



February 20, 2013

Diana Alvarado
Facilities Implementation–Pacific Area
U.S. Postal Service
1300 Evans Ave., Ste. 200
San Francisco, CA 94188-8200

Re: Berkeley Main Post Office

Dear Ms. Alvarado:

The Berkeley Architectural Heritage Association (BAHA) strongly opposes proposals to move retail postal operations from 2000 Allston Way and possibly sell the historic Main Post Office.

Built nearly a century ago, with a design inspired by Filippo Brunelleschi's Ospedale degli Innocenti in Florence, our Renaissance Revival Main Post Office reflects the high ideals of America's City Beautiful movement, whose public buildings were meant to embellish our townscapes and inspire community pride.

The Main Post Office was intended to be and remains a vital anchor of Berkeley's Civic Center, which is a major node of public activity comprising City Hall and other municipal services; Berkeley's only high school and Community Theater; the YMCA and its Teen Center; the Veterans' Memorial Building; the Berkeley Historical Society's History Center and archives; and the Farmers Market. Nearby are Berkeley's Central Public Library; Berkeley City College; Arts District theatres; and Berkeley BART station.

Four generations of Berkeleyans have frequented this splendid structure, whose architecture ennobles even the simple act of mailing a letter or package. Additionally, the building is enhanced by a lobby mural painted for the Treasury Relief Project in 1936–37, and a bas-relief of limestone located on the arcade wall outside. Both are listed as Defining Characteristics as part of the NRHP listing.

The entire parcel of Berkeley's Main Post Office is:

- Individually listed on the National Register of Historic Places (1980)
- Officially designated a City of Berkeley Landmark (1980)
- Listed on the National Register as a significant contributor to Berkeley's Civic Center Historic District (1998)

The building's elegant appearance and its central and convenient location make it a pleasure for people to use the Postal Service. In this respect, no commonplace storefront replacement could possibly serve the same purpose as successfully.

BAHA and many Berkeley citizens are dismayed that the Postal Service also plans to move all distribution operations from the centrally located Main Post Office to a DDU (Distribution Delivery Unit) Annex at Eighth and Harrison Streets in the city's far northwest corner. This is far from convenient and ecologically unsound. If the Postal Service wants to sell off some property, perhaps the DDU Annex is the one to sell.

Selling the Main Post Office at 2000 Allston Way would convert a short-term gain into long-term loss. Relocating retail post office services into a leased space would cost the Postal Service ongoing rent that would increase over time. Retaining the building and the services located in it would enable the Postal Service to save money and even obtain revenue from the lease of currently unused space in the rear.

Since the Post Office is a civic building, the protections of all the designations listed above extend to its interior as well as the exterior. The New Deal mural, the original counter layout, customer windows, and lobby details fall under the purview of Berkeley's Landmarks Preservation Commission; any proposed reuse or sale of the property is subject to Section 106 review, including environmental review for impact to the cultural resource.

The Berkeley Post Office is a characteristic and well preserved product of the Treasury Department Supervising Architect's Office in the early part of this century, and embodies for the city of Berkeley the sense of mission which the government then put into its public building — "buildings which will educate & develop the public taste & eventually elevate it to a higher plane" (Arch. and Eng., Oct. 1915). Outside and in, the building is conspicuous for fine and enduring materials. The lobby, particularly, is a civic treasure with its minimally altered marble, metal, and woodwork.

[Nomination Form for the National Register of Historic Places, 1980,
authored by Betty Marvin]

The Postal Service must not relocate services out of this historic building. Today the building, including its use as a post office, continues to proudly represent our national government and to be a prime, functioning element of Berkeley's Civic Center and Downtown. Its distinctive design and prominent, convenient location make it an excellent advertisement for the U.S. Postal Service.

In concluding, the Berkeley Architectural Heritage Association would like to remind the United States Postal Service that, because of citizen concern dating back more than a hundred years, the use, maintenance, and preservation of Federal properties

are subject to several Federal laws, including Section 106. Just a few of the Federal laws that may apply include:

American Antiquities Act of 1906; Historic Sites Act of 1935 as amended (16 USC 461-467); Federal Property and Administrative Services Act of 1949, as amended (40 USC 484(k)(3) and (4)); Public Buildings Cooperative Use Act of 1976; National Historic Preservation Act of 1966; Executive Order No. 11593 Protection and Enhancement of the Cultural Environment (1971); Executive Order No. 13006 Locating Federal Facilities On Historic Properties In Our Nation's Central Cities (1996); Executive Order No. 13287 Preserve America (2003); National Historic Landmarks Program (36 CFR 65); National Register of Historic Places (36 CFR 60).

The Berkeley Post Office is a civic treasure, and belongs to us all.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Susan D. Cerny".

Susan D. Cerny
Corporate Secretary

Cc: Mayor and City Council
Landmarks Preservation Commission
Rep. Barbara Lee
Citizens to Save the Berkeley Post Office
Living New Deal
Gray Brechin
Harvey Smith