

New Bills: Green Carts to Horse Carriages

by Courtney Gross

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Before the City Council could ring in the New Year, members pulled out an array of last minute legislation.

From a proposed ban on horse drawn carriages -- known to carry couples and tourists through Central Park -- to drastically increasing the number of food carts loaded with healthy foods, such as fruits and vegetables, the council will likely consider and adopt some, though definitely not all, of this legislation in 2008.

Here is a look at some of the bills that were introduced in December.

Greening the City's Carts

In a possible tribute to the binge, and most likely unhealthy, eating of the holiday season, Mayor Michael Bloomberg and Council Speaker Christine Quinn announced legislation that would increase the city's food carts by [50 percent](#) over two years.

New Yorkers may be most familiar with the typical kebab or Italian sausage cart, but the new legislation aims to specifically issue street vendor permits for less grease-ridden snacks.

For years, advocates and city officials have pointed to the disparity in access to healthy foods between poor and more affluent neighborhoods. In the Upper East Side 20 percent of bodegas carry leafy vegetables, while only 3 percent do in Harlem, according to the [Department of Health and Mental Hygiene](#). Supermarkets are also 30 percent less common in Harlem compared to the Upper East Side.

The legislation ([Intro 665](#)) would concentrate green carts in these deprived communities - specifically in areas where less than [12 percent of adults](#) regularly consume vegetables, according to survey results from the department.

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"The only way we'll ever put a dent in the dual problems of malnutrition and obesity is to increase access to healthy food," said Quinn in a prepared statement. "The council has taken major steps to improve access to nutritious food, and with this legislation, we'll take another bold effort towards becoming a healthier and more equitable city."

The legislation would phase in the new permits throughout the five boroughs. Ultimately, the Bronx and Brooklyn would each receive an additional 500 permits, Queens 250, Manhattan 200 and Staten Island 50. If the legislation were approved, the total number of street vendors would increase from 3,000 to 4,500.

Horse Drawn Carriages

Councilmember Tony Avella has declared war on the horse drawn carriage. Last month he introduced legislation that would ban the equine-transportation, saying the practice was inhumane and unnatural in an urban environment.

The legislation ([Intro 658](#)) has not yet garnered significant support -- only council members Melissa Mark Viverito and Annabel Palma have signed on thus far. The proposal was [reportedly](#) sparked by an accident in September, when a carriage horse got spooked, fled and squeezed between a nearby tree and pole. The horse died from the injuries in the accident.

While Avella is attempting to do away with the carriages all together, Councilmember James Gennaro wants to reform the industry.

His legislation ([Intro 652](#)) would increase a ride's fee from \$34 for the first half hour to \$54 and from \$10 to \$20 for each additional 15 minutes. Another bill ([Intro 653](#)) would mandate the horses be inspected at least four times a year. Currently, the law states only that the stables should be "open for inspection."

Last year, New York City Comptroller William Thompson released a [report](#) recommending the

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city increase its oversight of the horse drawn carriage industry to ensure the health and well being of the animals.

Debt Collecting

Council members Daniel Garodnick and Leroy Comrie introduced legislation ([Intro 660](#)) requiring that all debt collectors be licensed by the Department of Consumer Affairs, [in order to avoid baseless](#) claims by the agents.

Approximately 42 percent of consumer debt cases brought to the New York City Civil Court are from third parties that have no connection to the New Yorkers they are suing, according [to Garodnick's office](#)

. Bringing the collectors under the jurisdiction of the Department of Consumer Affairs, would ensure their practices were approved by the city and that their contact information would be readily available.

Clergy Parking Permits

Councilmember Robert Jackson introduced ([Intro 662](#)) legislation that would enable clergy with vehicles registered out of state to use the city's parking permits.

The permits [allow clergy](#) to park for four hours in no parking zones beside their house of worship or for three hours in no parking zones adjacent to hospitals. At the time of the bill's introduction, Jackson said clergy from nearby New Jersey or Connecticut should have the same privileges as those who live in New York, and the law should not discriminate against clergy who commute or cannot afford the city's high cost of living.

Suicide Prevention Phones on Bridges

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Councilmember Larry Seabrook introduced legislation ([Intro 664](#)) mandating that the city install suicide prevention telephones on all bridges that are 50 feet above the water. Phones would be required every 100 feet in both directions, according to the bill.

Reporting Response Times

Currently, the city tracks how long it takes an ambulance or fire station to respond to a fire or accident once it receives notification from emergency personnel. But, it does not track the amount of time elapsed from the initial 911 phone call to the response.

Under ([Intro 667](#)) legislation introduced by Councilmember Miguel Martinez, the city would have to report average response times starting from the initial 911 call and submit the information to the City Council and the mayor annually. It would also be required to post the data online.

Defibrillators in Public Libraries

Defibrillators are already required in most public buildings or areas, like parks, as well as large gyms or fitness facilities. Under ([Intro 669](#)) legislation introduced by Councilmember James Oddo, public libraries would also be required to keep defibrillators. ^