

Postal Regulatory Commission hearings on U.S. Postal Service's Station and Branch Optimization and Consolidation Initiative (Docket N2009-1) at Fordham University, Rose Hill Campus, O'Hare Hall, September 23, 2009, 1:00 p.m.

Testimony of Annelen C. Madigan

Brief biography:

I have worked with senior citizens in various Bronx agencies for over 20 years. I have degrees in social work from Lehman College of the City University of New York and the Wurzweiler School of Social Work, Yeshiva University. Presently I am the Director of Social Services for Rose Hill Senior Apartments in my position at Rosehill Housing Management which runs three senior buildings in the Bronx. Rose Hill Apartments is a 119 unit building for low income Seniors and handicapped persons, on Southern or Kazimiroff Blvd. a block and a half from the Botanical Postal Station. I coordinate with the social workers in the two other buildings, one also within three blocks of the Botanical Station of the Post Office, which have a total of another 120 units of senior, low income housing. I also serve on the executive committee of the Metro NY Service Coordinator's Association (MNYSCA), which works to educate and inform senior housing service coordinators in the entire city. I am a life-long Bronx resident.

As a social worker in low income senior housing, in a working class neighborhood in the Bronx, I would like to speak about the real impact that closing our local post office, the Botanical Station in the Bedford Park Community, will have on our residents and others in the area. The points I have to make may apply to other neighborhoods in the Bronx, New York City and in neighborhoods like ours around the country.

Postal services were already curtailed once when we lost our mailbox at Rose Hill Apartments. It was right out front. Fortunately, we have outgoing pick up boxes now, but only because we undertook a multi million dollar low income tax credit refinancing and investment in the building that included new outgoing mailboxes.

Now we are being told the local post office will be closed. At the station, there is a posted list of alternatives in the Bronx. These offices would be a very long walk or a bus trip for people in our area.

The topography of the area, and a many areas in the west Bronx, is extremely challenging. Much of the local community district sits astride the Grand Concourse Spine. The Botanical Post Office is located in the Bronx River Valley on one side of the ridge, while the western part of the District is located on the opposite slope heading down into the Harlem River Valley, on the other side of the high ground. Seventeen point two (17.2) percent of the Bronx population 5 years or older is challenged by a disability, with many mobility impaired. So So East- west pedestrian travel for senior citizens and our handicapped residents is not only difficult, it is unmanageable. The only alternative therefore is likely to be a north-south bus trip, outside and away from their local neighborhood shopping areas, a trip which would add more than \$2.00 for each trip each trip, on top of their postal expenses.

For the people I work with, this is the situation. The average monthly income of most of our residents is under \$895. Many live at the level of Supplementary Security Income, about 790 a month. They have to pay rent and utilities with this income, along with food and clothing. Those not on Medicaid, or other comprehensive insurances, have medical expenses also: for a third of Rose Hill residents this averages \$400 per year. In our Edison Arms building the 98 residents have an even lower average income of less than 860. per month.

Our residents are not much different than the rest of the population in the area, of which close to 50% is on public income support of some kind. In our Edison Arms building the 98 residents have an even lower average income of less than 860 per month.

Our residents are not going to order stamps or deal with package mailings on the computer. Of 131 residents in Rose Hill Apartments, I know of only 2 that are "on line". You may conclude that these are the kinds of people who still use the Post Office, they are not emailing their grandchildren, they are not banking on

line. They are your customers. They are the folks who will be subject to the difficulty of their local office closing.

Another issue particular to our neighborhood is postal money orders. Our shopping area has no bank. While many residents bank elsewhere, many of those have no checking accounts. Almost half of our residents pay rent and other bills by money order. The local check cashing establishment is more expensive for this purpose. Almost every time I use the Botanical Station, there are people buying money orders. It seems apparent that this "banking" function of the local station is something that will affect the whole neighborhood.

There are several definitions of "a neighborhood". Bedford Park is not just a geographical place. It is a distinctive area that forms a community. 85% of the Housing stock in Bedford park, like much of the West Bronx, is dense built-up multi-family housing. 12.9 % of the households are headed by a senior 65 or older. This community wants services and businesses that respond to its needs.. As I mentioned before, there is no bank. We need more than a supermarket, some restaurants and convenience stores to round out the area. A post office is a vital community link for communications, commerce and finances. It would be devastating to take this away from Bedford Park, and destabilizing to the businesses who are established here.

The population in the local Community District (7) grew by 25,000 Or 17.6%, growing to 141,400, between 1980 and 2000 (the last Census count). This in an already densely populated and built-up neighborhood that never experienced the abandonment of the South Bronx area about a mile away.

It is curious to me why the Borough of the Bronx is slated for seven closings. Only one closing is being considered in Queens, and none in the other outerboroughs of Brooklyn or Staten Island. These figures do

not seem fair or sensible.

I hope the reasons for closing are not discriminatory to lower income areas. You may not be able to judge by dollar amount how much an office is used by the community, or how important it is to that community, especially when an area has a high percentage of very low income households.

I know this is a hearing about proposed changes to the postal system, but the last time I was in the Botanical Station, the clerks were telling customers outright that the office would be closed October 2. Sounds like a done deal to me, though I wish this was not so.

Thank you for considering my remarks on behalf of the residents of our buildings and the senior citizens of the Bedford Park area.

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