

Maryland Horse Industry Strategic Plan:

January, 28th 2026: Virtual Meeting

Thoroughbred Advisory Committee

Open discussion was encouraged from a horse industry wide perspective and perspective given within that Advisory Committee. Notes from the Steering Committee prior meetings were distributed prior to the Advisory Meeting.

Meeting Summary:

The Thoroughbred Advisory Committee met as part of the Maryland Horse Industry Strategic Plan process to discuss how the Thoroughbred sector fits within Maryland's broader horse ecosystem and to identify shared challenges, opportunities, and priorities for the future. The group's discussion emphasized alignment, communication, sustainability, and the need for a clearer statewide narrative about the value of horses to Maryland.

Maryland's Horse Ecosystem and Shared Messages

Committee members agreed that the horse industry needs clear, consistent messages that can be shared across all disciplines. Advisory Committee Members emphasized that horses are integral to Maryland's identity as an agricultural state, particularly through the preservation of green space, rural landscapes, and working farmland. Green space was highlighted as it connects with the public, even among people who have no direct connection to horses.

Members also discussed the need to more clearly explain why working with horses—whether in racing, breeding, or recreation—is appropriate and beneficial for both horses and people. The public is increasingly uncomfortable with “working horses” and needs education on: Why work is healthy and appropriate for horses, How racehorses are cared for, The industry must explain itself, not assume understanding. As fewer Marylanders have direct experience with agriculture or working animals, participants felt the industry must do more to proactively explain horse care, welfare standards, and the positive human–horse relationship.

The committee described racing as one component of a much larger ecosystem that includes breeding, training, aftercare, lesson barns, competitions, recreation, youth programs, and therapeutic uses. Members saw opportunities for better storytelling that connects the full life cycle of the horse and shows how Thoroughbred racing supports and depends on the broader horse community. Reference to Virginia's statewide horse-industry advertising campaign as a model that speaks to *all* horse uses, not just racing.

Why the Horse Industry Matters to Maryland

Most Marylanders do not realize the size or scope of the horse industry. Thoroughbred racing is only one part of a much larger ecosystem. The committee discussed the horse industry's value as economic infrastructure, cultural heritage, and land-use protection. The industry supports a

wide range of jobs beyond those most visible on the racetrack, including farm labor, veterinarians, farriers, fence builders, landscapers, construction trades, and tourism-related businesses.

The horse industry helps sustain rural communities and preserves open space that might otherwise be lost to development. Many policymakers and members of the public do not fully understand the scale of this impact or how deeply horses are embedded in local economies, particularly in counties with mixed agricultural and equine activity. Fair Hill is referenced as a multi-use asset (eventing, racing, competition, land preservation).

Connection and Fragmentation Within the Industry

A major theme of the discussion was the disconnect of Maryland's horse industry. Members described long-standing silos within the Thoroughbred sector itself—particularly between breeders and horsemen—as well as between racing and other horse disciplines. Historically, the industry has struggled to act collectively—even when stakes were high.

The committee identified limited transparency, historical competition over scarce resources, and a lack of shared communication channels as key contributors to this fragmentation. Participants agreed that recent cross-discipline conversations represent a meaningful first step and that continued dialogue focused on shared interests, rather than sector-specific priorities, is essential. Failure to unite delayed: Slot machine authorization, Legislative wins, culture of information-hoarding and siloing: fatality data, purse funding mechanics, scratch explanations, Broader resentment from non-racing sectors: Perception that Thoroughbreds “have all the money” and don't engage elsewhere.

Several members suggested that the Thoroughbred industry could build goodwill and stronger relationships by using existing platforms—such as marketing channels or broadcast opportunities—to highlight other parts of the horse industry, including aftercare, trails, and recreational riding.

Coordination and Statewide Leadership

Committee members agreed that the horse industry would benefit from clearer statewide coordination. The Maryland Horse Industry Board was identified as a logical umbrella entity, but participants acknowledged that its current staffing, funding, and statutory limitations (cannot lobby) constrain its ability to fully play this role. A single, trusted umbrella voice is missing. Coordination cannot rely on volunteers or one person. Maryland Horse Council acknowledged as a lobbying entity, but: Volunteer-based & Not widely understood by stakeholders, the public or policymakers

A coordinated function should focus on convening stakeholders, developing shared messaging, supporting marketing and education, collecting and communicating data, and helping policymakers understand the industry's value. This role should prioritize education and alignment rather than advocacy alone.

Information Needs for Decision-Makers

Policymakers need clearer, more accessible information about how the horse industry functions and why it merits continued public investment. The committee emphasized the importance of pairing economic data with concrete examples and stories that show real-world impacts on communities, land use, and employment. Less “we need more money,” more “Here’s what Maryland gains—and risks losing.”

Decision-makers often receive fragmented or inconsistent messages and may assume that one individual or organization speaks for the entire industry. More coordinated communication products—such as economic impact summaries, visual materials, and site visits—were identified as potential tools to improve understanding. Examples raised: Legislators rarely visit farms and often don’t see the full horse lifecycle. There are missed opportunities with farm tours, breeding-to-racing education days. Preakness / Pimlico redevelopment was viewed as a major opportunity to reset perception and a highly visible storytelling platform for the entire industry.

Financial Sustainability of Operations

The committee discussed growing financial pressures facing racing-related operations and connected facilities, including rising labor costs, infrastructure expenses, regulatory compliance, and broader national declines in Thoroughbred racing participation.

While purses have increased due to subsidies, many underlying industry indicators—such as breeding numbers and on-track attendance—continue to decline. The need for Maryland to differentiate itself within the national racing landscape by focusing on areas it can control, including transparency, wagering integrity, field size, and customer confidence.

Specific stabilization ideas- Maryland must differentiate itself, not compete head-to-head. Focus on what Maryland can control: Transparency in steward decisions, Bettor-friendly policies, Limiting late CAW betting, Simulcast bettors (not on-track crowds) are the primary future customer.

Entry Points and Pathways Into the Industry

New people won’t engage with horses unless barriers are removed. Members highlighted lesson barns, youth programs, farm tours, and aftercare organizations as critical entry points for introducing new audiences to horses. The committee emphasized that accessibility—both physical and informational—is a major barrier, particularly for urban communities.

Several ideas were discussed for expanding outreach, including coordinated farm and racetrack tours, partnerships with existing state tourism and education programs, and experiences that allow people to see multiple aspects of the horse lifecycle in a single visit. Early exposure, especially for young people, is essential for long-term participation and workforce development. Transportation and access (e.g., buses) identified as real barriers.

Workforce and Careers in the Horse Industry

Workforce challenges are one of the most urgent issues facing the industry. Members cited long hours, physically demanding work, limited pay, housing and transportation challenges, and a shrinking pool of experienced workers, particularly in racing-specific roles and veterinary care.

Discussion focused on the industry's dependence on visa programs and uncertainty surrounding future workforce availability. Members agreed that careers in the horse industry are often poorly understood and that clearer career pathways, training opportunities, and lifestyle expectations must be communicated more effectively.

Questions, or interest in joining an Advisory Committee please contact:

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