



Berkeley City Council

CONSENT CALENDAR
July 24, 2012

To: Honorable Mayor and Members of the City Council
From: Councilmembers Jesse Arreguín and Susan Wengraf
Subject: Urging the United States Postal Service to Stop the Sale of the Berkeley Main Post Office

RECOMMENDATION:

Adopt a Resolution urging the United States Postal Service and U.S. Representative Barbara Lee to not proceed with the sale of the Berkeley Main Post Office, at 2000 Allston Way.

BACKGROUND:

Late last month, Berkeley city officials and residents became aware of the United States Postal Services' (USPS) plan to sell the Berkeley Main Post Office at 2000 Allston Way.

The Berkeley Main Post Office ("Post Office") is one of Berkeley's most heavily used post offices, and handles not only retail services but post office box and bulk mail services.

The news of the impending sale raises a number of concerns:

1. What are the reasons for the sale?
2. Did USPS consider alternatives to the sale of the entire property? Such as maintaining retail services in the historic post office building and renting the other space?
3. What will happen to the employees currently working at the Downtown Berkeley post office? If USPS continues to provide retail services at an alternate location Downtown, as they have suggested, will these employees be moved to the new location? What about the employees that handle other mail operations? Will they be working at a different facility or will they lose their jobs?
4. What will happen to the historic and landmarked post office building? What guarantees are in place that the renting of the building will be done in a way that

preserves and respects the architectural features of the building including the mural in the interior lobby? What guarantees are in place to ensure that the building if sold cannot be demolished?

5. Has USPS considered selling the building to the City of Berkeley for an alternate public use? What plans does USPS have for the building?
6. What impact will the closure have on mail services in Berkeley?

The decision to close the Berkeley Main Post Office came as a surprise to many residents and was done without adequate outreach and input from city officials or from customers.

While USPS is nationally facing significant budget challenges, the closure of the Berkeley Main Post Office will have an impact on Berkeley residents who use the Post Office for a variety of mail services. USPS have already closed posts offices in Berkeley, impacting the ability for residents to access and use mail services. The further closure of one of Berkeley's most heavily used post offices will have even more impact.

The Post Office is also an important retail anchor in the Downtown and an incredible architectural and cultural resource.

Throughout the country, USPS is selling property, including landmarked post office buildings, which has raised concerns by preservation groups about ensuring that the sale and continued use of the these buildings respects and preserves the architectural character of the building.

Given the lack of transparency and input from city officials and residents about the sale of the Berkeley Main Post Office and the impacts, alternate plans for mail service and the future of the historic building, it is critical that USPS not proceed with the sale of the Post Office. USPS should engage with city officials and residents in discussion around the sale.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS:

None

CONTACT PERSONS:

Jesse Arreguin, Councilmember, District 4	981-7140
Susan Wengraf, Councilmember, District 6	981-7160

Attachments:

1. Resolution

RESOLUTION NO.

URGING THE UNITED STATES POSTAL SERVICE TO NOT PROCEED WITH THE
SALE OF THE BERKELEY MAIN POST OFFICE

WHEREAS, the U.S. Postal Service has announced the pending sale of Berkeley's historic and heavily used Main Post Office, located at 2000 Allston Way in Berkeley's Downtown; and

WHEREAS, the Italian Renaissance-revival building was designed by the office of the Supervising Architect of the Treasury as a fitting counterpart to the Phoebe Hearst Plan for the nearby University of California campus and is widely recognized as one of the handsomest in the United States; and

WHEREAS, the post office is both an official landmark of the City of Berkeley and listed on the National Register of Historic Places; and

WHEREAS, the post office contains two examples of New Deal public art — an interior mural by Suzanne Scheuer and a marble relief panel in the exterior loggia by David Slivka —; and

WHEREAS, the finely detailed post office lobby has never been remodeled and remains virtually identical to its opening in 1915; and

WHEREAS, the post office serves as a heavily-used anchor and service center for downtown businesses as well as Berkeley residents; and

WHEREAS, the abrupt sale of the post office in Berkeley, as elsewhere in the United States, has been announced with no transparency let alone input from city officials, local businesses and other affected patrons; and

WHEREAS, while USPS is nationally facing significant budget challenges, the closure of the Berkeley Main Post Office will have an impact on Berkeley residents who use the Post Office for a variety of mail services. USPS have already closed posts offices in Berkeley, impacting the ability for residents to access and use mail services. The further closure of one of Berkeley's most heavily used post offices will have even more impact; and

WHEREAS, it is not clear whether alternatives to the sale of the building were considered, such as maintaining the lobby for retail operations or whether the building could be used for another public purpose; and

WHEREAS, it's also not clear what the impacts will be to existing employees and to the landmarked building; and

WHEREAS, the sale of U.S. post offices is being conducted with no consideration to the many properties' historic or aesthetic values and in apparent violation of the National Environmental Policy Act; and

WHEREAS, the USPS is obligated to assure the ongoing protection of the public works of art in its buildings, but no assured policy appears to be in place to safeguard those artworks in perpetuity and to keep them public once the buildings are sold; and

WHEREAS, it is not at all clear whether the USPS substitution of a leased facility for one that the public through the USPS owns will, in fact, result in a net saving for the USPS; and

WHEREAS, given the lack of transparency and input from city officials and residents about the sale of the Berkeley Main Post Office and the lack of important information on the impacts, alternate plans for mail service and the future of the historic building, it is critical that USPS not proceed with the sale of the Post Office. USPS should engage with city officials and residents in discussion around the sale.

NOW THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED by the Council of the City of Berkeley that it hereby urges the United States Postal Service to not proceed with the closure and sale of the Berkeley Main Post Office, and that it initiate a public review and engagement process with stakeholders.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that copies of this Resolution be sent to United States Postmaster Patrick R. Donahoe, USPS Pacific Facilities Service Vice President Diana K. Alvarado, the Berkeley Postmaster, House Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi, Congresswoman Barbara Lee and United States Senators Dianne Feinstein and Barbara Boxer.