

May 22, 2019

Balanced Dialogue, Compromise and Collaboration Required on Horse-Drawn Carriages

As CEO of Destination Greater Victoria, I am writing to express our concern with regards to the City of Victoria's motion to phase out horse-drawn carriage operations by 2023.

Our city is growing. As we modernize, we must strive to preserve and protect the important character of our community. Our unique sense of place, proximity to nature and quality experiences make us a destination of choice for travelers, and as residents, we are the envy of the world.

We understand that change is inevitable and requires planning for future decades and generations. It's a huge responsibility bestowed with trust upon our elected officials. It's Council's job to make decisions – big and small – that protect our unique character and quality of life for our children and grandchildren. Horse-drawn Carriages are a part of Victoria's identity. Beyond their charm, these magnificent, gentle animals affect humans of all ages – residents as well as visitors. I am fortunate enough to live in James Bay and on many warm evenings, I regularly bring my two-year-old son to play in MacDonald Park. Nothing brings him more joy than seeing these majestic horse-drawn carriages. He loves the horses and they bring him tremendous joy. These frequent interactions teach him so many values including kindness, gentleness and the importance of a slower, simpler pace of life.

As Council considers this issue on behalf of all residents and businesses, let's remember:

- The SPCA is no longer calling for a ban on horse-drawn carriages. The reputation for the care and well-being of the animals is sterling. These horses are working horses. Without work, their futures are at risk as the cost of good care requires income.
- There are councillors that have been working constructively with the SPCA and the horse carriage industry to explore ways to improve and strengthen business operations.
- This issue was debated a year ago. At the conclusion of this debate the City of Victoria signed five-year leases with operators for their horse stands. A complete retraction of the City's commitment is at best a demonstration of bad faith and signals to all business owners a risk to their investment should Council 'change its mind'.

We aren't Montreal or New York or even Seattle. We are Victoria, and we are at a place in our evolution where we can decide to preserve and protect the unique character that defines us as a community and as a people. I urge Council and the horse-drawn carriage operators to continue working to find common ground and practical solutions that allow for safe operations of horse drawn carriages in our City's future.

Trust, consultation and stability are vital for any governance relationship. The Greater Victoria economy and community rely on the tourism industry and the tax revenue it provides. Good social programs are

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rooted in a strong economy and the revenue it generates. On behalf of the 1,000 local businesses that we represent, I urge Council to consider an amended motion based on these principles. Horse-drawn carriages are a vital element of Victoria's tourism sector and part of our community's distinguished identity. I am hopeful that our political leaders will look for solutions.

Paul Nursey is the CEO of Destination Greater Victoria

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