Postal Regulatory Commission
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Cuyahoga Valley Chamber of Commerce

Bridging Our Communities

Serving the business interests of Brooklyn Heights, Cuyahoga Heights, Independence, Seven Hills, Valley View and Walton Hills

2009
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Postal Rate Commission

Hearing

U.S. Postal Service's Station and Branch Optimization and Consolidation Initiative
(Docket N2009-1)

September 16, 2009

1:00 P.M.

Testimony

of

Wayne Benos
Immediate Past President
Cuyahoga Valley Chamber of Commerce

To the Chairperson and Members of the Commission:

Greetings,

My name is Wayne Benos and on behalf of the Cuyahoga Valley Chamber of Commerce, I would like to thank the commission for this opportunity to present the chamber's views regarding the Station and Branch Optimization and Consolidation Initiative, 2009. While it is my understanding that the commission is focused on the general concept consolidation of post offices on a nationwide basis, my focus, is by nature more local in scope in that the Cuyahoga Valley Chamber of Commerce is a local area chamber of commerce. It is my hope that our views, by extension, relate to the larger picture.

The purpose for which the Chamber was formed is to serve the ethical business interests of its members and to promote the ethical pursuit of commerce in general. The Chamber, in its membership and activities, is non-partisan and non-sectarian. The business of the Chamber is business.

The Cuyahoga Valley Chamber of Commerce is an advocate for business within the six communities we serve, including Brooklyn Heights, Cuyahoga Heights, Independence, Seven Hills, Valley View and Walton Hills. Through our more than 200 member organizations, we offer opportunities to build business-to-business relationships, influence the civic agenda, champion business interests, and promote economic development in the Cuyahoga Valley.

Our membership is a diverse cross-section of the Cuyahoga Valley representing entrepreneurs, small business, large corporations, manufacturing, villages, cities, retail, banking, hospitality, services, shipping, and many more. Our members enjoy many benefits from resources to help grow their business to opportunities to enjoy group savings on healthcare insurance and workers compensation premiums. Through our membership in the Northeast Ohio Area Chamber of Commerce (NOACC), our members can connect with more than 30,000 businesses throughout Northeast Ohio. In addition to the businesses themselves, the I-77 – Rockside Road corridor in the center of the Chamber's business region boasts the second largest number of hotel rooms in Northeast Ohio behind only downtown Cleveland and therefore has a great number of both business and leisure travelers who also utilize the post services in this area.

Upon receiving the invitation to present testimony at this hearing, the Cuyahoga Valley Chamber of Commerce (hereinafter "CVCC") sent an e-mail survey to its members soliciting comments from their own experience relative to the potential closing of the Independence Branch of the United States Post Office. Though this survey is antidotal by necessity, I believe the responses do have utility in gauging the effect such a closing would have on businesses in the area.

The survey was as follows:

> Dear Chamber members,
>
> The Cuyahoga Valley Chamber of Commerce has been asked to testify at one of the two Field Hearings currently scheduled by the Commission in a docket examining the closure of a large number of post office stations and branches throughout the country. The docket is called N2009-1 and entitled "Station and Branch Optimization and Consolidation Initiative".
>
> CVCC could comment on the impact of station and branch closure upon the business of its members. One hearing will be held in Independence, Ohio on September 16th at 1-4 pm.
>
> In order to be able to more fully express the opinions of our members at this hearing, we would like your responses to the following questions:
>
> 1) Do you have an opinion as to how, in general, the closing of the Independence Branch of the Post Office would affect your business?
>
> 2) Does your business travel directly to the Independence Branch of the Post Office such that its closure would adversely affect your business? If so, explain the impact.
>
> 3) Does your business have a post office box at the Independence Branch of the Post Office?
>
> 4) In what ways does your business utilize the Independence Branch of the Post Office?
>
> 5) In general, do you have an opinion regarding the potential affect on y our business of the potential closing of a number of Post Office Branches across the country and the consolidation of services into a smaller number of Post Office Branches as contemplated by the Postal Regulatory Commission's "Station and Branch Optimization and Consolidation Initiative"?
>
> As the hearing that we would attend is on September 16th and in consideration of the fact that we have been asked to submit our testimony in writing prior to the hearing, we would ask that if you wish to respond to these questions you do so by the end of business on September 10th. Thank you for your input

In response to these questions some of the member's comments are as follows:

Comment #1

Submitted by:
Britton Smith Peters & Kalail Co. LPA
Eileen Zimlich, Operations Manager
3 Summit Park Dr. #400
Independence, Ohio 44131

1) Do you have an opinion as to how, in general, the closing of the Independence Branch of the Post Office would affect your business?

ANSWER: It would make running our operations more difficult and costly.

2) Does your business travel directly to the Independence Branch of the Post Office such that its closure would adversely affect your business? If so, explain the impact.

ANSWER: Yes. We post documents that must have a postal time stamp on them. Having to drive those documents downtown or out to the airport would significantly add to the travel time of the employees who handle this. It would add to the time that our employees are away from the office and add to the mileage spent traveling.

3) Does your business have a post office box at the Independence Branch of the Post Office?

ANSWER: No.

4) In what ways does your business utilize the Independence Branch of the Post Office?

ANSWER: We mail legal documents that must have a postal time stamp on them. These documents go to the courts and the time stamp is imperative. We also use the Independence Branch for miscellaneous services, such as obtaining credit for unused postage and purchasing stamps.

5) In general, do you have an opinion regarding the potential affect on your business of the potential closing of a number of Post Office Branches across the country and the consolidation of services into a smaller number of Post Office Branches as contemplated by the Postal Regulatory Commission's "Station and Branch Optimization and Consolidation Initiative"?

ANSWER: We are dismayed. Independence is the second largest business district in Ohio. It is already a hardship for our business because the Independence Branch closes at 5:00. Several days a week, we have to pay an employee to drive to the airport postal facility in order to post mail after 5:00 pm. This has added significantly to the cost of running our business. We are a law firm. We work against legal deadlines that require posting of mail by specific deadlines. In today's market, our hours do not end at 5:00. Deadlines come up quickly and evening hours are a must. The total closing of the Independence Branch would compound an already difficult situation. One can only wonder how the closing of our local post office might affect corporations considering relocating to the Independence area. Perhaps they will reconsider.

Comment #2

Submitted by:

Joseph A. Balog
General Counsel
Sr. Vice President
Dalad Group
6055 Rockside Woods Blvd.
Suite 100
Independence, Ohio 44131

Closing of the Independence Post office would not affect our business. We very, very seldom travel to the post office and do not have a post office box at the post office. I don't think many businesses on Rockside Road use the post office branch. The postal service should eliminate Saturday delivery services for homes and businesses and close the excess branches.

Comment #3

Submitted by:

Vicky
Vicky Hawke, Executive Director
Northeast Ohio Area Chamber of Commerce
216-447-9900 Toll Free 866-466-6222

Will the Garfield Hts and Parma-State Rd Post Offices be affected also? This will definitely be an inconvenience for the Independence businesses. I would like to know what factors are being used to decide which offices will be closed. Demographics of the immediate area? Miles between existing post offices? No matter which offices they close, people/businesses are going to be affected.

Comment #4

Submitted by:

Barbara Biro
Clerk
Village of Cuyahoga Heights
4863 East 71st Street
Cuyahoga Heights, OH 44125

The following resolution was passed August 12, 2009 to show support for our neighbors, City of Independence. Many of our residents in the Village of Cuyahoga Heights use the Independence facility to fulfill their postal needs. The facility is centrally located and has easy access. The Village, itself, uses this facility for our postal needs as well.

As a small village, we understand the need to consolidate services during these trying economic times but sometimes consolidation can be harmful to the dynamics of a local community. The City of Independence has development plans for that area that make the facility a central part of that development. We would hate to see the development impeded or stopped altogether.

RESOLUTION NO.: 2009-117

INTRODUCED BY: MAYOR BACCI, DUSZYNSKI, FARAGONE, HENLEY, SCHAB, SCHOEFFLER AND SUHY

A RESOLUTION OPPOSING THE CLOSURE OF THE INDEPENDENCE BRANCH OF THE UNITED STATES POSTAL SERVICE AND DECLARING AN EMERGENCY

WHEREAS, the Village has many residents and businesses that greatly rely on the services of the Independence Branch of the United States Postal Service, 6509 Brecksville Road, Cleveland, Ohio 44131("Independence Branch"); and

WHEREAS, as a neighboring community to the City of Independence, we understand and appreciate their desire to enhance the Downtown Independence area; and

WHEREAS, the Independence Branch may be identified as a possible office to be closed by the United States Postal Service; and

WHEREAS, by necessity of the services provided by the Independence Branch to the residents and businesses of the Village of Cuyahoga Heights and the City of Independence, the Village requests that the Independence Branch remain open.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED by the Village of Cuyahoga Heights, State of Ohio, that:

Section 1. This Council hereby opposes the closing of the Independence Branch of the United States Postal Service, 6509 Brecksville Road, Cleveland, Ohio 44131, and requests that the Independence Branch remain open.

Section 2. The Clerk of Council is hereby authorized and directed to forward a certified copy of this Resolution to the Congressional Representatives of Northeast Ohio and Ohio's two U.S. Senators.

Section 3. This Resolution is hereby declared to be an emergency measure necessary for the immediate preservation of the public health, safety and welfare of the inhabitants of the Village of Cuyahoga Heights by reason of the necessity of opposing the closure of the Independence Branch of the United States Postal Service. Wherefore, this Resolution shall take effect immediately upon its passage and approval by the Mayor.

PASSED: ATTEST:

EFFECTIVE:

Approved_____ _____
Mayor President of Council

_____
Clerk of Council

Comment #5

Submitted by;

Gini Klamut
General Manager
La Quinta Inn – Independence

I do all of my mailing needs at this location, which is not only the most convenient, but most efficient location. I would be very sorry to see this close and Garfield stays open.

END OF SAMPLE COMMENTS FROM MEMBERS

As can be seen from the above comments there is concern regarding the potential closing of the Independence Branch of the United States Post Office. Though one business commented that it does not matter to them whether any particular post office is closed because they are apparently sufficiently technologically advanced not to require direct access to the local post office, other businesses have indicated to the contrary. Indeed many of the businesses represented by the CVCC are small businesses that can not operate on such a sophisticated level and any diminution in the services that they require would constitute a hardship on their operations, which as we all know over the last year or so, has been stretched in some cases to the braking point.

Being mindful of the economic stress on the Post Office in these tough economic times, and understanding that the Post Office is a quasi-governmental entity and is no longer simply another government agency that can operate solely on tax dollars, we are also mindful that the United States Postal Service has been a vital part of the American Experience and has been a unifying bond throughout the United States going back to the days of Benjamin Franklyn. It is and has been a source of pride locally to have a post office and its continuation serves as an anchor to both the residents and most of the businesses (especially the small businesses) in the area. While the contraction of the Post Office's business must be met with ingenuity, it must also be remembered that the Post Office is a service provider and that the cutting of service is the cutting of the underpinnings of the post office's one and only function. In these tough economic times, providing more service at a reasonable price is the more likely way for the post office to survive. The probability of survival for many small local businesses will also be enhanced by the increase of postal services rather than its decrease. With the massive layoffs that have occurred in the past year many individuals have started their own businesses and those business rely on the post office to provide cost effective service to allow them to operate. While the Federal Government injects billions of dollars into the financial sector and the automotive industry to stimulate the economy by providing the where-with-all for those "too big to fail" companies to survive it must not forget those individuals and businesses that, in the aggregate are also "too big to fail". Also, though we have just weathered a severe economic recession, the signs seem to be pointing to recovery. It would seem unfortunate if the U.S. Postal Service closed branches in response to recession just at the time that economy may be expanding requiring more, not less, services from the post office.

The services that the local Independence Post Office can and does provide to the local economy is essential to its viability and it is the hope of the Cuyahoga Valley Chamber of Commerce that this Commission will take these facts into consideration when it makes its decision regarding both the future of the Independence Post Office Branch in particular and all the branches around the country in general.

Thank you very much for your time and consideration in this matter