

RLOWGOUNTRY

CHARLESTON
EDISTO ISLAND
FOLLY BEACH
JAMES ISLAND
JOHNS ISLAND
KIAWAH ISLAND
SEABROOK ISLAND
WADMALAW ISLAND
YONGE'S ISLAND

ERS IN CHARLESTON AND THE ISLANDS

Commission wants carriage horse policy reviewed

BY ADAM FERRELL
Of The Post and Courier Staff

"Carriage horses aren't going away. The question is whether we have proper animal welfare."

Alan Berger, executive director and CEO of the John Ancreum SPCA

A decision on whether to reconsider the welfare of horses used in the carriage tour industry has yet to be stabled two months after the city first mentioned the issue.

Last week, the city's Tourism Commission consulted Mike Miller, president of the Carriage Operators of North America. He told the commission that Charleston has a good policy, but it should be reviewed regularly. Local carriage tour industry representatives invited Miller here from Minnesota to evaluate the carriage operations and advise the commission.

The commission passed a resolution to take "a fresh look" at the city's regulations, which were created in 1993 based on veterinarian recommendations.

The commission also decided its carriage horse subcommittee should recommend an independent group to study how the horses are treated. That recommendation is expected to come before the full commission this month. A final proposal would be sent to City Council.

The commission recommended the study to Charleston City Council in February following concerns from residents and animal-rights groups. Council then sent the issue to the commission after hearing opposition from Tour operators.

Tour operators have maintained the horses are healthy

and the companies follow city regulations.

Broderick Christoff, general manager of Classic Carriage Tours on Guignard Street, said he felt operators originally opposed a new study fearing special interest groups would push their agendas and hurt the carriage tour business. He said carriage tour companies would welcome an independent investigation.

"It's not the study itself that we're afraid of," he said.

Alan Berger, executive director and CEO of the John Ancreum



ADAM FERRELL/STAFF
William Pitonyak, a tour guide with Carolina Polo and Carriage Co. on Hayne Street, cleans up the tack on a horse named Hampton.

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Horse carriage industry large

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SPCA, urged the commission to support a new study and said that should lead to a city ordinance with enforceable regulations that is periodically reviewed.

"Carriage horses aren't going away," he said. "The question is whether we have proper animal welfare."

Commission member and Charleston City Councilman Henry Fishburne said concern about pulling horses off the street as the temperatures become hot and about who will make that decision are the most important issues.

"I think the issue here is more of an issue of self-regulation,"

he said.

Miller said the best situation would be to have a city employee monitor the temperature of the horses as well as the ambient temperatures.

Currently, tour operators keep their own horse-care records, but a veterinarian paid by the city makes random inspections.

Miller said that with some 33,000 carriage tours sold last year, Charleston has the largest carriage operation in the country besides Mackinac Island, Mich., where the only motor vehicles allowed are ones for emergency services.

Adam Ferrell covers downtown.

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