

ORGANIZING TO SAVE YOUR POST OFFICE



Berkeley Historic Post Office, CA

A UNION/COMMUNITY ORGANIZING TOOLKIT

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Why Should We Save the Post Office?

The Postal Service has been under attack for years by the private corporations and from within the management ranks. However, the USPS continues to make cuts that not only hurt the Postal brand, but it also deters people from utilizing its services, casting doubt that the first class letter is dead.

The USPS believes it's more important to build on the goal to provide services for the big corporate mailers, not the individual customer. The attacks include: Cutting hours, closing post offices, closing mail processing plants, suspending post offices indefinitely, and trying to degrade postal work, utilizing cluster boxes, cutting service standards, by outsourcing work to retail stores, and killing the sanctity of the mail. It is our constitutional right for rural folks as well as minorities and the poor to be well informed and educated, to have a reasonable standard of living, and to provide access to basic communications. This is an attack on our democracy. The Postal Service is supposed to be inclusive of all.

The Postal Service is part of our National Constitution and under the Postal Reorganization Act the Postal Service is what binds the people of this country together. The Postal Service is to provide an efficient, affordable, fair and equitable service to all no matter where you live in this country.

We need to protect the sanctity of our mail service and make sure the service is efficient, affordable and prompt. It must be made clear that communities want full service post offices with career employees performing the work.

This toolkit is to help provide you with the necessary skills to save your Post Office in your community. You should want to save your good paying jobs that belong to the community. Since the 1970s we have lost over 180,000 postal living wage jobs to the private sector with lower pay and fewer benefits. This is a big hit to workers around this country.

What You Can Expect from the USPS

The Postal service by law is required to notify the public and all patrons of the Post Office where there is a proposal to close, suspend, or relocate the facility.

You will find those laws in various places such as Title 39, United States Code 404(b) which prohibits the USPS from permanently closing a small post office just to save dollars, it must be based on certain criteria and requires the Postal Service to provide a notice posted in the Post Office as well as a form letter to all customers within 60 days before a final decision can be made to allow customers to evaluate the proposal and offer comments.

It includes scheduling a meeting and allowing for written comments to be submitted, the Postal Reorganization Act (PRA) which calls for providing a maximum degree of effective and regular service to rural areas, communities and small towns where post offices are not financially self-sustaining, 39 U.S.C. 101 language that clearly establishes that no small post office shall be closed solely for operating at a deficit, 201, and 403, 404 (a) (13) and (d) , 39 CFR Section 241 provides the community with appeal rights to the PRC within 30 days after the written determination is made available to the public. PO-101 *Postal Handbook Post Office Discontinuance Guide*, the Postal Accountability and Enhancement Act, 39 U.S.C. 3661 (b) requires the USPS to submit its request for an opinion within a reasonable time prior to the effective date of proposal to the PRC, Section 106 of the Historic Preservation USPS Compliance Act which governs policies in order to dispose historical properties including maintenance, repair, new construction, and demolition.

This is outlined in Handbook RE-1, Realty Acquisition and Management updated June 2008 and RE-6 Facilities Environmental Handbook, and the postal service again is required to notify the public and consider public comments and input. (See 39 CFR Section 241 on pages 16-29 for USPS requirements and appeal process).

If your Post Office is listed on the POSTPlan, the USPS will be in touch to collect public input, which is also required by law. POSTPlan is a program to propose a closure, consolidation, relocate to a retail store, or reduce your retail hours. The Postal Service is required to send Letters to your community informing you of an upcoming community meeting that the USPS will be holding for public input.

Accompanying this letter will be a community survey. This survey gives you very few options:

- either turn your post office into a “Village Post Office” where your PO boxes will be moved to a local business and mail handled by the business employees
- choose POSTplan: hours cut and service reduction

There should also be a public notice in the post office notifying all patrons of the community meeting. This notice must be posted 2 weeks before the meeting date. When the USPS plans a community meeting, it normally plans a one hour meeting and usually schedules the location at the Post Office being affected. This of course is not a location that can give the community full access to attend. The time they schedule is usually in the afternoon when the public is working, which deters the public from attending.

Many of the meetings are not advertised. So it is important for our locals to find out if any of their post offices are on the POSTplan list that fall within their local's jurisdiction. The local can help bring the community together to re- schedule a community meeting. The community can request that the USPS reschedule the community meeting to a time and place that will work best for the community not the USPS. The USPS is required by law to reschedule.

The meeting planned by the USPS never addresses the specific individual community issues in the town where the Post Office is located, but makes arguments from a national funding crisis. They usually will provide a fact sheet of the results of their survey that may or may not have reached the community members. The USPS also explains at the meeting that they will implement hour reductions 30 days after the community meeting. This proves that any testimony given at the meeting means nothing to them as they have already decided to implement their plan based on their survey results. This can be argued when you appeal the USPS decision to the Postal Regulatory Commission.



What Steps Should We Take?

The first step in taking action is to reschedule the community meeting. Once you have found a better location date and time, a letter must be drafted to the USPS regarding the request to reschedule.

A letter from a legislative official, the Mayor or other elected officials may pull more weight requesting to reschedule the community meeting. Ask officials to send a reschedule letter and get their assistance in finding a better location and time for the meeting.

Sample letter requesting a new re-scheduled date and place to have a Community Meeting

USPS District Office

For the _____ Post Office

As per Title 39, United States Code 404(b) the community of _____ Post Office requests to reschedule the Community Meeting to the _____ Community Center on July 8, 2017 at 6pm, allowing all patrons to have the opportunity to speak on the issue of the proposal to close or reduce the hours of the _____ Post Office. We will provide a facilitator to provide a fair opportunity for all to be heard.

Sincerely,

Mayor Townsend

Town of _____

Getting the Message to the Community

We need to consider how we will advertise to the community how important the meeting is to save their post office. Look at ways you can reach the most people in the shortest time.

Circulate a petition to show that your entire community is on record of wanting to keep the Post Office intact, with no changes, or closure. Ask businesses to collect signatures. Have town hall meetings prior to the USPS meeting. Get city or county officials, the Mayor and City Council, and include all elected officials in town to sign a proclamation to keep the Post Office fully functional. Put petitions in the library, the country store, churches, etc. Provide copies for the Legislative Representatives and for the USPS.

Make signs that can be attached to stakes that can be installed on both sides of the street where the post office is located saying "Save Our Post Office" and include a community leader's phone number to call and the date, time, and place of the community meeting. Rent an electronic sign flashing the same message. Do not place any signs in the post office or on its premises outside. Signs can be very effective in drawing media and TV attention.

Write letters to the Editor of all the local newspapers and internet blogs, Facebook and other social media. Get leaders to show up on cable television asking the community to show up at the community meeting to save their post office. Notify your congressional member's office, judges and ministers, and your radio stations of the time and place of the community meeting ask them to spread the information through their contacts with the community.

When the USPS says they sent out surveys, many times it has been reported that dozens, and sometimes hundreds, of folks never received the survey. The USPS is supposed to have a fact sheet with statistics on how many surveys were sent and a breakdown on how the community responded by the option they chose. This is reported at the community meeting.

Send out an alternate survey, to everyone who utilizes your post office. Collect these surveys and share the results at the community meeting, providing copies to everyone who attends

Information about the USPS Survey

The USPS will be sending a survey to a randomly selected group of community members soon as it is a legal requirement to get public input on changes to our post office. You may or may not be one of the people who receive the USPS survey. The USPS survey is full of technical jargon and misleading language that can be difficult to understand. If you receive the USPS survey, this document is designed to help you fill it out. Below is what each proposed option means and what the impact would be on our post office:

If You Want Your Post Office to Remain Open with Full Services Do Not Choose Option 1, 2, 3, or 4:

Option 1: Cutting window service hours will eliminate the Postmaster position in your community, reduce use of the post office, and can lead to eventual closure. Imagine what happens if they cannot find someone to fill an extremely part-time position with a smaller salary and fewer benefits.

Option 2: Conduct a discontinuance study; means close your post office. Your rural letter carrier will not have the time, the training, or the material to provide full postal services and you will have to catch them as they drive past your rural mailbox. "Alternate access points" means the post office in the nearest town.

Option 3: "A contractor" will not weigh parcels, register, certify, or insure mail, sell passports or money orders, handle express, COD, return receipts, international or any number of postal services. A "contractor" is not a trained, sworn postal employee and may go out of business at any time.

Option 4: "Relocate" means close your post office.

DO WRITE IN: Keep full service hours

DO WRITE IN: My preference for window service hours each weekday would be full service 8am – 5pm (or whatever full service means for your community)

DO WRITE IN: "ADDITIONAL COMMENTS" (reason why your town needs full service full-time)

**Sample Petition to Be Signed by All Customers of the
Post Office Targeted for Closure or Consolidation**

[insert District Manager's name]
District Manager
Customer Service and Sales
U.S. Postal Service
City, state and zip code

Dear Mr./Ms. [insert last name of District Manager]

We the citizens and customers of [insert name] Post Office, hereby protest any change in the present status of our post office.

It is our desire to keep our post office at its present status---a United States post office with career postal employees.

We have many concerns, among them the sanctity of the mail and the inconvenience your proposal presents to us in delivering and sending the mail, particularly accountable mail. We are especially concerned over what effect your proposed action would have regarding the purchase of postal money orders, as we have heard of the documented abuses occurring at contract mail stations and Village Post Offices.

The Postal Reorganization Act of 1970 calls for providing a maximum degree of effective and regular postal service to rural areas, communities and small towns where post offices are not financially self-sustaining.

We do not feel your proposals meet these criteria.

Sincerely,

Customer's signature
Print customer's name:
Customer's address, city, state
Name of Post Office and zip code:

(Be sure to keep a duplicate copy of the petition.)

A Model to Build From: A Community Meeting

Scheduled meeting at a time that's best for the community. Once you find a location that will be big enough make sure that it is available at a time in the early evening where the public would have a better chance of showing up. Consider the need to look at the time you will need to educate the community and give them ample notification to arrange to be at the meeting. You should also plan a time where people can show up an hour before the scheduled meeting to organize speakers and points of view and to plan your strategy. Invite elected officials, lawyers, and business owners to speak as well as labor and community members.

Consider offering an incentive to show up. Example: raffle a \$50 gas card or gift card.

A sign-in sheet should also be provided so that everyone can stay in contact. Have a petition available for the community members to sign that requests the USPS to stop actions to close or reduce hours of the post office operation.

Convene an hour before the meeting to get speakers ready. Have a facilitator assigned to make sure all community members are heard (like a retired state trooper or police officer). Retain an attorney or legal aide to represent your town if the board or council agrees.

Address all issues relating to the importance of keeping the Post office open and with full service hours, and get USPS representatives contact information, before the meeting starts.

Sample Talking Points for Your Community Meeting

Examples:

- Community health getting medicines & educational materials
- Lack of access to internet services
- Impact to local businesses
- Weather impact during storms & winter months
- Actual mileage involved to alternative sites
- Hours not open after or before work for community members

Sample Talking Points for Your Community Meeting

- Community center for patrons
- Bulletin Board notices
- Money order needs
- Immigrant services to ship packages to family outside USA
- Political mailings and local election ballots
- Voter registration
- Connection to government agencies
- Need effective and regular services to rural areas
- Gas costs including lost work hours
- Community living under poverty level
- Depend on post office to pay bills on time and receive goods and needs to our rural area
- Utilize the Post Office for all communications
- Businesses need to mail packages and need Saturday delivery
- Need access to the post office during lunch hours
- Misquoted lease amount or misquoted cost savings projected
- 70% of post offices don't make profit. Rules say profit should not be a consideration to shut a post office down.
- Compare alternative surveys done by the community
- Failed to reach all the patrons with USPS survey
- Announcing hours to be reduced within 30 days, not weighing input of the community
- A real post office provides over 37 services where alternate services provide 2-3 services
- The number of businesses within the community will be hurt and could close and leave the community, devastating the town
- A post office provides affordable postage fees
- A post office provides universal reliable mail service
- The post office provides a non-threatening place for unbanked to conduct financial transactions such as purchasing money orders
- The community will be adversely affected financially
- Business growth will end for retail stores, gas stations, eating establishments
- Loss of employment in the community
- Cost of attempting electronic mail

Sample Talking Points for Your Community Meeting

- Mail delays
- Loss in revenue to businesses in the community
- Increased vehicle emissions
- Loss in sales tax and property tax
- Loss in attracting new business
- Not adequate for the elderly and the disabled
- Denied access to voter registration, absentee ballots and passport applications
- Denied a positive image of the community
- Decrease in lease revenues when post office is vacated
- Increased driving, more accidents, wear & tear on the rural roads

It will be important to make as many arguments as possible that involve the effects on your community post office. Make them to the USPS Representative at the meeting as well as in your appeal to the Postal Regulatory Commission. Give a list of written questions the Community wants a response to within 15 days of the community meeting.

The Postal Service's presentation usually last about 20 minutes.

The fact sheet they provide does not address the individual office and why it must close or reduce hours, it's based on a national funding crisis. They should have a fact sheet on the survey they conducted so make sure you raise questions as to who was surveyed and why the survey did not allow for keeping full services intact. Request what the USPS plans to do with the testimony from the Community Meeting?

Local Data and Impact: Make sure you provide all the concerns including:

- The problem with logistics to other alternative services
- Demographics for seniors, the disabled, travel
- Connectivity rely on mail to communicate not internet
- Businesses need Saturday delivery and lunch hours available
- Security needs with a post office & delivery no lockboxes
- What profit do you need, to keep post office full-service
- The community will be financially impacted

Be visible in the meeting consider making signs, stickers, or buttons. Post your signs around the room, have folks hold signs in prominent parts of the room, or even out front as people enter for the meeting.

Assign someone to take detailed notes of postal responses to questions and their reason for proposal as well as the testimony given by the Community, and video tape meeting.

Invite the Local Media!
Save Everything Published to Submit to the PRC.

Keep the Postal Service there until, everyone has had the opportunity to speak, collect surveys and petitions and copy and send them to the USPS and have a set for your appeal to the Postal Regulatory Commission.

Questions for Customers to Ask at the Community Meeting

1. I rely on money orders to pay my bills as I am unbanked how can I receive this service when I cannot travel to another town, nor keep up with the rural carrier's schedule to be at my house?
2. Our Post Office is a meeting place for our community and also provides bulletin board space for us to post notices of community activities, provides a safe school bus stop, and serves many other functions. When the post office closes, the town dies. Clearly the post office serves as a vital communication center and also can provide guidance and information for America's rural population during a national emergency. How can you protect us?
3. The federal government is spending an enormous amount of taxpayer money trying to create jobs. Why is the Postal Service trying to cut back and/or eliminate such an important business/service and jobs for our community?
4. I understand the facility specifications for a contract office are not as stringent as a real post office building operated by real postal employees. The security of the mail, safety and health issues should be the same, for all customers no matter where you live. How are you going to protect my rights to a full service post office?

5. We are concerned about losing our community identity if our post office closes and we lose our businesses and a chance for growth aren't you obligated to protect our identity?
6. I no longer drive nor do I have anyone to drive me to other towns for service. I will be denied the right to receive important mail like my medicines and important bills and other needed supplies how will I get service?
7. Why are you proposing to move our post office boxes to a private business? Will you eventually close our post office? How will a contract worker give me the same service, urgency and security as my real post office? How much revenue are you looking for to keep our post office?
8. How can I be certain that a contract worker will charge me the right fees for packages and other type of mail? Isn't it true that contract workers are not given the same training as postal employees, nor are required to take an oath to protect the mail as postal employees do?
9. How will I be able to send mail and packages to my son who is overseas in the military and get help with odd shaped boxes?
10. What can we do to keep our full service post office?



When Do We File Our Appeal to the Postal Regulatory Commission?

- The public must be given a 60 day notice of a proposed action to enable the persons served by a post office to evaluate the proposal and provide comments.
- The final determination to close or consolidate a post office must be made in writing and must include the findings covering all the required considerations after the public comments are received and taken into account.
- Written determination must be made available to the customers served by the office at least 60 days before discontinuance takes effect.
- Any customer served by the affected post office may appeal the decision to the Postal Regulatory Commission (PRC) within 30 days after the written determination is made available. The PRC serves as the consumer advocate for customers. Make sure the PRC receives the appeal in Washington DC early enough within the 30 days.

- The PRC may either affirm the determination of the Postal Service or return the matter for further consideration, but may not modify the determination.
- The PRC will render an opinion within 120 days after receiving the timely appeal.

The rules provide opportunity for affected customers to express their views and concerns in writing. Customers should receive a reply in writing and all the documents generated during the process because they are public information. You may have to request copies and a small fee may be charged. Each closing must be considered on its own merit. You can also obtain the information through the Freedom of Information Act. In your appeal, provide documentation/notes that your community collected during and after the public meeting.

Postal Service Requirements for Discontinuance and Appeal to the Postal Regulatory Commission

1. **The authority citation for 39 CFR Part 241 is revised to read as follows:**

Authority:

39 U.S.C. 101, 401, 403, 404, 410, 1001.

2. **Revise § 241.1 to read as follows:**

§ 241.1 Post Offices.

- (a) *Establishment.* Post offices are established and maintained at locations deemed necessary to ensure that regular and effective postal services are available to all customers within specified geographic boundaries.
- (b) *Classification.* As of October 1 of each year, Post Offices are categorized through a cost ascertainment grouping (CAG) process based on allowable postal revenue units for the second preceding fiscal year as follows:

- (1) *CAG A-G*. Post offices having 950 or more revenue units.
- (2) *CAG H-J*. Post offices having 190 but less than 950 revenue units.
- (3) *CAG K*. Post offices having 36 but less than 190 revenue units.
- (4) *CAG L*. Post offices having less than 36 revenue units.

3. Revise § 241.3 to read as follows:

§ 241.3 Discontinuance of USPS-operated retail facilities.

- (a) *Introduction* - (1) *Coverage*. (i) This section establishes the rules governing the Postal Service's consideration of whether an existing retail Post Office, station, or branch should be discontinued. The rules cover any proposal to:
- (A) Replace a USPS-operated post office, station, or branch with a contractor-operated retail facility;
 - (B) Consolidate a USPS-operated post office, station, or branch by combining it with another USPS-operated retail facility; or
 - (C) Discontinue a USPS-operated post office, station, or branch without providing a replacement facility.
- (ii) The regulations in this section are mandatory only with respect to discontinuance actions for which initial feasibility studies have been initiated on or after July 14, 2011. Unless otherwise provided by responsible personnel, the rules under section 241.3 as in effect prior to July 14, 2011 shall apply to discontinuance actions for which initial feasibility studies have been initiated prior to July 14, 2011.
- (2) *Definitions*. As used in this section, the following terms have the following meanings:
- (i) “*USPS-operated retail facility*” includes any Postal Service employee-operated post office, station, or branch, but does not include any station, branch, community post office, or other retail facility operated by a contractor.

- (ii) “*Contractor-operated retail facility*” includes any station, branch, community post office, or other facility, including a private business, offering retail postal services that is operated by a contractor, and does not include any USPS-operated retail facility.
 - (iii) “*Closing*” means an action in which Post Office operations are permanently discontinued without providing a replacement facility in the community.
 - (iv) “*Consolidation*” means either an action that converts a Postal Service-operated retail facility into a contractor-operated retail facility, or an action that converts an independent Post Office into a Classified Station or Classified Branch. A resulting contractor-operated retail facility reports to a Postal Service-operated retail facility; a resulting Classified Station or Classified Branch reports to an administrative Post Office.
 - (v) “*Discontinuance*” means either a closure or a consolidation.
- (3) *Requirements* A District Manager or the responsible Headquarters Vice President, or a designee of either, may initiate a feasibility study of a USPS-operated facility for possible discontinuance. Any decision to close or consolidate a USPS-operated retail facility may be effected only upon the consideration of certain factors. These include the effect on the community served; the effect on employees of the USPS-operated retail facility; compliance with government policy established by law that the Postal Service must provide a maximum degree of effective and regular postal services to rural areas, communities, and small towns where post offices are not self-sustaining; the economic savings to the Postal Service; and any other factors the Postal Service determines necessary. In addition, certain mandatory procedures apply as follows:
- (i) The public must be given 60 days' notice of a proposed action to enable the persons served by a USPS-operated retail facility to evaluate the proposal and provide comments.

- (ii) After public comments are received and taken into account, any final determination to close or consolidate a USPS-operated retail facility must be made in writing and must include findings covering all the required considerations.
- (iii) The written determination must be made available to persons served by the USPS-operated retail facility at least 60 days before the discontinuance takes effect.
- (iv) Within the first 30 days after the written determination is made available, any person regularly served by a Post Office subject to discontinuance may appeal the decision to the Postal Regulatory Commission. Where persons regularly served by another type of USPS-operated retail facility subject to discontinuance file an appeal with the Postal Regulatory Commission, the General Counsel reserves the right to assert defenses, including the Commission's lack of jurisdiction over such appeals. For purposes of determining whether an appeal is filed within the 30-day period, receipt by the Commission is based on the postmark of the appeal, if sent through the mail, or on other appropriate documentation or indicia, if sent through another lawful delivery method.
- (v) The Commission may only affirm the Postal Service determination or return the matter for further consideration but may not modify the determination.
- (vi) The Commission is required to make any determination subject to 39 U.S.C. 404(d)(5) no later than 120 days after receiving the appeal.
- (vii) The following table summarizes the notice and appeal periods defined by statute.

Public Notice of Proposal

60-day notice

Public Notice of Final Determination

30 days for filing any appeal
120 days for appeal consideration
and decision

Up to Wait at least 60 days from first day after posting
final determination before closing or consolidating
USPS operated retail facility.

- (4) *Additional requirements.* This section also includes:
- (i) Rules to ensure that the community's identity as a postal address is preserved.
 - (ii) Rules for consideration of a proposed discontinuance and for its implementation, if approved. These rules are designed to ensure that the reasons leading to discontinuance of a particular USPS-operated retail facility are fully articulated and disclosed at a stage that enables customer participation to make a helpful contribution toward the final decision.
- (5) *Initial feasibility study.* A District Manager, the responsible Headquarters Vice President, or a designee of either may initiate a feasibility study of a USPS-operated retail facility's potential discontinuance, in order to assist the District Manager in determining whether to proceed with a written proposal to discontinue the facility.
- (i) *Permissible circumstances.* The initial feasibility study may be based upon circumstances including, but not limited to, the following:
 - (A) A postmaster vacancy;
 - (B) Emergency suspension of the USPS-operated retail facility due to cancellation of a lease or rental agreement when no suitable alternate quarters are available in the community, a fire or natural disaster, irreparable damage when no suitable alternate quarters are available in the community, challenge to the sanctity of the mail, or similar reasons;
 - (C) Earned workload below the minimum established level for the lowest non-bargaining (EAS) employee grade;
 - (D) Insufficient customer demand, evidenced by declining or low volume, revenue, revenue units, local business activity, or local population trends;
 - (E) The availability of reasonable alternate access to postal services for the community served by the USPS-operated retail facility; or

- (F) The incorporation of two communities into one or other special circumstances.
- (ii) *Impermissible circumstances.* The following circumstances may not be used to justify initiation of an initial feasibility study:
- (A) Any claim that the continued operation of a building without handicapped modifications is inconsistent with the Architectural Barriers Act (42 U.S.C. 4151 et seq.);
- (B) The absence of running water or restroom facilities;
- (C) Compliance with the Occupational Safety and Health Act of 1970 (29 U.S.C. 651 et seq.); or
- (D) In the absence of any circumstances identified in paragraph a)(5)(i) of this section, the operation of a small Post Office at a deficit.
- (iii) *Notice to customers.* Local management must provide notification and questionnaires to customers at the USPS-operated retail facility under study. Local management may determine whether notification is appropriate through media outlets. In addition, the following customers that receive delivery service from the USPS-operated retail facility must receive notification and questionnaires by mail:
- (A) Post Office Box customers at the USPS-operated retail facility under study;
- (B) Customers whose delivery carrier is stationed out of the USPS-operated retail facility under study;
- (C) Customers in the delivery area of the same ZIP Code as the retail facility under study, regardless of whether the delivery carriers for those customers are stationed out of the retail facility under study or out of a nearby facility; and
- (D) Customers whom the retail facility under study serves for allied delivery services such as mail pick-up.
- (iv) *Initial feasibility study due to emergency suspension.* Wherever possible when an initial feasibility study is to be initiated under § 241.3(a)(4)(i)(B) (for example, when it is anticipated that a lease or rental agreement will be cancelled with no suitable alternate quarters available in the community), responsible personnel should initiate the initial feasibility study sufficiently in advance of the circumstance prompting the emergency suspension to allow a meaningful opportunity for public input to be taken into account.

If public input cannot be sought sufficiently in advance of the end date of the lease or rental agreement, responsible personnel should endeavor, to the extent possible, to continue operation of the USPS-operated retail facility for the duration necessary to gather public input and make a more fully informed decision on whether to proceed with a discontinuance proposal. Customers formerly served by the suspended facility should receive notice under paragraph (a)(4)(iii) of this section, including by mail, to the same extent that they would have if the facility were not in suspended status at the time of the initial feasibility study, proposal, or final determination.

- (b) *Preservation of community address*—(1) *Policy*. The Postal Service permits the use of a community's separate address to the extent practicable.
- (2) *ZIP Code assignment*. The ZIP Code for each address formerly served from the discontinued USPS-operated retail facility should be kept, wherever practical. In some cases, the ZIP Code originally assigned to the discontinued USPS-operated retail facility may be changed if the responsible District Manager receives approval from his or her Vice President, Area Operations, before any proposal to discontinue the USPS-operated retail facility is posted.
 - (i) In a consolidation, the ZIP Code for the replacement contractor-operated retail facility, classified station, or classified branch is the ZIP Code originally assigned to the discontinued facility.
 - (ii) If the ZIP Code is changed and the parent or gaining USPS-operated retail facility covers several ZIP Codes, the ZIP Code must be that of the delivery area within which the facility is located.
- (3) *USPS-operated retail facility's city name in address*. If all the delivery addresses using the city name of the USPS-operated retail facility being discontinued continue to use the same ZIP Code, customers may continue to use the discontinued facility's city name in their addresses, instead of that of the new delivering USPS-operated retail facility.
- (4) *Name of facility established by consolidation*. If a post office is to be consolidated with one or more other post offices by establishing in its place a classified station or classified branch affiliated with another post office, the replacement unit is usually given the same name of the facility that is replaced.

If a USPS-operated retail facility is to be consolidated by establishing in its Place a contractor-operated retail facility, the replacement unit can be given the same name of the facility that is replaced, if appropriate in light of the nature of the contract and level of service provided.

- (c) *Initial proposal*—(1) *In general*. If a District Manager believes that the discontinuance of a USPS-operated retail facility within his or her responsibility may be warranted, the District Manager:
- (i) Must use the standards and procedures in § 241.3(c) and (d).
 - (ii) Must investigate the situation.
 - (iii) May propose the USPS-operated retail facility be discontinued.
- (2) *Consolidation*. The proposed action may include a consolidation by replacement of a USPS-operated retail facility with a contractor-operated retail facility. The proposed action may also include a consolidation by replacement of a post office with a classified station or classified branch if:
- (i) The communities served by two or more post offices are being merged into a single incorporated village, town, or city; or
 - (ii) A replacement facility is necessary for regular and effective service to the area served by the post office considered for discontinuance.
- (3) *Views of postmasters*. Whether the discontinuance under --- consideration involves a consolidation or not, the District Manager must discuss the matter with the postmaster (or the officer in charge) of the USPS-operated retail facility considered for discontinuance, and with the postmaster of any other USPS-operated retail facility affected by the change. The District Manager should make sure that these officials are invited to submit written comments and suggestions as part of the record when the proposal is reviewed.
- (4) *Preparation of written proposal*. The District Manager, or a designee, must gather and preserve for the record all documentation used to assess the proposed change. If the District Manager thinks the proposed action is warranted, he or she, or a designee, must prepare a document titled “Proposal to (Close) (Consolidate) the (Facility Name).” This document must describe, analyze, and justify in sufficient detail to Postal Service management and affected customers the proposed service change. The written proposal must address each of the following matters in separate sections:

- (i) *Responsiveness to community postal needs.* It is the policy of the Government, as established by law, that the Postal Service will provide a maximum degree of effective and regular postal services to rural areas, communities, and small towns where post offices are not self-sustaining. The proposal should:
 - (A) Contrast the services available before and after the proposed change;
 - (B) Describe how the changes respond to the postal needs of the affected customers; and
 - (C) Highlight particular aspects of customer service that might be less advantageous as well as more advantageous.
- (ii) *Effect on community.* The proposal must include an analysis of the effect the proposed discontinuance might have on the community served, and discuss the application of the requirements in § 241.3(b).
- (iii) *Effect on employees.* The written proposal must summarize the possible effects of the change on postmasters and other employees of the USPS-operated retail facility considered for discontinuance.
- (iv) *Savings.* The proposal must include an analysis of the economic savings to the Postal Service from the proposed action, including the cost or savings expected from each major factor contributing to the overall estimate.
- (v) *Other factors.* The proposal should include an analysis of other factors that the District Manager determines are necessary for a complete evaluation of the proposed change, whether favorable or unfavorable.
- (v) *Summary.* The proposal must include a summary that explains why the proposed action is necessary, and assesses how the factors supporting the proposed change outweigh any negative factors. In taking competing considerations into account, the need to provide regular and effective service is paramount.
- (viii) *Notice.* The proposal must include the following notices:
 - (A) *Supporting materials.* “Copies of all materials on which this proposal is based are available for public inspection at (Facility Name) during normal office hours.”
 - (B) *Nature of posting.* “This is a proposal. It is not a final determination to (close) (consolidate) this facility.”

- (C) *Posting of final determination.* “If a final determination is made to close or consolidate this facility, after public comments on this proposal are received and taken into account, a notice of that final determination will be posted in this facility
- (D) *Appeal rights.* “The final determination will contain instructions on how affected customers may appeal a decision to close or consolidate a post office to the Postal Regulatory Commission. Any such appeal must be received by the Commission within 30 days of the posting of the final determination.” The notice in this clause is provided when the USPS-operated retail facility under study is a post office. For purposes of this clause, the date of receipt by the Commission is based on the postmark of the appeal, if sent through the mail, or on other appropriate documentation or indicia, if sent through another lawful delivery method.
- (d) *Notice, public comment, and record—*(1) *Posting proposal and comment notice.* A copy of the written proposal and a signed invitation for comments must be posted prominently, with additional copies to be given to customers upon request, in the following locations:
- (i) The USPS-operated retail facility under study, unless service at the facility has been suspended;
 - (ii) The USPS-operated retail facility proposed to serve as the supervising facility;
 - (iii) Any USPS-operated retail facility likely to serve a significant number of customers of the USPS-operated retail facility under study; and
 - (iv) If service at the facility under study has been suspended, any USPS-operated retail facility providing alternative service for former customers of the facility under study.
- (2) *Contents of comment notice.* The invitation for comments must: (i) Ask interested persons to provide written comments within 60 days, to a stated address, offering specific opinions and information, favorable or unfavorable, on the potential effect of the proposed change on postal services and the community.
- (ii) State that copies of the proposal with attached optional comment forms are available in the affected USPS-operated retail facilities.
 - (iii) Provide a name and telephone number to call for information.

- (3) *Other steps.* In addition to providing notice and inviting comment, the District Manager must take any other steps necessary to ensure that the persons served by affected USPS-operated retail facilities understand the nature and implications of the proposed action. A community meeting must be held to provide outreach and gain public input after the proposal is posted, unless otherwise instructed by the responsible Headquarters Vice President or the applicable Vice

President, Area Operations. Authorization to forgo a community meeting should issue only where exceptional circumstances make a community meeting infeasible, such as where the community no longer exists because of a natural disaster or because residents have moved elsewhere.

- (i) If oral contacts develop views or information not previously documented, whether favorable or unfavorable to the proposal, the District Manager should encourage persons offering the views or information to provide written comments to preserve them for the record.
 - (ii) As a factor in making his or her decision, the District Manager may not rely on communications received from anyone unless submitted in writing for the record.
- (4) *Record.* The District Manager must keep, as part of the record for consideration and review, all documentation gathered about the proposed change.
- (i) The record must include all information that the District Manager considered, and the decision must stand on the record. No written information or views submitted by customers may be excluded.
 - (ii) The docket number assigned to the proposal must be the ZIP Code of the office proposed for closing or consolidation.
 - (iv) The record must include a chronological index in which each document contained is identified and numbered as filed.
 - (v) As written communications are received in response to the public notice and invitation for comments, they are included in the record.
 - (vi) A complete copy of the record must be available for public inspection during normal office hours at the USPS-operated retail facilities where the proposal was posted under paragraph (d)(1) of this section, beginning no later than the date on which notice is posted and extending through the posting period.

When appropriate, certain personally identifiable information, such as individual names or residential addresses, may be redacted from the publicly accessible copy of the record.

- (vi) Copies of documents in the record (except the proposal and comment form) are provided on request and on payment of fees as noted in chapter 4 of Handbook AS-353, *Guide to Privacy, the Freedom of Information Act, and Records Management*.
- (e) *Consideration of public comments and final local recommendation—*
 - (1) *Analysis of comments.* The District Manager or a designee must prepare an analysis of the public comments received for consideration and inclusion in the record. If possible, comments subsequently received should also be included in the analysis. The analysis should list and briefly describe each point favorable to the proposal and each point unfavorable to the proposal. The analysis should identify to the extent possible how many comments support each point listed.
 - (2) *Re-evaluation of proposal.* After completing the analysis, the District Manager must review the proposal and re-evaluate all the tentative conclusions previously made in light of additional customer information and views in the record.
 - (i) *Discontinuance not warranted.* If the District Manager decides against the proposed discontinuance, he or she must post, in the USPS-operated retail facilities where the proposal was posted under paragraph (d)(1) of this section, a notice stating that the proposed closing or consolidation is not warranted.
 - (ii) *Discontinuance warranted.* If the District Manager decides that the proposed discontinuance is justified, the appropriate sections of the proposal must be revised, taking into account the comments received from the public. After making necessary revisions, the District Manager must:
 - (A) Transmit the revised proposal and the entire record to the responsible Headquarters Vice President.
 - (B) Certify that all documents in the record are originals or true and correct copies.
 - (f) *Postal Service decision.*-(1) *In general.* The responsible Headquarters Vice President or a designee must review the proposal of the District Manager and decide on the merits of the proposal. This review and the decision must be based on and supported by the record developed by the District Manager.

The responsible Headquarters Vice President can instruct the District Manager to provide more information to supplement the record. Each instruction and the response must be added to the record. The decision on the proposal of the District Manager, which must also be added to the record, may approve or disapprove the proposal, or return it for further action as set forth in this paragraph (f).

- (2) *Approval.* The responsible Headquarters Vice President or a designee may approve the proposed discontinuance, with or without further revisions. If approved without further revision, the term “Final Determination” is substituted for “Proposal” in the title. A copy of the Final Determination must be provided to the District Manager. The Final Determination constitutes the Postal Service determination for the purposes of 39 U.S.C. 404(d).
 - (i) *Supporting materials.* The Final Determination must include the following notice: “Copies of all materials on which this Final Determination is based are available for public inspection at the (Facility Name) during normal office hours.”
 - (ii) *Appeal rights.* If the USPS-operated retail facility subject to discontinuance is a post office, the Final Determination must include the following notice: “Pursuant to 94 (1976), this Final Determination to (close) (consolidate) the (Facility Name) may be appealed by any person served by that office to the Postal Regulatory Commission, 901 New York Avenue, NW., Suite 200, Washington, DC 20268-0001. Any appeal must be received by the Commission within 30 days of the first day this Final Determination was posted. If an appeal is filed, copies of appeal documents prepared by the Postal Regulatory Commission, or the parties to the appeal, must be made available for public inspection at the (Facility Name) during normal office hours.”
- (3) *Disapproval.* The responsible Headquarters Vice President or a designee may disapprove the proposed discontinuance and return it and the record to the District Manager with written reasons for disapproval. The District Manager or a designee must post, in each affected USPS-operated retail facility where the proposal was posted under paragraph (d)(1) of this section, a notice that the proposed closing or consolidation has been determined to be unwarranted.
- (4) *Return for further action.* The responsible Headquarters Vice President or a designee may return the proposal of the District Manager with written instructions to give additional consideration to matters in the record, or to obtain additional information. Such instructions must be placed in the record.

- (5) *Public file.* Copies of each Final Determination and each disapproval of a proposal by the responsible Headquarters Vice President must be placed on file in the Postal Service Headquarters library.
- (g) *Implementation of final determination—(1) Notice of final determination to discontinue USPS-operated retail facility.* The District Manager must:
- (i) Provide notice of the Final Determination by posting a copy prominently in the USPS-operated retail facilities in each affected USPS-operated retail facilities where the proposal was posted under paragraph (d)(1) of this section, including the USPS-operated retail facilities likely to be serving the affected customers. The date of posting must be noted on the first page of the posted copy as follows: “Date of posting.”
 - (ii) Ensure that a copy of the completed record is available for public inspection during normal business hours at each USPS-operated retail facility where the Final Determination is posted for 30 days from the posting date.
 - (iii) Provide copies of documents in the record on request and payment of fees as noted in chapter 4 of Handbook AS-353, *Guide to Privacy, the Freedom of Information Act, and Records Management.*
- (2) *Implementation of determinations not appealed.* If no appeal is filed, the official closing date of the office must be published in the *Postal Bulletin* and effective, at the earliest, 60 days after the first day that Final Determination was posted. A District Manager may request a different date for official discontinuance in the Retail Change Announcement document submitted to the responsible Headquarters Vice President or a designee. However, the USPS-operated retail facility may not be discontinued sooner than 60 days after the first day of the posting of the notice required by paragraph (g)(1) of this section.
- (3) *Actions during appeal—(i) Implementation of discontinuance.* If an appeal is filed, only the responsible Headquarters Vice President may direct a discontinuance before disposition of the appeal. However, the USPS-operated retail facility may not be permanently discontinued sooner than 60 days after the first day of the posting of the notice required by paragraph (g)(1) of this section.
- (ii) *Display of appeal documents.* The Office of General Counsel must provide the District Manager with copies of all pleadings, notices, orders, briefs, and opinions filed in the appeal proceeding.

- (A) The District Manager must ensure that copies of all these documents are prominently displayed and available for public inspection in the USPS-operated retail facilities where the Final Determination was posted under paragraph (g)(1)(i) of this section. If the operation of that USPS-operated retail facility has been suspended, the District Manager must ensure that copies are displayed in the USPS-operated retail facilities likely to be serving the affected customers.
- (B) All documents except the Postal Regulatory Commission's final order and opinion must be displayed until the final order and opinion are issued. The final order and opinion must be displayed at the USPS-operated retail facility to be discontinued for 30 days or until the effective date of the discontinuance, whichever is earlier. The final order and opinion must be displayed for 30 days in all other USPS-operated retail facilities where the Final Determination was posted under paragraph (g)(1)(i) of this section.
- (4) *Actions following appeal decision*—(i) *Determination affirmed.* If the Commission dismisses the appeal or affirms the Postal Service's determination, the official closing date of the office must be published in the Postal Bulletin, effective any time after the Commission renders its opinion, if not previously implemented under § 241.3(g)(3)(i). However, the USPS-operated retail facility may not be discontinued sooner than 60 days after the first day of the posting of the notice required under § 241.3(g)(1).
 - (ii) *Determination returned for further consideration.* If the Commission returns the matter for further consideration, the responsible Headquarters Vice President must direct that either:
 - (A) Notice be provided under paragraph (f)(3) of this section that the proposed discontinuance is determined not to be warranted or
 - (B) The matter be returned to an appropriate stage under this section for further consideration following such instructions as the responsible Headquarters Vice President may provide.

Sample Letter of Appeal **Postal Regulatory Commission**

(insert date)

POSTAL REGULATORY COMMISSION

901 New York Ave NW STE 200
Washington, DC 20268-0001

The Postal Service has informed us of a decision to (*close or consolidate*) our post office by (*insert date*). This action is being taken over the community's protestations. This is a fundamental mistake and would hurt our rural community.

We the customers of (*insert name*) Post Office, vigorously protest and appeal this action in view of the provision in the Postal Reorganization Act that calls for the Postal service to provide a maximum degree of effective and regular postal service to rural areas, communities and small towns where the post office is not self-sustaining.

As a rural area we depend on the post office. This population includes many elderly and retired individuals who frequent the post office on a daily basis in anticipation of important mail pieces. The small rural post offices are vital to the functioning of rural America, and necessary to the overall health of rural America, economic and otherwise. Closing this post office is not the answer to fixing the financial problems of the Postal Service.

In addition, the post office serves as the center of information for America's rural population during a national emergency. It is what keeps our communities alive. We will be totally devastated if we lose our post office.

(Insert a paragraph that relates specifically to your community)

We have attached a list containing the signatures of customers served by (*insert name of post office*) who do not feel that the alternate service offered by the Postal Service is acceptable as it does not provide a maximum degree of regular services that customers are entitled to under the law.

(If the decision is to close and offer rural delivery use the following)

The Postal Service's decision to close our post office and provide rural delivery services raises questions concerning the sanctity of the mail and the risks involved in non-career employees handling the mail.

We also foresee inconveniences in purchasing money orders and stamps and sending accountable mail. We have the same concerns regarding the receipt of accountable mail, such as certified letters, registered letters and CODs. We are also concerned about vandalism, theft of our mail, and identity theft. We do not believe this service meets the requirements of the Act.

(If the decision is to contract through a community post office or Village Post Office, use the following)

The decision to change our post office to a contract facility is unacceptable. This will mean the loss of our identity as a community. This action raises questions about having a contract employee who is not adequately trained, provide efficient prompt service that we received for years and we are concerned about security. Only limited services will be provided which adversely affects our community. Money order services will be denied and that affects us financially. The Postal Service can terminate the contract and close the contract facility at any time and we customers would lose our appeal rights to the PRC and not be protected under the Postal Reorganization Act. This will affect our community economically.

(If the decision is to reduce service hours of the post office)

The reduction in service hours will adversely affect our community's access to full and regular services as maintained by the Postal Reorganization Act.

Many of our community work and cannot afford to take time off to do our financial and postal business during certain work hours, and we need Saturday services as well. We need to have the availability to get to the post office during the full day depending on travel considerations.

(If the Postal Service is consolidating with a neighboring post office)

We strongly oppose the consolidation of two post offices and appeal for your assistance. This will mean a loss of identity to our community.

(Use last paragraph in all cases)

We feel that, as citizens of the United States, we are entitled to the same efficient postal service provided to our counterparts in urban areas. The Postal Reorganization Act is explicit in pointing this out. We petition you, as members of the Commission, to respectfully consider our protest and order the Postal Service to give additional considerations to our service needs.

How can the federal government spend billions of dollars to attempt to create jobs and then a branch of the federal government eliminates vital jobs in small towns? Isn't it against the law to close a post office just to save money? A post office in an urban area may be a luxury or a convenience but in rural America a post office is a necessity and we are proud to see our flag flying over our post office every day.

Attached we have listed all the documentation that was presented to the Postal Service: petitions, including testimony, from the Community Meeting, all of our Congressional and elected officials response, resolutions, and information the Postal Service gave us. We request that all documentation be made a part of the official record of our appeal.

Respectfully submitted,

(Secure signatures of as many postal customers as possible in the community include community leaders)

Enhance and Expand Services at Post Offices, Don't Close or Discontinue Our Services

International Money Transfers (IMTs)

In 2012, more than \$123 billion in remittances were sent from the United States to more than 140 countries. Currently, the USPS provides paper and electronic international money orders. Paper money orders are accepted in 28 countries. The electronic service, Dinero Seguro/Sure Money, has nine participating countries and is available at 2,800 post office locations. Of the ten countries receiving the most remittances from the United States (Mexico, China and India are the top three), the USPS paper money order serves only two and the electronic service is available in four of those 10 countries.

- Expand IMTs in one of the following ways:
 - Replace Dinero Seguro, the current electronic international money transfer system, with the Universal Postal Union (UPU)'s International Financial System (IFS) which operates in 70 countries.
 - Work with the Postal Service's current remittance provider to expand the Dinero Seguro offering to additional countries.
 - Combination of the UPU system and expansion of Dinero Seguro.
- Expand availability of Dinero Seguro to additional post offices – infrastructure already exists.
- Establish customer accounts for IMTs similar to the Sure Money “frequent customer” card which:
 - Streamline customer identification/use (reduce filling out forms).
 - Facilitate storage of remittance amounts so a larger amount can be sent at a lower fee (rather than multiple small transactions).
- **Money Transfer and Bill Pay**
 - Modernize the current paper Money Order service by adding an electronic Money Order service:
 - Post to Post electronic domestic money order (possibly using UPU's existing system).
 - Bill payment via electronic money order.

- Explore implementation of the UPU's domestic functionality which includes money transfer for Mobile devices.

- **General Purpose Reloadable Cards (GPR)**

- Offer USPS-branded Postal Cards at all Post Offices across the country.
- Add features that provide no-fee upload of tax refunds, payroll, and government benefit payments.

Customers could log into their online Postal Service prepaid card account to check balances, transfer funds, pay bills, and so on. A smartphone app could allow customers to load paper checks onto their card by taking a picture of the checks with their phone, just like they can at most major banks.

- **Check Cashing** Expand check cashing capability beyond U.S. Treasury checks.

- **Automated Teller Machines (ATMs)**

- Install low-fee ATMs in Post Office lobbies and offer no-fee transactions to Postal Card customers. Access to cash would further facilitate the purchase of postal products and services.

- **Partnerships to Provide Services to Executive Agencies**

- Explore with government agencies the provision of benefits and payments such as Social Security benefits or IRS refunds via a General Purpose Reloadable Card – Postal Card.
- Explore with government agencies providing a service to “cash” Electronic Benefit Transfers for recipients of government benefits.
- Work with government agencies including the Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation (for example, their Money Smart Program and the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau to provide consumer education regarding financial services available at post office locations.
- Explore the UPU's system for transfer of U.S. government pension benefits both internationally and domestically.

- **Savings Services**
 - Explore adding a component to the Postal Card to offer an interest-bearing savings feature.
- **Small-Dollar Loans**
 - Explore adding a component to the Postal Card to offer small-dollar loans to customers who participate in automatic deposit of paychecks or government payments.
 - Well stocked office and mailing supplies
- Wi-Fi access for customers
- Internet kiosks with access to government services
- Customer assistance with packing and addressing items, particularly merchandise returns
- Copying, printing, scanning and faxing services
- Notary services
- Safety deposit boxes
- Office and conference room rentals
- Large screen monitors that can advertise postal products and bring in paid advertising and the latest news and weather
- More Passport services
- Fishing/hunting licenses
- Public transit fare cards
- Authentication services where federal benefits must be applied for in person such as Veterans benefits
- In disasters, FEMA and other agencies have the need to distribute funds quickly and periodically and a reloadable Postal Card – essentially a digitized money order – could be the perfect vehicle. It would be delivered through the mail or available at USPS delivery centers set up in areas where delivery is not immediately possible.

RESOURCES:

Postal Regulatory Commission

901 New York Ave NW STE 200

Washington, DC 20268-0001

Phone: 202-789-6800 Fax 202-789-0891

(The PRC will provide detailed information regarding filing complaints)

Organizing to Save Rural Post Offices

Developed by the Rural Organizing Project

P.O. Box 1350

Scappoose, OR 97056

Grand Alliance (To Save the Public Postal Service)

P.O. Box 34273

Washington, DC 20043

A Grand Alliance.org

The Post Office Red Book A NAPUS Action Guide

Prepared by the Post Office Preservation Committee

National Association of Postmasters

8 Herbert St

Alexandria, VA 22305-2600 703-683-0923

Preserving Historic Post Offices

Advisory Council on Historic Preservation

1100 Pennsylvania Ave NW, suite 803

Washington, DC 20004 202-606-8503

www.achp.gov

Preservation and Disposal of Historic Properties

OIG Report April 16, 2014

Report Number SM-AR-14-004

Impact of the Closure of Post Offices in Northwest Iowa

Prepared by Smart Solutions Group April 2012

Contact Ed Andrews 319-936-0098 or ed@smartsolutionsgroup.net

Save Your Post Office Guidelines

Prepared by Mario Principe

National League of Postmasters

maprincipe@verizon.net 703-249-8312

Campaign for Postal Banking

Visit at: CampaignforPostalBanking.org