Testimony for USPS Public Hearing on 2/26/13

Berkeley, CA

by Harvey Smith, National New Deal Preservation Association

Our community has been busy since the meeting here last September. Our work to oppose the sale of the Post Office has fallen into four categories: investigation, research, organizing, and connecting.

First, we’ve investigated the proposed sale of the downtown Berkeley Post Office and have clearly understood it makes absolutely no sense – financially or functionally. The USPS owns the building, on behalf of the American people, so why relocate it someplace else downtown and pay for costly leased space? As a former letter carrier has pointed out, why not think of ways of economizing while in the present building by installing solar to save on the electric bill? Why not consolidate the carriers at Station A on San Pablo, as was done during the renovation of that building, to the 8th Street center and save the salary of a manager? We know moving processing and bulk mail from downtown will create more pollution in our city and create inconvenience for both customers and letter carriers. But, if there were excess capacity in the backside of the downtown Berkeley Post Office, why shouldn’t the USPS itself lease out and profit from the space? That would be a viable, long term business plan.

Second, we’ve researched what has caused this manufactured crisis for the USPS. We are highly offended by the continual line from USPS management that this crisis is due to, in the words of Berkeley Postmaster Davis, “electronic communication.” This is a Big Lie. Let me make this clear. The crisis of the post office is not due to email. We are talking about the same innovative institution that has survived the telegraph, the telephone and faxes. It can adjust to survive the Internet. We know that this is an ideological, orchestrated plan (not a conspiracy), because the intentions of the Heritage Foundation, the Cato Institute, the American Enterprise Institute, ALEC and other conservative think tanks have been clearly described. Anyone can go to the internet and find them. They have been advocating for years the privatization of the postal service and the de-unionization and cutbacks of postal service jobs. They support the turning over of postal service functions to UPS and FedEx. Their efforts resulted in the onerous legislation of 2006 requiring the pre-payment of postal worker health benefits. We know that privatizers in the House of Representatives have continually stymied legislation that would allow the USPS to innovate and to compete with the private mail carriers.

Third, we’ve organized in our community. People are upset and angry at the thought of their beautiful landmarked post office with its New Deal art being turned into a private commercial venture, for example, a B & B as proposed in the USPS PowerPoint. Berkeley citizens have come together with all their creative and investigative talents to oppose the selling of our public heritage paid for by our parents, grandparents and great-grandparents. We want the historic building and its art to be protected, but we do not see the USPS taking this responsibility very seriously. We want the proper environmental impact studies to be completed. Ultimately, if this building were sold, the citizens of this city will not take it lightly and will not go away quietly.

Fourth, we’ve connected with communities throughout California and across the country. We know we may have to go Washington together and walk the halls of Congress because that’s where the buck stops and starts. We want to tell particularly some members of the House to get out of way and let the USPS continue its tradition of innovation and its record of universal service and of providing living wage jobs. We want them to know the sentiments of both the citizens and the postal workers about the unnecessary liquidation of our public services and the theft of our national heritage. We want to tell the privatizers in Congress like Darrell Issa, the enablers like Postmaster General Donahoe, the opportunists like Richard C. Blum of CBRE, “Get out of the way and let the USPS do what was originally intended in the U.S. Constitution.”

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