

RESOLUTION

Date: February 2, 2016

Committee of Origin: Parks & Environment

Re: Proposed Intro No. 573-A, a Local Law to Amend the New York City Administrative Code in Relation to Horse Drawn Cabs.

Full Board Vote: 37 In Favor 2 Against 2 Abstentions 0 Present

The following facts and concerns were taken into account in arriving at our conclusions:

Horse-drawn carriages (“cabs”) currently operate largely, though not entirely, in Central Park, as they have for decades. The horses are currently stabled in private stables in West Midtown, and the carriages are also stored outside of the park in private facilities.

Intro 573-A (attached), as currently amended, would affect this industry in several ways, including restricting the operation of the horses and carriages to Central Park and eliminating their use of city streets, reducing the numbers of licensed horses and carriages, requiring that the horses be embedded with microchips as tracing devices and making various other modifications to current practice, including relocating the stables and related facilities for the horses and carriages to Central Park.

The New York City Mayoral administration has proposed this legislation in its current form. The administration announced it as a “compromise” and as essentially a “done deal”. It has urged that it be adopted by the City Council on a very fast track, possibly within less than two weeks of its being announced, and with many details neither publicly discussed nor even developed to date.

The proposed stable building in Central Park and related issues. The administration anticipates that, pursuant to the specific terms of the legislation, a building sometimes referred to as the “85th Street (or 86th Street) Shop”, which is original to Central Park and was designed by Calvert Vaux, the co-designer of the park, would be converted, at the expense of New York City, into permanent stables for the horses. The cost of the conversion is currently estimated by the administration to be “in the range” of \$25 million. The administration anticipates that occupancy of the stables would be governed by a concession agreement under a “sole source” concession.

The proposed stable building would house approximately 75 horses at any one time. It would need to accommodate provisions for feeding the horses, providing hay or other bedding for them, addressing their manure, providing veterinary care, etc. Additionally, though this is not stated in the language of the intro itself, the administration has also now revealed that it plans to build a new building adjacent to the stables to house approximately the same number of carriages as the number of horses that would be housed in the stable building.

The location of the proposed stable conversion – and the new building to house the carriages – is just south of the 85th Street (sometimes referred to as 86th Street) Transverse, which is bordered by a narrow sidewalk. The proposed stable location is just to the west of the newly restored and expanded Central Park police precinct building, positioned opposite a parking area from the precinct building, and just to the north of the Great Lawn, with a notable change in grade up to the Great Lawn area.

The Transverse is heavily used by private and other vehicles. There is no layoff area on the Transverse for deliveries, etc. to what would be the stable area. The Great Lawn is heavily used for a variety of individual and team recreational purposes, and is also used for major events such as concerts and other special events.

The Parks and Environment Committee of Community Board 7/Manhattan, heard a detailed presentation from someone familiar with both the specific location and the care and management of horses about the extreme impracticality of housing and supporting 75 horses and their carriages, etc. at the proposed location.

Currently, customers largely engage the horse carriages on 59th Street just south of the park, or otherwise in southern areas of the park. The intro contemplates that customer pickup locations within the park – currently described as being at several southern points in the park -- would be mandated, but no details have been made public about how the horses, with their carriages, would get from the stables at 86th Street to the various pickup locations. Among other things, as riding private horses in the park has been almost eliminated, the bridle paths in the park, which were originally designed for use by horses, have increasingly become heavily used by runners, walkers, etc. as active recreational use of the park has continued to increase dramatically. Further, it appears that the bridle paths would have to be paved to accommodate the weight of the horses and carriages. So using the bridle paths as a route for the horses and carriages to get to the customer pickup locations would be very problematic, and would involve a radical change to their historic character. Use of the park Drives to move the horses and carriages to the pickup locations would also be highly problematical, given the huge numbers of recreational users on the Drives, as well as the motor vehicle traffic still allowed in the park at limited hours.

The Central Park Conservancy, which manages Central Park pursuant to a contract with New York City, was not involved in the “negotiation” leading to the proposed “compromise”. It has now publicly expressed similar concerns to those of CB7 about the travel routes from the stables, about the conversion of the historic “Shop” building to stables, and about the lack of detail about the proposal, among other things.

The proposed ban on pedicabs in the park south of 86th Street. The intro also provides that no pedicabs would be allowed to operate in Central Park south of 86th Street. The pedicab industry, and specifically the operators who generally work in Central Park, were not part of any discussion or “negotiation” leading to the proposal that they be banned from the area of Central Park that provides their primary revenues. Unlike the horse carriage operators, who are members of a union that participated in the discussions with the administration leading to this “compromise” proposal, the pedicab operators are not unionized and are reported to be minimally organized.

Community Board 7/Manhattan, **strongly opposes** the use of a historic building, or any location in Central Park, and of public funds, to create a permanent stable and related facilities for the horse carriage industry. The space in Central Park (as in all of our parks) is limited and subject to competing public uses, and public funds to support our parks are also severely limited. Community Board 7/Manhattan **strongly opposes** using these public resources to provide a permanent infrastructure in Central Park for a private industry, regardless of the extent to which the proposed sole source concession agreement might generate some revenues. The proposed stable building has historically been used for purposes that benefit all park users, and that is how it should continue to be deployed, particularly given the scarcity of maintenance support space within the park.

Community Board/Manhattan also **believes** that the proposed location for the stable compound would be highly likely to prove impractical for its intended purpose, given its grade, its location immediately adjacent to both the Transverse and the Great Lawn, and other topographical problems, and that these many practical issues have not been thought out by proponents of the intro. There would not be sufficient room at the Transverse or other adjacent areas to address bringing in the massive amount of straw or wood chips needed to bed the horses, and then removing the soiled material, to address the massive amounts of manure, and to address other issues of equine maintenance. There is also likely to be substantial interference with public enjoyment of the adjacent Great Lawn, and with setting up and conducting large-scale events on the Great Lawn, among other physical and topographical conflicts. Further, extremely substantial alterations of the existing “Shop” building would be needed, with highly challenging issues of providing light and ventilation, among other things. New York City would be at substantial risk of spending tens of millions of taxpayer dollars, and of having dedicated an extremely scarce resource to private use, only to find that the stable location did not work for the intended purpose.

Community Board 7/Manhattan, also **strongly opposes** adoption of the provision in the intro that would ban pedicabs in Central Park south of 86th Street without the opportunity for public debate on this question.

Generally, Community Board 7/Manhattan, **strongly objects** to the speed and lack of detail that have characterized the review of this intro, **sees no urgency to the situation** and **strongly believes and urges** that consideration of the intro be slowed down considerably, in order to permit further details to be developed, made public and considered, and to permit the pedicab industry to be heard.

Other than opposing the use of any structure existing or to be built in Central Park, or of public funds, to house the horse and carriage operations, as stated above, Community Board 7/Manhattan **takes no position** at this time as to whether any other provision of the intro should be adopted, and **hopes** that further information and public debate may inform any future position that it may choose to take.

Committee Members: 5-0-0-0. Non-Committee Board Members: 3-0-0-0.