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## Tour operator wants jury trial

### **Carolina Polo and Carriage Co. contesting 11 citations from city code inspectors**

By Allyson Bird

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Faced with 11 city code citations related to their horses and stables, Carolina Polo and Carriage Co. representatives on Monday asked that a jury hear their case.

Charleston's tourism director, Vanessa Turner-Maybank, and other city officials stood at one podium, while high-profile defense attorney Capers Barr stood flanked by his clients at the other. Municipal Judge Michael Molony mentioned several times that the cases arose at the peak of tourism season.

"It's good to see you, Ms. Maybank," Molony said. "I knew something was up when she came into the courtroom."

The hearing stemmed from the city's most comprehensive inspection of all horse-driven tour operators. A veterinarian's report, completed last month, noted concerns with each of the five companies and set deadlines for correcting those problems.

The inspection found that Carolina Polo gave its horses the lowest quality feed and hay, provided altered medical records and used bleach to clean stalls. Urine in the stalls produces ammonia which, when mixed with bleach, creates toxic gas.

City officials issued the company six citations and five more after it allegedly failed to meet deadlines to bring the operation to code.

Standing before Molony, Barr said Carolina Polo's veterinarian would talk with the city-paid veterinarian. Barr said some of the violations amounted to little more than "differing advice."

Had he not been on vacation when the citations were handed out, Barr told Molony, "I don't even know if these tickets would have been before you today."

Barr suggested the company and the city could resolve the citations before the next court date but that the company requested the trial to buy time to do just that.

"I guess the point is, I don't think there are any issues that are threatening, that have not been brought into compliance," he added.

But city attorney Ravi Sanyal told Molony that if the cases make it to trial, he plans to pursue convictions.

After court, Sanyal said, "I have a feeling he's going to be talking to us between now and then try to work this out."

Each code violation carries a maximum penalty of nearly \$1,100, and the city could move to suspend the company's operations depending upon the trial's outcome. If unresolved, the case will head to trial Aug. 17.

Though unrelated, the city released its inspection findings shortly after a woman who boarded horses for Carolina Polo accused manager Robert Knoth of neglecting his animals. Nancy Lane contacted People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals before sending a letter to the city outlining five horse deaths over the last two years.

She appeared in court Monday as an observer. A city investigation into her allegations continues.

Highlighting the recent inspection, PETA sent an e-mail to the city Friday calling for officials to suspend Carolina Polo's operations for 180 days, the maximum time allowed under city code. While pointing to horse health, the e-mail also noted problems with the company's equipment.

Recapping the argument, PETA Animals in Entertainment Specialist Desiree Acholla said, "If not for the horses, then do it for the general public."

Sanyal said city officials cannot take any action until the matter settles in court.