Task Force Members Present: Tobey McWilliams (Chair), Otis Brown (Vice Chair), Jamie Gibson, Monica Hunt, Hunter Messineo, Kat Demas Mulkey, Simone Starnes (7)

Task Force Members Not Present: Sharon Stewart-Wells (1)

Also Present: Jennifer Osterman (USHJA Assistant Managing Director of Sport Programs) (1)

I. Welcome and Roll Call
Ms. McWilliams called the meeting to order and Ms. Osterman performed roll; with seven (7) members present, a quorum was met.

II. Approval of meeting minutes from December 30, 2019
Mr. Brown made a motion to approve the meeting minutes from December 30, 2019; Ms. Messineo seconded and the motion was passed without further discussion.

III. Discussion of the 2021 Championship Proposal
Ms. McWilliams brought up to the Task Force comments from the Board of Directors regarding the 2021 Children’s and Adult Amateur Hunter Championship proposal. The Board suggested pulling data for 2’6” and Children’s Pony riders from the previous competition year to see which section would be more beneficial to add. The Board believes that the 2’6” addition would be easier for the competition management as they would not have to move as many jumps for course changes. They also discussed the demographics by zone of the Children’s Ponies and 2’6” riders. Ms. Osterman pulled a data report and explained to the Task Force the presented numbers. One set of numbers defines Zone Horse of the Year standings from Nationals and Premiere rated competitions, and the other outlines Zone Stirrup Cup standings from Regional I and II competitions. It is evident that the Stirrup Cup standings are significantly less and not fully representative of the 2’6” population that the Championships would target. The National and Premiere rated competitions had over 10,000 unique riders competing in any 2’6” class, who are not professionals and have not jumped over 3’. Ms. McWilliams clarified that all of those riders would be eligible based on the proposed specifications.

Ms. Demas Mulkey expressed her confusion about the Board’s direction after previous conversations, but it appears that the numbers validate the 2’6” addition over the ponies. Ms. Osterman provided feedback from the survey that was previously sent out to membership, and there was a significant number of responses that recommended adding a lower section. Mr. Brown questioned if there were any responses in the survey that specifically asked for the addition of the Children’s Ponies, and Ms. Osterman confirmed that there were not any suggestions from the respondents to add them.

Ms. Osterman continued with feedback from the survey that 66% of the respondents have not competed in the Championships previously and suggested that it was due to the location and date for their home zone championship. Additionally, there were comments that the overall cost to compete was high, including travel, shipping, entry fees, etc. Ms. McWilliams spoke to the issue of the dates for the Championship being difficult due to Children’s riders having school, and riders who are competing at the 3’ and 2’6” level are not necessarily traveling often to compete. Ms. McWilliams had gotten feedback from trainers that they would be more interested in taking their whole barn to the Championship if it would include their 3’ and 2’6” clients. She continued that it would become a goal for such a large population of the membership to add the lower section. The most common item from the survey was that respondents enjoys is the team aspect of the Championships.
Ms. McWilliams continued with the location topic regarding cutting costs on travel to Championships. The Board disagreed that hosting the Hunter Championships during the Jumper Championships would decrease the amount of travel because the Jumper Championships are very busy and would need to send another staff member regardless.

Ms. Demas Mulkey brought up the Championships’ budget model and questioned the help from sponsors to offset some of the expenses, but our previous presenting sponsor was redirected as this program was put on hold. Ms. Osterman explained that bumping up the rider application fee to $75 as well as decreasing the amount allocated for staff travel per event alleviates some of the budget. She mentioned that the cost of IT hours has increased across the entire Association, and that we are still struggling with the cost of awards. The Awards Department helped find new styles and prices to the awards, but there still was not much of a decrease. Ms. Osterman suggested to the Task Force that the host competition should provide ribbons for the individual rounds per day and USHJA would provide the special overall awards to include ribbons, horse/rider sashes, and coolers. Ms. Brown was in favor of the horse show providing ribbons for the individual rounds.

Mr. Brown suggested to the Task Force that we move to only three locations, an East, Central, and West Coast. He suggests that it would be easier to find dates to fit into the overall schedule and there would be less expenses in regards to travel. There had been feedback previously that the distance would be too far for most riders with only three locations. Ms. Osterman provided that the 2019 numbers suggests that the largest participation was bi-coastal, but it would leave out the opportunity for Zones 1 and 2. Zone 2 had a large response rate to the survey, so we should be careful in placing that Championship to where it is accessible for them. She also provided that Zone 7 had a large response rate to the Championship. The Task Force was in agreement to the idea that riders could choose which location they would want to attend if one location is closer to them, regardless if it is their home zone. Ms. Messineo suggested that the Championship can follow the North American League World Cup Qualifier, in which riders can declare where they want to compete. It was also clarified that rider’s points count regardless of their home zone and where they compete.

There was further discussion about how to split up the Championship locations and maintain to five total locations. Dividing the country by modeling the International Hunter Derby regions did not work historically. Ms. McWilliams emphasized that if we are considering adding the 2’6” sections, then those riders typically do not travel to compete. If we were make the locations farther apart, then we would lose a lot of participation from that population. Ms. Demas Mulkey suggested doing five locations; North East, South East, North Central, South Central, and West Coast. Decreasing to five location would help cut costs in terms of travel, shipping costs, and ribbon expenses.

The Task Force wrapped up by reviewing the changes discussed on the call. Ms. Osterman will revise the documents so that the Children’s Ponies will be replaced with the Low Children’s and Adult 2’6” Hunters, adjust the awards so competitions provide ribbons for individual rounds, increase the rider application to $75, and riders can declare which location they would like to compete. The Task Force decided to meet again to review the documents and vote prior to sending it back to the Board for their March meeting.

IV. Old business
No old business was discussed.

V. New business
No new business was discussed.

VI. Adjournment
With no further business, the meeting adjourned at 4:34 pm ET.

Respectfully submitted,

Jennifer Osterman
USHJA Assistant Managing Director of Sport Programs