

CANYADA LODGE

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La Grande, WA 98648



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September 17, 2011

Postal Regulatory Commission
Public Affairs and Government Relations
901 New York Avenue NW Ste, 200
Washington, D. C. 20268-0001

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Re: Appeal of USPS closing of the La Grande, WA Post Office
USPS docket # 1369365-98348

POSTAL REGULATORY
COMMISSION
OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY

Dear Commissioners,

Please regard this letter as response within the established time period set for the purpose of appealing the above mentioned determination by the United States Postal Service (USPS) to close the La Grande, WA Post Office.

Since there is no information (except the above contact address) provided by the USPS regarding the process of appealing this matter we submit the following:

Background

We first became aware of the USPS determination on September 14, 2011 after inquiring of the La Grande, Postmaster about the status of the USPS process for closing this Post Office. There was no obvious posting of this determination on entry ways or at the location of the Postal facilities in the store. When asked about this the Postmaster responded he had been directed not to promote the existence of this information and to only answer direct questions of those who discovered it. It was placed in a part of the store separated from the Postal facilities.

The information about the determination consisted of multiple copies of what appears to be an overview (cover and 5 pages) of the process evolving before the determination was made. An additional folder (about 1 inch thick) was also available which included community and customer responses and other USPS background information. None of the information was available for copying or could be removed from the store.

Prior to the recent discovery of this USPS determination, we requested additional financial information from the USPS in our formal July 15, 2011 (see item 1) response letter. A 7/20/2011 response letter from the USPS (see item 2) did not provide any requested financial information relating specifically to the La Grande Post Office. It only contained unspecific information about consolidations and services which have been available for some time as means of eradicating the USPS financial problems. After receiving this letter, we sent a 7/23/2011 (see item 3) letter requesting very specific information from the USPS. To date there has never been a response to our 7/23/2011 letter.

Since the local Postmaster has been unable, due to lack of information he has, to respond to our requests and the USPS has chosen not to, it is very frustrating to try and make sense of any of this or formulate a reasonable and accurate challenge or appeal or to fully understand the basis for this USPS decision. The USPS is a public service organization and not a private one. Transparency of pertinent issues should be made. It would be easy to assume an advantage to such withholding of information, but we prefer to feel it is more indicative of a greater systemic bureaucratic problem within the USPS.

Regarding the specifics of the Determination information:

“...when the postmaster was reassigned on June 30, 2011.” (p1)—When asked, the Postmaster said he was unaware of any reassignment and is still functioning as the La Grande Postmaster as he has for about 20 years.

“...an OIC has been installed to operate the office.” (p1)—No person other than the current Postmaster has existed to date.

“Cost of required modifications exceeds the cost of the building.” (p1)—Undetermined what the source of this requirement is. Postmaster states someone came to the store measuring to move the 66 square foot present Post Office to the front of the store. Its present location in the store has existed for about 100 years without complaint or concern. It seems an unnecessary expenditure which would save about 12 steps into the store. Hardly a valid justification.

Rural delivery route issue. (p1)—Security issues relating to mail boxes cannot be equated to an inside post office box. Contact of the delivery person to conduct business would not be practical due to distances from the box locations and wait times to meet the carrier.

April 7, 2011 low attendance of Eatonville Library meeting regarding closure. (p1)—Unstated here is the fact the meeting was held at a time most people are working or traveling to out of area appointments.

Community identity loss (p1&2)—(p1) USPS states USPS will preserve community name and zip code.

(p3) USPS states zip code will be required to change

(p4) USPS states "in order to insure regular and effective service the Zip Code will change to the zip code" (sic)

Cost savings—(p2)—unclear due to reported PRC statement ("closing 1,000 Post Offices would only save 0.7% of Postal budget)

Travel to other post office (p2)—Where post office boxes are deemed a necessity there will be no other option shifting additional costs to consumers. Low availability of local boxes will add greater distance burden to customers

Community "comprised of 7 houses" (p3)—actual is 13 homes, 1 apartment, City of Tacoma La Grande Hydro offices & University of Washington Pack Forest administration and training offices & facilities

Effect on employees (p4)—Reassignment has not taken place as stated. There is no PMR to be separated. It is understood current Postmaster will be sent to the Elbe post office which presently has no Postmaster negating savings to the USPS of employee costs in closing La Grande

Economic savings (p4)—Does not reflect the above or the revenue generated by the La Grande Post Office. (Seems the Postmaster could vary time between post offices which would generate cost efficiencies called profitability)

"Final determination will not adversely affect the community" (p4)—17 current postal box customers will be displaced. USPS states only 7 boxes are available in Eatonville, the nearest other Post Office. Rural area security of mail is different than in cities and individually placed boxes cannot be secured from mail & identity theft and are easy targets with little to no oversight from authorities.

Summary (p5)—Unrecognized here are the recent effects of the economy and not necessarily a long established trend. A number have moved out of the area, some have cut costs scaling back postal service needs out of financial necessity and not from desire or use of alternative and competing services. It may serve a current purpose, but picking this exceptional economic period as a bell-weather justifying closing makes no more sense than requiring unnecessary modifications to the store.

This closing process for the La Grande Post Office predated all the media hype regarding the reported 3,653 Post offices and later even larger figures. In early spring this and one other Washington Post Office were the only ones in consideration. It is our understanding the other post office- believed to be the Nooksack- was closed due to emergency rules and dealt with a lease running out. Since the lease for the La Grande Post Office runs through 2012 it is a standalone subject for closure and is not found on the other extensive lists later presented to the public long after the La Grande process was started.

Since rural communities rely more on local post offices for basic services just by the nature of their isolation, it is surprising to see they carry the greatest burden of targeted closures. While the USPS may feel no adverse effect from these closings the communities they served will. Although skirting the issue of its greater intended service which USPS has to all patrons, it appears these closures have no real interest other than cost alone. Zero favorable responses hardly indicates locals are jumping for joy to see the Post Office disappear.

We ask that your Commission thoughtfully consider all the documents enclosed and exclude this one Post Office from the chopping block.

We apologize for the manner this letter has had to be put together. Working from notes of information found at the Post Office and the lack of specific requested information has left us at a decided disadvantage.

If there is anything further we can provide for your consideration please contact us at the below listed number or address.



David Smith



Judi Smith

David & Judi Smith, P. O. Box 22, La Grande, WA 98348, (360) 832 3888

Encl: (item 1) Comment ltr to Wm Todd, USPS
(item 2) USPS response ltr from Vicki Johnson, Mngr PO Operations
(item 3) 2nd request to USPS (Vicki Johnson) for specific information

Item
1

William Todd
415 First Ave N
Seattle, WA 98109-9998

July 15, 2011

Re: Closing the La Grande, WA Post Office

Dear Mr. Todd,

This letter is in response to your invitation for public comment regarding the potential closing of the La Grande, WA Post Office. (Postal Service questions in **bold**)

Effect on your Postal Services

Relocating to another Post Office would limit the ability to send or receive mail in a convenient or timely manner. The only Post Office we pass directly on a recurring basis is 20+ miles from La Grande and that would be less than once per week and not on a regular schedule. Another Post Office would be in Eatonville which we would have to make an effort to get to since we go there very infrequently. Like other displaced postal patrons, there would be cost shifts to all of us for added efforts we would make. There are no mail car pools.

We do mailings several times during a given year, some with short time frames, and the added inconvenience of a local, readily accessible postal facility would force us to resort to electronic means to reach those on the mailing list. This is a viable option, but up to now this has not been done solely in an attempt to support the local Post Office. This is something we believe in doing even though it is not in our best financial interests. Not all decisions are made solely because of costs even at the individual level.

Effect on your Postal Services (cont'd)

We travel for extended periods at different times during any given year and would not have an efficient manner available to have our mail picked up during these absences. Thanks to the large volume of "junk mail" the Postal Service is required to deliver, any change of Post Office would require getting a much larger-and more expensive- box to hold all the mail until our return. This would be a constant expense for what would be very limited amounts of time. Having the Post Office save and forward the mail would be at an additional cost. Temporary changes of address, used in the past, have always ended with more problems of mail delays and loss than it was worth.

Due to the problem of mail and identity theft it would not be an option for us to use a mail box which would have to be located over a third of a mile from our residence. Any semblance of security with such an arrangement would not work for us compared to using a post office box.

Dealing with the impacts of changing to a different Post Office would, from a practical standpoint, cause us to rethink the whole need and use for the Postal System. This would mean changing as much as possible to other sources for electronic mailings, billings, receipting and general correspondence to reduce impacts from the loss of this Post Office. Yes, it would mean entering the current century and adding to the Postal Service woes, but we would be left with no other options. This is not our preference.

Effect on Your Community

Unlike living in a city, living in a rural setting means living at a distance from neighbors with limited ability to interact. The La Grande Post Office has been in continual operation for well over a hundred years (35+ of those our Post Office) and even though its hours are limited in comparison to other post offices, it focuses the time residents come to pick up their mail. This brings people together and offers an opportunity to interact which would not be otherwise readily available. Everyone in this small community and some others outside it has been met by us through these interchanges while collecting mail.

There also have been numerous other opportunities to meet and talk with tourists and passer-bys stopping for the quaint charm this small local post office still provides. There have been numerous times these casual encounters developed into more. As a sometimes local historian, there is much to be gleaned from these experiences. They should not be lost to the concrete and positive value they provide to the Postal Service image.

It is our understanding from talking with some of these people, you have been provided with some taste of what this means through comments you have received from those tourist & passer-bys. The real effect of this is far greater than you could imagine. This is the intangible service the Postal Service will lose as more of these sites disappear. It is the "value added" portion so easy to overlook. Bean counters like beans, visionaries value people.

Other comments

From a practical and financial aspect we do not understand the savings to the Postal Service. We have heard the current Postmaster will be offered a job at more hours in another post office which has no present postmaster position. This seems not to be a net gain in the overall savings to the Postal Service, but is a noble gesture. This leaves only the rent of space in the La Grande store. Our understanding is current rent stands at \$150 per month which includes all utilities and store maintenance. Maybe we are naïve, but this sounds like a good deal even in today's economy for the Postal Service. Even the truck delivering and picking up mail will still pass by the same site on its route to remaining Post Offices.

Since the \$1,800 in rent per year would be offset by the postal revenue generated at the La Grande Post Office (amount unknown) it would seem the actual savings for a closure would be minimal at best (if it exists at all.) Since closing 2,000 post offices at a \$1,000 a year average savings generates \$2,000,000 it is difficult to grasp how one of these sites stands against the billions the Postal Service needs to save. If we are missing something here please edify us. We really would like to know how you see the balance sheet on this one La Grande Post Office. From our present viewpoint it seems hardly a hiccup.

We can understand savings and cuts. It is just a cold view of dollars and cents. We do not understand where those cuts are so minimal how it can be so easy to avoid the other intangible, but important matters the Postal Service represents to communities both large and small. Above all else, the Postal Service represents a service provided to the public. The current balance sheet view seems in opposition to most that is embodied in its existence. The Postal Service is much more than just a business. It is an institution in this country. It is sad to see how much really stands to be lost.

Thank you for the opportunity to be heard during this public comment period. We will be inquiring about this with those on the below cc list. Our contact information is listed below should you desire confirmation or elaboration. Good luck with a difficult decision affecting us all.

David Smith

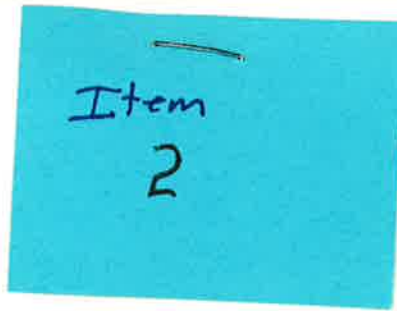
Judi Smith

David & Judi Smith, P. O. Box 22, La Grande, WA 98348, (360) 832 3888

cc:	Federal Representatives: Senator Patty Murray Senator Maria Cantwell Representative Dave Reichert	County Representative: Roger Bush	State Representatives: Senator Randi Becker Representative Jim McCune Representative J. T. Wilcox
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07/20/2011



rc'd
7/22/11

DAVID AND JUDI SMITH
P.O. BOX 22
LA GRANDE WA 98348

Dear Postal Service Customer:

Thank you for taking the time to submit your comments to the proposal to close the La Grande Post Office. Your comments are appreciated and will be carefully considered, along with the comments of other customers, as the matter is reviewed further in my office and at higher levels of the Postal Service.

In response to your letter:

- You expressed a concern about the cost savings obtained by the Postal Service from the closure of Post Offices. The Postal Service has developed and begun implementing a range of cost-reducing initiatives. These include: consolidating operations, adjusting delivery routes, restructuring administrative and processing functions and closing district offices. We also have introduced several new products and services, including Priority Mail Flat Rate boxes and Adult Signature service, in an effort to grow revenue.

I realize with change there is always concern. However we are confident that the alternate service listed in the proposal will continue to provide you with effective and regular service.

If you have additional questions or comments, please feel free to contact Doreen Karoly at (206) 442-6171.

Sincerely,

Vicki Johnson
Manager, Post Office Operations
415 First Ave N
Seattle, WA, 98109-9998

Item
3

Vicki Johnson
Manager, Post Office Operations
415 First Avenue N
Seattle, WA 98109-9998

July 23, 2011

Dear Mz Johnson,

Regarding your 7/20/2011 response letter we feel a need to readdress our concerns.

It appears the intent of our request was not clear by the generalized response you sent in your letter. So, restated, we request the following information specific to the La Grande, WA Post office and not to the overall strategy of the Postal Service as described in your letter.

1. Please provide us with the specific cost and savings issues regarding only the La Grande Post Office
2. Please provide us with the impact related issues affecting customers regarding closing of the La Grande Post Office. i.e. How will the transition take place, what notice will be given, will the zip code remain, what local alternative postal box availability exists, how will mail be forwarded during the transition, what Postal assistance will be given, how will each item listed in your letter directly affect La Grande Post Office customers, will remaining unused box rental be refunded, what follow-up will be available for long-term unsettled issues and any other matters currently known to the Postal Service, but not covered here.
3. An earlier Postal Service letter regarding submission of comments refers to "for reasons stated in the accompanying proposal." Your letter of July 20th also references a formal proposal. Having seen no additional letters or information then the quoted statement, please provide us with whatever this reference is about.

As of this writing, there seems to be some confusion regarding the intent of the Postal Service plans regarding this matter. Up to now the only stated closings we have been provided with have been 2 per district and 2,000 nationwide. The recent media saturation indicates a very specific "3,653 closings mostly in rural areas." Very little else seems clear.

Some references have been made in the media to use existing facilities (primarily local stores) to set up some kind of new concept of localized service. Since the La Grande Post Office exists in an existing store we would like to know how this concept might be applied in La Grande. The media is stating 2,500 of these facilities will be used and it appears this is already a concrete aspect of what is going on. We would like to know your thoughts on this as well.

In order to have us understand this, please provide us the details of the present scope of what is intended. We understand the media does not always report all the details because of their time constraints and there is no way to clear this up without such information coming from the source.

Notice, we are still happy to use the Postal Service to receive this information.

Thank you for your time in this matter.

David Smith

Judi Smith

David & Judi Smith, P. O. Box 22, La Grande, WA 98348, (360) 832 3888