



February 25, 2009

Ms. Lina Hoffman
Consumer Affairs Manager
Suncoast District, USPS
6013 Benjamin Road Ste.201
Tampa, Florida 33634-5178

Dear Ms. Hoffman:

On behalf of the Lakeland Area Chamber of Commerce, representing the interests of more than 2,000 businesses in the Lakeland community, I write in opposition to the proposed consolidation of services at the Lakeland, Florida Processing and Distribution Center (P&DC) with the Tampa P&DC Center. Besides the potential loss of 39 jobs in the Lakeland community that will result from this proposal, we must also address this issue from a business perspective.

The Chamber questions several of the benefits of the consolidation and the USPS Area Mail Processing (AMP) feasibility study recommendations listed on the USPS web site. The USPS claims that an AMP center supports network rationalization and reduced redundancies, and it is hard to imagine that closing the Lakeland facility will accomplish this goal. Lakeland is located strategically between Tampa and Orlando on the I-4 corridor, a geographic super-region that is ranked seventh largest in the country and fifteenth in the world. Lakeland's strategic location, with 8.5 million people living within a 100-mile radius of the city, should be considered an asset to the USPS as more individuals are projected to move into the region placing a greater burden on mail services.

Furthermore, the USPS owns the Lakeland facility, while it leases the Tampa location - a lease which expires in 2017. Has this been factored into the cost-savings analysis over the long-term? We also question the cost and service efficiency of collecting the 338 zip code mail in Lakeland and trucking it to Tampa, which adds to increased truck traffic on an already stressed interstate system and results in consumption of excess fuel. Once processed at the Tampa P&DC Center, this same mail will have to be trucked BACK to Lakeland and to further points in the 338 service area.

The USPS states the AMP center should have minimal impact on customer service. Lakeland's P&DC has been recognized frequently as the top processing plant in the country. Why wouldn't that level of service be utilized to its maximum capacity rather than forcing the Tampa facility to increase their overtime labor to handle the additional mail service? The USPS also claims that local postmarks will continue to be available. This is true, but only if one physically takes his mail to a Post Office. The majority of our Chamber members are small business owners who do not have ample time in their day to drive mail to a post office, thus their mail will no longer bear the Lakeland postmark resulting in a loss of identity.

The AMP feasibility study states that bulk mail services will remain at the Lakeland facility and that customers that currently presort their mail will continue to receive postal discounts. These two points are of great concern. Any future plans to relocate bulk operations to Tampa would create a major disruption and delay in mail service to Lakeland businesses.

Currently all Post Offices, with the exception of the Lakeland P&DC, no longer accept more than five trays of pre-sorted bulk mail causing Polk business owners to drive their bulk mail to the Lakeland facility in order to receive the postal discount. Moving bulk operations to Tampa, thus incurring a Tampa commute, is unacceptable.



35 Lake Morton Drive
P.O. Box 3607
Lakeland, FL 33802-3607

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(863) 688-8551
(863) 683-7454 fax
www.lakelandchamber.com

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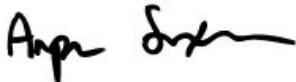
Furthermore, our mail processing business members have informed the Chamber they will only drive large bulk orders to Tampa if such a move occurs, resulting in an unfair advantage between their large and small business clients. The Chamber, considered a smaller client by mail processors, would incur a \$1,979 increase to our annual cost of just one of many Chamber mailings, our monthly newsletter. While that number may be considered slight, it would force a cut in services elsewhere to absorb the increase. One of our private mail processing businesses estimated a \$400,000 increase in his costs if the postal discount was removed - a cost he would pass onto his clients. Businesses operating in today's economy cannot absorb higher costs.

Every business in this country is enduring the same challenges the USPS faces: to identify cost-savings measures to keep their doors open without jeopardizing their most valuable asset, the customers they serve. While we commend the efforts of the USPS to improve operational efficiency and make more efficient use of Postal Service assets, we urge the USPS to consider the negative consequences of moving Lakeland's first class mail operations to Tampa.

In light of the global competition facing the USPS with the surge of on-line communications service, we ask the USPS to weigh the short-term economic and efficiency benefits reported in the study against the long-term impact to their customers, and to thoroughly analyze the real cost savings of this decision.

The Chamber appreciates the opportunity to offer our concerns and recommendations with regard to this important issue. We respectfully request your thoughtful consideration of the points addressed in this letter.

Respectfully,



Anu Saxena,
Chairman of the Board

AS:bb

cc: Ralph L. "Buddy" Fletcher, Mayor of Lakeland
Polk State Legislative Delegation
Florida Congressional Legislative Delegation
Board of Directors, Lakeland Area Chamber of Commerce