



The New York Horse Sanctuary & Cultural Center - Proposal



The New York Horse Sanctuary and Cultural Center

1. Executive Summary

For generations, New York City's carriage horses have occupied a singular place in the life and history of the city. As New York debates the future of the carriage horse industry, the future of the horses themselves deserves equal attention.

The prospect of retiring the carriage horses presents an opportunity to create something of lasting value: a permanent sanctuary for the horses and a cultural destination unlike any other.

New York has a history of meeting moments of change with bold public projects. This could be one of them.

The New York Horse Sanctuary and Cultural Center would bring the city's carriage horses to a spacious permanent home, where they could live in compatible herds with freedom of movement, shelter, and attentive care throughout their lives.

A voluntary, funded acquisition program would offer owners fair compensation while placing the horses under the nonprofit's lifelong protection.

The campus would include walking trails, observation areas, memorial grounds, an apple orchard, and a vibrant Visitor and Education Center with exhibitions, lectures, workshops, research, and arts programming.

People could come to learn, create, reflect, follow a horse's life in retirement, or simply spend time in a beautiful setting where horses are living well.

The project would develop in phases, beginning with the funding and professional planning needed to move forward. Land acquisition and construction of the facilities needed to welcome and care for horses would follow. The public campus would grow from that foundation, giving people new reasons to visit and return as the institution develops.

The New York Horse Sanctuary and Cultural Center would carry the founding herd's legacy forward as an enduring institution—honoring the ancient relationship between horses and people, caring for horses, bringing people together, and enriching New York's cultural life for generations to come.

“Those who teach the most about humanity aren't always human.”

— Donald L. Hicks



2. The Need—and the Opportunity Before Us

After leaving the New York City carriage industry, a horse's first home may not be their last. They may be sold, transferred, privately re-homed, or relocated elsewhere.

Even when an owner makes every reasonable effort to place a horse responsibly, that initial placement cannot guarantee lifetime protection. Circumstances can shift, horses can change hands again, and over time some can pass through auctions, dealers, and other resale channels that feed into the horse-slaughter pipeline.

The problem is not simply finding somewhere for the horses to go. It's creating a permanent destination in which their protection does not depend upon future owners, future transactions, or their continuing economic usefulness.

For New York City's carriage horses, daily life includes the demands of working amid traffic, noise, and congestion. Pulling carriages over pavement, navigating crowded streets, and at times working in extreme weather place sustained demands on their bodies and attention. Away from the streets, confinement in individual stalls limits opportunities for free movement and the companionship of a herd.



Retirement at the sanctuary would offer relief from those demands and the opportunity for a different rhythm of life. The horses could move freely, rest, spend time outdoors, and form lasting bonds with other horses. Their days would be shaped around their own needs, with room for individual preferences and personalities to emerge.

Within the security of a tranquil and familiar home, these horses would have time and space to heal. Permanent retirement would mean having a place where they belonged for the rest of their lives, with no further work expected of them.

The same horses once encountered on the streets of Manhattan could become the center of a thriving institution. Their sanctuary would become the living foundation for a multidimensional cultural center. The public could come to know these horses in a new chapter of their lives while discovering how much they have to teach us about care, connection, and our responsibilities to one another.

3. The Equine Cultural Center

The Cultural Center would give the Sanctuary a rich public life built around learning, creativity, history, and community. The horses would remain at the heart of the institution, while visitors would encounter the place through art, education, research, music, conversation, and simply spending time in a beautiful landscape alongside horses.

This Center could include permanent and changing exhibitions devoted to the history of New York City's carriage horses, archival photographs and films, and the individual stories of horses who came to live at the Sanctuary. Rotating exhibitions could explore broader subjects involving horses, cities, art, history, animal welfare, and the human-animal bond.

The horses—and the people whose lives have intersected with theirs, past and present—could create extraordinary opportunities for documentary storytelling. Each horse would bring a distinct history, personality, and network of relationships shaped by years of life in New York City. Retirement at the Sanctuary would begin a new chapter, one that could be followed over time.

Documentary films, short and feature-length films, photography, oral histories, social media, and other media could create an evolving archive of the horses' lives, the people connected to them, the development of the Sanctuary, and larger questions of aging, caregiving, memory, and human-animal relationships. Because these stories would continue to unfold year after year, people far beyond the campus could come to know the horses as individuals and remain connected to the life of the institution.

Programming could bring together veterinarians, historians, writers, artists, equine professionals, researchers, ethicists, and conservationists. Lectures, discussions, films, workshops, and public seminars would make the Center a place for continuing exchange.

Education and research could extend from university and professional partnerships to school and family programs. Public offerings could address caregiving, aging, quality of life, grief, and compassionate end-of-life decisions.

The arts could become an integral part of the Cultural Center's identity. Drawing and painting classes, outdoor painting days, photography workshops, and exhibitions could invite people to respond to the horses and landscape through their own work. The Cultural Center and surrounding grounds could provide a distinctive venue for small chamber, classical, and acoustic performances, as well as seasonal gatherings that complement the Sanctuary's quiet character.

Imagine... a winter evening. Soft lights glow along the paths and buildings. Inside the Herd Halls, horses eat hay, rest, and settle near familiar companions. Visitors gather nearby for a simple seasonal celebration. Music drifts through the air; people sip mulled cider, talk, and laugh. The Sanctuary feels warm and alive, with the horses at its heart.

4. Guaranteed Retirement & Acquisition

The Guaranteed Retirement & Acquisition Program would create a voluntary, compensated pathway for carriage-horse owners who choose to transfer their horses into permanent retirement at the Sanctuary.

Participating owners could sell their horses to the Sanctuary at a fair value established through an independent valuation process. Legal ownership would transfer to the nonprofit. The program would not depend upon owners donating valuable animals or surrendering them without compensation.

A horse would enter the Sanctuary only when both appropriate space and dedicated financial resources for that horse's continuing care were available. Acquisition and lifetime-care obligations would therefore be considered together from the outset, allowing the Sanctuary to expand responsibly without accepting more horses than it could properly support.

Each transfer would be documented through a clear legal agreement and accompanied by veterinary records, health evaluation, transportation planning, and appropriate intake procedures.

Once acquired, the horse would not be resold, leased for commercial work, returned to the carriage industry, or transferred to another owner.

For owners who wish to remain connected, the Sanctuary could offer something a conventional sale often cannot: the reassurance of knowing where the horse is, how they are living, and the opportunity to visit them.

The program could operate whether any transition in the carriage industry occurred at once or gradually. Horses could enter retirement in manageable stages as horse-ready space and financial capacity became available.

“My troubles are all over, and I am at home.”

— Anna Sewell, *Black Beauty*



5. Herd Halls: Designed Around How Horses Naturally Live

At the heart of the Sanctuary would be the Herd Halls—large, open communal environments designed around movement, social relationships, agency, rest, feeding, and the natural rhythms of horses living together. Horses are highly social animals, and the ability to form and maintain relationships with other horses is an important part of their physical and emotional well-being.

More closely resembling expansive indoor riding arenas than conventional barns, the Herd Halls would be open-plan structures with high ceilings, natural light, strong ventilation, generous sheltered space, and direct connections to turnout—secure outdoor areas where horses can graze and socialize—and pasture. The goal would not be to reproduce a traditional stable on a larger scale.

Instead of rows of horses living separately in individual stalls, compatible groups would live socially while caregivers retained the ability to meet each horse's individual medical, nutritional, mobility, and behavioral needs. When temporary separation was necessary, social contact would be preserved whenever appropriate.



Multiple Herd Halls would house compatible groups in flexible spaces that adapt as horses arrive and age. Drawing on European active-stable and open-barn systems, the design would pair communal living with individualized care.

Horses recovering from injury or illness, requiring specialized care, or needing temporary separation could be accommodated in spacious recovery stalls or flexible medical areas.

Grooming, bathing, veterinary treatment, rehabilitation, and farrier care could take place within or beside the Herd Halls. Experienced facility designers, equine behaviorists, and veterinarians would determine the details.

Live cameras could support daily monitoring of the horses' well-being and security while also providing an online feed for people who wish to follow life in the Herd Halls.

Outside, horses would have extensive turnout and pasture for movement, grazing, social life, and enrichment. Together, the Herd Halls and surrounding landscape would form one adaptable living system, with room to meet the changing needs of the herd.

6. Lifetime Care: Through Every Stage of Life

The Sanctuary's commitment to each horse would extend throughout that horse's life, including aging, illness, injury, disability, changing social needs, and end-of-life care.

Each horse would be cared for individually, taking into account veterinary evaluation, medical history, age, mobility, temperament, nutrition, and changing circumstances.

Particular attention would be given to senior horses. Aging may bring changes in teeth, digestion, weight, joints, vision, mobility, and social needs. Nutrition, footing, shelter, social grouping, monitoring, and medical care would be adapted accordingly.

Lifetime responsibility would also include compassionate, veterinarian-guided end-of-life care. When a horse's quality of life could no longer be adequately maintained, humane euthanasia would be understood as part of responsible guardianship.

7. Land & Site: Choosing the Right Setting

The right setting would need to serve two essential purposes: to provide an exceptional permanent home for horses and to support a Cultural Center that people can readily visit and return to. The success of the institution would depend not only on the quality of the land, but also on its accessibility and connection to the public it is intended to serve.

Passenger-rail access from New York City should therefore be a priority in site selection, with a manageable last-mile connection from the station to the campus. This would help make the Cultural Center a destination New Yorkers could return to regularly rather than visit only on rare occasions.

The horses' needs would be fundamental to the choice of property: adequate acreage, suitable terrain, reliable water, healthy drainage, pasture and turnout potential, and sufficient space for multiple Herd Halls and future growth.

The site would also need to accommodate the Visitor and Education Center, exhibitions and gathering spaces, the Memorial Garden and apple orchard, walking trails, observation areas, and other public features.

Practical infrastructure would include buildings for hay and feed storage, equipment and work areas, staff facilities, and appropriate on-site residential accommodations to support continuous oversight, emergency response, security, and the horses' round-the-clock care.

The surrounding local community could benefit through employment opportunities, local vendors and services, construction and professional work, lodging, dining, transportation, visitor spending, and regional tourism.

Environmental stewardship would be integral to the site plan, including responsible grazing, drainage, manure management, soil and water protection, native and equine-safe plantings, shade and habitat preservation, and long-term care of the land itself.

8. Horses as Teachers and Healers: A Living Public Program

The public life of the Sanctuary would begin with a simple idea: people can learn a great deal from horses without asking the horses to perform for them.

Horses as Teachers would give visitors an unusually close view of herd life, relationships, behavior, aging, care, and the many ways horses communicate. Much of what visitors encounter may be quiet and ordinary—horses grazing, resting, eating, moving among companions, or simply standing together. Knowledgeable guides could help people notice and understand friendships, preferences, routines, boundaries, and personalities that become visible when horses are observed over time.

Guided tours could introduce visitors to the Herd Halls, turnout areas, care systems, and the thinking behind the Sanctuary's design while bringing the horses themselves into focus: their names, histories, relationships, and changing lives in retirement. Individual horses could also provide a living connection to the larger history of horses in human society—from transportation and agriculture to sport, art, and city life.

Appropriate, supervised interaction could include quiet time with horses who enjoy human contact, grooming, offering an approved carrot or apple, or simply observing at close range. Visitors could learn about equine behavior, care, aging, ecology, and the relationship between horses and people.

The campus could also explore the healing potential of quiet, non-riding encounters with horses. Equine-assisted programs for veterans living with trauma have shown promising results, suggesting that time spent building a connection with a horse may offer comfort, trust, and a sense of calm. The Sanctuary could make room for such experiences within its broader public and educational life.

The Sanctuary could also host day-long healing retreats, bringing together quiet time near horses, guided reflection, walks, and opportunities for creative expression. The Cultural Center and Quiet Room would offer welcoming spaces to gather and rest between activities.



9. A Place for Remembrance and Reflection

The Sanctuary would serve not only as a permanent home for its resident horses, but also as a place where the carriage horses who came before them are remembered with dignity and gratitude.

A Memorial Garden and adjoining apple orchard could create a quiet landscape for remembrance and simply being still. Trees, native plantings, pathways, and wooden benches would invite visitors to linger rather than pass through.

The garden would honor New York City's carriage horses while offering a place whose meaning could extend beyond them. People might come to remember an animal or person they have loved, sit with grief or gratitude, write, draw, think, or spend time quietly in nature.

Imagine a spring morning or a long summer evening. Someone sits beneath the trees with a notebook while a gentle breeze moves through the orchard. Horses can be heard somewhere in the distance. Birds call, leaves stir, and the ordinary life of the Sanctuary continues nearby. Nothing is being performed or required. The place simply offers space to remember and reflect.

The apple orchard could deepen that sense of continuity. Flowering in spring and bearing fruit later in the year, it would connect remembrance with renewal and the ongoing life of the Sanctuary.

Together, the garden and orchard could create something both deeply personal and distinctly public: a beautiful place where New York's history with these horses is preserved while visitors are given space to bring their own memories into the landscape.

10. A Living Campus for Learning, Research & Collaboration

The Sanctuary could serve as a living campus where excellent equine care, education, research, professional training, and interdisciplinary collaboration develop around the horses and their needs.

Its state-of-the-art approach could bring together veterinarians, universities with strong equine programs, students, farriers, equine-care professionals, researchers, educators, and other specialists.

These relationships could support clinical consultation, internships, and practical training opportunities for emerging equine professionals.

Research could extend beyond conventional veterinary questions. The Sanctuary's social herds and long-term resident population could create opportunities for non-invasive study

of behavior, relationships, enrichment, cognition, choice, aging, and other dimensions of equine life.

The result could be a powerful exchange: care generates knowledge, knowledge improves care, and what is learned at the Sanctuary radiates outward.

11. A Practical Path from Vision to Living Campus

The New York Horse Sanctuary and Cultural Center would be developed in phases, allowing a project of substantial scale to move forward responsibly without requiring every element of the long-term vision to be funded and built at once.

The horses' permanent home would be the first operational priority, but the entire property would be master-planned from the beginning as one integrated institution, reserving space for the Cultural Center, public areas, operations, landscape features, and future growth.

Phase One: Initial Funding and Predevelopment

The first step would be to form a founding committee with expertise in equine welfare, nonprofit development, philanthropy, finance, law, land and facilities, and cultural programming. The committee would build partnerships, guide initial fundraising, and coordinate feasibility work, site criteria, preliminary design consultation, and legal and zoning review.

Social media could play an important role in getting the project off the ground, giving people a way to follow its development, share the vision, and become involved. Building this public connection early could help demonstrate interest in the future institution and strengthen initial fundraising efforts.

The goal would be to secure commitments for land acquisition, the horse-ready core, and ongoing care and operations. Funding for the Cultural Center and other public features could follow in later phases.

Phase Two: Land Acquisition and Master Planning

With an initial financial foundation in place, the next priority would be securing the right property. Professional master planning would establish how the equine, public, operational, infrastructure, landscape, and future-growth components would work together as one coherent campus.

Phase Three: The Horse-Ready Core

The first construction priority would be everything necessary to begin safely receiving and permanently caring for horses: Herd Halls, fencing, water and utilities, feeding systems, veterinary and treatment areas, feed storage, staff and equipment facilities, access roads, and essential support infrastructure.

Phase Four: Horse Intake and Expansion

Once appropriate horse-ready capacity was in place, horses would arrive in manageable groups, allowing for veterinary evaluation, acclimation, and careful introduction into compatible social groups.

As acquisitions continued, additional Herd Halls, turnout areas, staffing, veterinary resources, and support infrastructure could be added as the Sanctuary grew toward its planned equine capacity.

Phase Five: The Cultural Center and Public Campus

As the equine foundation became established, the broader public institution could increasingly take physical form. The Visitor and Education Center, exhibitions, lecture and screening spaces, walking paths, observation areas, Memorial Garden and apple orchard, public art, gathering areas, and other cultural and educational facilities could develop as resources permitted.

Because these elements would have been anticipated in the original master plan, the Sanctuary and Cultural Center could grow as one coherent institution rather than as unrelated additions.

12. Governance, Partnerships & Funding

The New York Horse Sanctuary and Cultural Center should be structured from the outset as an institution built to endure, with the lifetime security and well-being of the horses as its first obligation.

New York's history offers ample precedent for institutions conceived not merely for the moment, but for generations.

A strong governing board could bring together expertise in equine welfare and veterinary medicine, nonprofit leadership, finance, law, philanthropy, land and facilities, education, communications, and the arts. Professional management, clear financial controls, transparent reporting, and defined standards of care would help ensure that ambition is matched by accountability.

Strategic partnerships could extend the institution's expertise, reach, and resources. Relationships with philanthropic organizations, educational and cultural institutions, equine professionals, businesses, and community partners could support different aspects of the Sanctuary's development and public life.

The financial model should be diversified rather than dependent upon a single donor, revenue stream, or institution. Capital development could draw from major philanthropy, foundations, grants, institutional and corporate partnerships, naming opportunities, memorial and tribute giving, individual supporters, and appropriate public or civic participation.

Community support could include memberships, recurring donations, symbolic horse sponsorships, and other programs that allow people to form an ongoing connection with individual horses and the institution as a whole. As the Cultural Center develops, earned income from programs, events, gift shop sales, and visitor offerings could provide additional support.

These sources should supplement rather than carry the fundamental lifetime-care obligation. The horses' security should rest on a financial foundation strong enough to withstand quieter years as well as periods of greater public activity.

The goal is not merely to fund construction, but to establish a financially resilient institution capable of protecting horses for generations while sustaining a vibrant cultural and public life around them.

13. Anticipated Questions & Proposed Approaches

A project of this scope naturally raises practical questions. Some answers will depend upon funding, site selection, professional planning, engineering, and other development work. At this stage, the following represent credible approaches rather than final specifications.

What would be the first step toward making this project happen?

The first step would be to form a founding committee with the expertise and relationships needed to advance the proposal. Its initial work would include building partnerships, coordinating professional feasibility and cost analysis, and guiding the fundraising needed to move into predevelopment.

How could public support grow before the sanctuary is built?

An active online community could help bring the project to life before construction even begins. Sharing equine research, horse stories, and plans for cultural programming through social media and discussion groups could attract future visitors, supporters, donors, and partners, building momentum toward the sanctuary's creation.



How much will the Sanctuary and Cultural Center cost, and where will the funding come from?

An early priority would be a thorough professional analysis of the project's anticipated costs, including land, construction, infrastructure, equine facilities, staffing, and long-term operations. That work would establish a credible preliminary financial range and help determine the scale and type of fundraising required.

Funding would come from a diversified mix of philanthropy, institutional partnerships, community support, and, as the Cultural Center develops, earned income. Section 12 sets out the proposed funding approach in greater detail.

Once a site is selected and architectural, engineering, and construction planning advances, the preliminary estimates could be refined substantially.

How much land will be required?

Final acreage should be determined through professional equine and master-planning analysis. For early planning purposes, approximately 250 to 400 acres may provide a useful working range for a campus ultimately supporting about 200 horses, multiple Herd Halls, turnout and pasture, the Cultural Center, infrastructure, and future growth.

How would visitors reach the Sanctuary from New York City?

Passenger-rail access from New York City would be a priority, with a manageable last-mile connection from the station to the campus. Easy road access would also be required for visitors arriving by car, staff, suppliers, emergency services, and horse transport.

How quickly could the horse-ready core be completed?

A responsible timeline cannot be established until sufficient committed funding is in place, a site is secured, necessary approvals and infrastructure requirements are known, and professional plans are developed. Once those conditions are met, development could proceed in phases beginning with the essential horse-ready core.

What if horses require retirement before the permanent Sanctuary is ready?

The project should plan for that possibility in advance. Depending on timing and circumstances, temporary horse-ready facilities on the property or carefully vetted interim partner facilities could provide care until permanent capacity became available, without altering the Sanctuary's long-term commitment to those horses.

How would the Sanctuary accommodate horses with different medical, dietary, behavioral, or mobility needs?

Flexible spaces, individualized feeding and medical plans, recovery areas, and temporary separation when necessary would allow care to adapt to each horse while preserving appropriate social contact. Communal living would remain compatible with individualized care.

How would the horses be transported from New York City?

Transportation would be planned and supervised by experienced equine professionals with veterinary guidance. Timing, grouping, vehicles, rest, and other logistics would be determined according to the horses' needs and available horse-ready capacity.

Could current carriage drivers, grooms, or stable workers have a role in the new institution?

Potentially. Some may bring valuable practical experience and detailed knowledge of individual horses. Depending on qualifications and interest, opportunities could exist in horse care, facility management, transportation, visitor education, historical interpretation, or other areas of the institution.

How would the Sanctuary operate through New York winters and severe weather?

The Herd Halls are intended in part to address this challenge by providing large, protected communal environments where horses can remain dry, mobile, and socially connected during severe weather. Unlike individual stalls, the open communal design would allow horses to choose proximity to familiar companions, gathering together within sheltered space when conditions are cold or uncomfortable.

Climate, drainage, ventilation, snow management, emergency power, footing, and seasonal operations would be addressed through professional design.

How would the Sanctuary evolve beyond the founding herd?

New York City's carriage horses would be the Sanctuary's founding herd and the reason for its creation. As those horses age and, over time, reach the ends of their lives, space would gradually become available to offer the same promise of permanent protection to horses without a secure permanent home.

The original carriage horses' histories and legacy would remain permanently woven into the institution they inspired.

14. Why This Matters to New York: The Story Ahead

The departure of New York City's carriage horses could mark the beginning of a remarkable new chapter.

Imagine...

One day in the future, the last group of carriage horses is leaving the New York City stable where generations of carriage horses began and ended their working days. On that morning, New Yorkers and the press line the block to witness a moment many thought they might never see. Others follow live online from far beyond the city.

One by one, the horses leave the old, cramped three-story brick building, first constructed for the city's horses more than 130 years ago. They make their way down from the upper-floor stalls and past the place where they were harnessed day after day, moving toward the large waiting horse van. Different in color, temperament, and history, each horse comes forward as an individual, yet together they embody more than a century of New York City history.

After the last horse is loaded and secured, the van pulls away, leaving behind not only a crowd—but an era.

For the first time in generations, the stable stands empty of horses.

The van travels north through the city. From above, cameras follow through traffic and out beyond the Bronx. Gradually, the landscape changes. Dense city streets give way to wider skies, quieter roads, and greener land.

At the Sanctuary, people wait in anticipation. The unmistakable low rumble of an approaching engine can be heard in the distance. The van turns onto the long, picturesque driveway, lumbering slowly toward the Herd Halls and coming to a stop.

Then—the once-in-a-lifetime moment.

The ramp is lowered.

The horses peer out with curious eyes, ears pricked. Handlers greet them warmly and lead each horse down the ramp toward the spacious Herd Halls. For the first time, they enter a place designed not around the demands of traffic, tourism, and work, but around rest, companionship, safety, and life.

The herd is finally home.





The Beings Project

www.thebeingsproject.org · info@thebeingsproject.org