

City of Charleston MAYORAL RACE

Election Day is November 7th and there is a crowded field vying for the top job in the City of Charleston. Incumbent Mayor John Tecklenburg faces challenges from former Statehouse Representative William Cogswell, activist and podcaster Mika Gadsden, Charleston School of Law Professor Debra Gammons, public affairs professional and National Guardsman Clay Middleton and Charleston City Councilman Peter Shahid.

Carolina Tails asked each candidate two questions to let you know which candidates are putting animals on their policy agendas. Mika Gadsden did not respond to our request.



William Cogswell



Debra Gammons



Clay Middleton



Peter Shahid



John Tecklenburg (I)

Q1 The community is in dire need of stringent measures to curtail the overpopulation of dogs and cats, which is increasing, leading to more dog attacks and costs to taxpayers and donors. Will you support ordinances for incentivized spay/neuter of owned animals through a registration system, along with subsidized mandatory spay/neuter for the most overpopulated animals?

WILLIAM COGSWELL: It is crucial to take a humane and responsible approach to tackle this problem while ensuring the safety of the community and the welfare of animals. I would support an ordinance that provides low-cost or free spay/neuter services for low-income residents and implement a registration system for dogs and cats. Cities like Austin, Texas have implemented similar measures that have resulted in more responsible pet ownership and relieved pressure on animal shelters. I would support a fiscally responsible program that reduces the number of animals in shelters and on the streets, promotes responsible pet ownership, and improves public safety.

DEBRA GAMMONS: As Mayor, I will support and encourage measures that (1) educate pet owners on the importance of taking proper care of their animals; (2) encourage pet owners to spay/neuter; and (3) provide economic assistance to pet owners who are financially unable to pay the costs to spay/neuter their pets. We have a responsibility to take care of our animals and ensure the safety of our neighbors.

CLAY MIDDLETON: I am in support of sensible ordinances and partnerships to encourage and incentivize spay/neutering of owned animals through a registration system, along with subsidized options

for mandatory spaying/neutering for the most overpopulated animals. We can't shelter our way out of the problem and frankly, we can't afford to keep doing the bare minimum. By being thoughtful, we can save taxpayers money and promote better public health and safety measures that are often overlooked. Our city and region need to set the right example for others in South Carolina to adopt meaningful ordinances and form similar partnerships.

PETER SHAHID: I will support measures that will help reduce the overpopulation of animals either by enacting new ordinances or aggressively enforcing existing state and local laws. In addition, the city needs to prevent what is commonly called "backyard breeding." I fully support the Charleston Animal Society's efforts to encourage the spaying and neutering of animals. While these efforts have led to positive results regarding overpopulation issues, I recognize that more needs to be done. Before I support a registration system, I would need more details as to the parameters of such a system to ensure the safeguards of individual privacy concerns.

JOHN TECKLEBURG: Spaying and neutering is a critical issue for our community, and I would certainly be interested in hearing specific and detailed proposals to curtail overpopulation.

Q2 As of this printing, a local entrepreneur will have received South Carolina DMV approval for his electric carriages. Will you support his application to provide tours in Downtown Charleston as an additional alternative to the animal-drawn vehicles tourist attraction?

WILLIAM COGSWELL: Our city and residents have amazing stories to share with over 8 million visitors who come here every year. I myself was a tour guide for several years during college, and some of my greatest memories are from that job. It is important to provide a variety of transportation options to tourists. The electric carriage alternative is a great addition to our already diverse range of tour options, including walking tours, culinary tours, and horse-drawn tours. By working together and offering different modes of transportation, we can enhance and modernize our tourism industry and create unforgettable memories for visitors.

DEBRA GAMMONS: As Mayor, I will support electric carriages that are safe and abide by our City's Ordinances. I will work to make the City a safe environment for people to walk, ride their bikes, and ride carriages. Having visitors and residents learn about our rich history – bad and good – is important for a strong future.

CLAY MIDDLETON: I do not see a problem with having an electric carriage as an option for people to have as they see and enjoy our city.

PETER SHAHID: I have met with this local entrepreneur, Kyle Kelly, numerous times to discuss his efforts to launch electric carriages. I believe he has created a viable alternative to carriage rides. I will support his efforts as long as these carriages are safe, comply with state and local laws, and maintain the character of our historic city.

JOHN TECKLEBURG: Once electric carriages have been approved by SCDMV, I would like to see them regulated like other city tourist conveyances here in Charleston. That said, the process for getting there could take time, as it would require City Council approval of multiple ordinance changes before the electric carriage regulations could be enacted.