Notes from meeting with USPS officials

April 5, 2011

Officials present were:

* Pete Nowacki, Minneapolis
* Garry Mattox, Denver
* Will Jones, Minneapolis
* Dennis O’Connell, Northfield Postmaster (on the job in Northfield since January 2011)
* Retail Specialist (didn’t get her name), Minneapolis

We were told that the final decision about Northfield will be made by someone in the Denver office, not Anthony Williams. They wouldn’t give us a name. We were told to direct all mail to:

Natalie Sorvari, Manager, Consumer Affairs, Northland District

US Postal Service

100 S. 1st St. RM 115

Minneapolis, MN 55401

The most insightful person at the meeting was former Northfield Postmaster (now retired) Mel Miller. He was the Postmaster when the Annex was built. The reason for building the annex was overcrowded working conditions downtown. Several in the room said that at the time, the downtown building was full of serious safety hazards which are still present and would preclude any conversation about consolidating annex work back downtown.

Mel offered that what might work well in Northfield is a “detached box unit” and a CPU, contract postal unit. He described this as an automated storefront with no humans onsite. He also said that residential “to your door” delivery is the highest cost of the postal service, not the customer service window. He advocated that the service formula needs to change to centralized boxes in residential settings.

Mel also said that the financial boondoggle currently killing the USPS was the 2006 legislation mandating the USPS to pre-fund its retirement health care benefits. Annual price tag? $5.5 billion.

Revenue at the downtown Post Office has declined from $1M in 2006 to $800K in 2010. Window traffic downtown has declined 12% since 2007. Citizens pointed out that street construction in the downtown area was heavy for much of that time. Gary Mattox told us that the timeline for the buildout and consolidation scenario would take about 7 months.

In answer to a question about the Dundas Post Office (why not close that and drive that business to downtown Northfield?), Mel said that closing a Post Office is a challenge to the Federal Code and requires much more time and faces much more opposition, much of it from within the USPS ranks. The national organization of Postmasters usually gets involved and tries to stop it. Dundas postal workers are USPS employees. Consolidating two locations into one is a much quicker process.

Both Mel Miller and Dennis O’Connell offered to meet with anyone in town to continue this conversation and answer questions or give advice.

**Additional info added by Ross:**

The 60-day clock started ticking last night; zero hour is **Friday, June 3**.

By closing the downtown post office, USPS hope to save $750,000 over ten years.

The downtown post office is three 3,000 sq ft floors, the Carrier annex is 9,000 sq ft on one floor (I think that this is important as it's a familiar theme for Keith and me).

The build-out costs for the southern annex are estimated at $250,000 to $350,000 (Dan had thrown out a figure of $400,000; I'd bet on Dan).

One of the guys (I'm pretty sure it was Garry Ma**tt**ox (garry.mattox@usps.gov)) said that the person we should be contacting in the post office was the boss of the Western District.  They didn't seem to be able to come up with his or her name (which was weird and/or discouraging) but Garry said I could e-mail him and he'd get me that information.