



City asked to ban carriage horses

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PETER GUINTA

The Animal Rights Foundation of Florida on Monday asked the St. Augustine City Commission to "join other progressive cities across the globe and ban horse-drawn carriages on city streets."

Carla Wilson, Central Florida coordinator for the foundation, told the commission she wanted to "open a dialogue" with them to seek "a solution to the problem."

"People (these days) are less aware of what is going on around them," Wilson said. "This is unfortunate for horse-drawn carriages. Although they were a traditional means of transport 100 years ago, now we use cars, which are a way of life in St. Augustine."

City commissioners listened politely to Wilson but did not discuss, comment or vote on the issue.

Robert Murphy McDaniel, a St. Augustine native and owner of St. Augustine Transfer Co., the oldest continuously operated horse carriage facility in the United States, said two state veterinarians had just examined his barn and horses.

"They found nothing wrong with what we are doing," he said. "They said it was far improved over the last time they were here. People see horses as big, strong animals, and they are. But they are not tough animals and will not stand long-term abuse. They would die. None of us has seen a dead horse on the street."

Animal rights activists are "urban terrorists" because some destroy animal research labs, he said.

Wilson pointed to the 28 horse-carriage accidents in St. Augustine since 1987.

The last one was June 9, where five people in a horse-drawn carriage were forced to jump to safety after their carriage horse bolted and pulled the carriage for several blocks. Two passengers were injured, one seriously enough to go to the hospital. The horse was not injured.

"And these are the ones we know of," she said. "People have had broken bones, stitches and hospital visits."

No horses or humans were killed in any of the 28 accidents in St. Augustine. But people and horses died from accidents in other cities.

The foundation says horses on the street have been known to grow lame from pounding hard streets, suffer heat prostration and dehydration in the summer, become spooked for no particular and become susceptible to respiratory diseases.

"These animals live a nose-to-tailpipe existence," she said.

The commission was already considering the creation of safer carriage routes, which is why the foundation came to St. Augustine, Wilson said.

"Any proposed route is still unsafe for the public and the horses," she said. "They are slow-moving vehicles on already congested streets."

McDaniel said these groups have an agenda: "They want to tell us where to live, what to eat and wear or use as transportation or, whether or not we should even use animals."

Wilson said this has been an issue with the Animal Rights Foundation for 10 years.

"We're hoping the commission will take notice," she said after her presentation. "It's their responsibility to keep their people and tourists safe. We thought it was time to speak out."