

A Downtown Without A Post Office?

During mid August, the DIB along with all the other local governments and hundreds of residents and businesses that daily use the Downtown Post Office at 101 Palafox Place got notice that the U.S. Postal Service had begun an analysis to determine the savings that could be gained by closing the Downtown Post Office (one of only two within the city limits of the City of Pensacola) and merging its operation with the Jordan Street Postal Facility (three miles away). Needless to say, notice of that action set off shockwaves of disbelief through Pensacola. At a hastily called “Town Hall Meeting” on August 18th, officials from the Postal Service heard testimony and fielded questions from almost 100 concerned businesses and residents as well as top officials from the City of Pensacola, Escambia County, The DIB, and the Pensacola Bay Area Chamber of Commerce.

At the “Town Hall Meeting”, those in attendance learned that of the five post office facilities with a “Pensacola” address, the downtown station was the third MOST PROFITABLE. Yet, it is the only one proposed for closure and consolidation. It was also disclosed that of the 2019 available postal boxes at the downtown post office, 1948 were rented – the highest percentage among the five “Pensacola” post offices. The postal officials also reluctantly disclosed that walk-in revenue earned during 2008 at the Downtown Post Office was \$2.2 million. We also know from the DIB annual market research that the intersection of Romana Street and Palafox Place just outside the Downtown Post Office is the intersection with the highest daily pedestrian traffic in the City of Pensacola. Downtown Pensacola is also the only neighborhood in the City that is still adding residents and households. All of these facts seem to make the case for keeping the Downtown Post Office open. But, we can’t take that for granted.

Downtown Post Offices are truly an anchor for downtown commerce. According to a comprehensive study done by the National Main Street Center a few years ago, that group concluded that 80% of the people that shop downtown do so because of its convenience to a full service post office. Today in Downtown Pensacola, 607 businesses, almost 10,000 employees, 558 residential households, and thousands of tourists rely upon (i.e. use) the Downtown Post Office. Moving a destination location like a post office, City Hall, or the County Courts outside of downtown will have serious detrimental impacts on the traffic, productivity, and sales at the for-profit downtown businesses. Dozens of the downtown postal box holders have had the same boxes within walking distance of their businesses for almost a half century. A full service post office has been downtown since the 1800s.

Downtown Pensacola is one of the few areas of our community where the density of use is great enough for it to make more sense to walk instead of drive between destinations. In fact, many of the 2002 downtown residents and a majority of downtown business owners and managers do just that to reach the post office each day. Many even go more than once each day. By being able to do so, it allows those households to have fewer automobiles and allows the air we breathe to be less polluted.

Unfortunately our downtown post office finds itself caught firmly in the national debate about how to best make the postal service profitable again. While there are many other options (other than closing the downtown station) that should be considered, the DIB and its partners at the City and the Chamber have taken the mantle to try and make downtown stakeholders, the media, postal officials, and members of our congressional delegation aware of the economic damage that the current consideration will create for downtown, Pensacola, and the postal service itself. Everyone reading this viewpoint is encouraged to visit www.downtownpensacola.com to see how you can help keep this proposal from occurring. The fate of the Downtown Post Office will likely be made in early October of this year. The DIB is committed to keeping the current post office in its current location and unchanged. If that is not possible, we will work just as diligently to help a private provider of postal box service and postal counter service locate downtown to fill the void. A downtown without a post office, it doesn't have to happen here.