

August 5, 2011

To: Postal Regulatory Commission
901 New York Avenue NW, Suite 200
Washington, DC 20268-0001

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Re: Docket #1383312-22654

Office of PAGR

POSTAL REGULATORY

I am writing to voice my objection to the USPS decision to close the Post Office in Star Tannery, VA. I believe the PRC should consider the following issues in its review of the decision itself, as well as the USPS behavior.

1. The decision is not in accordance with the law. 39 USC 101(b) says "No small post office shall be closed solely for operating at a deficit, it being the specific intent of the Congress that effective postal services be insured to residents of both urban and rural communities." The reason for closure is an annual deficit of \$21,988, pure and simple. Second, the alternative of repeated round trips (for some, up to 40 miles or 2 gallons of gasoline each trip) to Strasburg for packages and P.O. boxes does not provide maximum degree of effective postal services. Service by carrier does not provide secure delivery (part of effective service), a complaint voiced by many members of the community during public meetings, some of whom brought photographs of the mailbox vandalism they had experienced.
2. The loss of handicapped accessibility is particularly unacceptable. Star Tannery Post Office has a handicapped ramp for the infirm, elderly, or any postal patron who cannot negotiate stairs. But Strasburg does not (ADA exemption). Postal patrons who cannot mount the steep steps must wait in their vehicles and honk the horn repeatedly until someone inside hears them and finally comes out to assist. This is frustrating, demeaning, and humiliating. Also, it is poor customer service toward the people at the counter inside, who must endure the honking and wait for a clerk to make multiple trips outside—once to find out what service is needed and a second time to provide the service. Perhaps after making many, many trips outside, especially in winter, the clerks will find those steps too steep as well.
3. The USPS has lied to the community about options other than closure. In the March 9 community meeting Michael Furey said the USPS had no options for Star Tannery other than closure. The community is aware of at least two USPS employees who have stated publicly that they would welcome the opportunity to work at a Star Tannery level "C" operation, if only the USPS would consider that option and post the job opportunity. Furthermore, this level "C" option is being considered by USPS for the Fort Valley (VA) community, whose postal activity amounts to the same number of hours per day as Star Tannery's. Why tell the Star Tannery community we have no options, but then consider those options for Fort Valley??
4. The USPS has ignored and/or misrepresented the community input. The USPS "record" claims that only 7 respondents to the community survey opposed closure. In fact, many more than 7 of the 113 survey respondents were opposed to a potential closure, but they were ignored because their responses did not use the words "I object" or "I protest." USPS classification of the overwhelming number of negative responses as simply "concerns" or, worse yet, as expressing "no opinion" is a gross misrepresentation of the facts. Similarly, the USPS has characterized the March 9 community meeting as having 80-100 citizens "attending." In fact, those people did much more than attend—they voiced strong opposition to any closure. For the USPS to say otherwise is completely unacceptable. The USPS has deliberately twisted the record to support their intentions.

The citizens of the community deserve the "maximum effective" postal service guaranteed by law, which is decidedly not what the decision for closure offers. In addition to the decision itself, the USPS trampling of the truth—in characterizing the community input on the record, and in hiding all the options from the community—are highly objectionable. The decision must not be affirmed.

(Shenandoah County)
(area of Star Tannery)

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