

Can Berkeley Stop the Sale of its Downtown Post Office?

Those opposing the sale will rally
this Saturday, November 1st at 10:30 AM-12:30 PM
on the steps of Berkeley's Main Post Office at 2000 Allston Way
Music is by Hali Hammer, Redd Welsh and Occupella.

USPS admits it's signed a sales contract.

The U.S. Postal Service has walked away from negotiations with the City of Berkeley and the National Trust on an agreement to preserve Berkeley's Main Post Office. The USPS refuses to respond to questions from the City of Berkeley or from Congresswoman Barbara Lee regarding the imminent sale. We still do not know who the buyer is. The USPS has listed the building for sale since July, 2013, with CBRE, the realty firm headed by Richard Blum, Senator Diane Feinstein's spouse. Attempts to obtain further information from the U.S. Postal Service were stonewalled.

Speakers include Congresswoman Barbara Lee, Councilmember Jesse Arreguin, Jacquelyn McCormick from the National Post Office Collaborate, Gray Brechin, Living New Deal, Harvey Smith of The National New Deal Preservation Association, Peter Byrne, author of Going Postal, and Alan Menjivar, American Postal Workers' Union. Senator Loni Hancock, Mayor Tom Bates, Council Member Linda Maio, all loyal supporters of keeping the Berkeley P.O. public are invited. Congresswoman Barbara Lee is scheduled to speak at 11 AM.

Berkeley's downtown Post Office was built in 1914 with funds from the federal government obtained by Republican Senator William Knowland at the request of the Berkeley Chamber of Commerce. It is a copy of a famous Renaissance orphanage in Florence, Italy. Our Post Office was declared an historic landmark by the U.S. Department of Interior, the State of California and the City of Berkeley. It was paid for with tax money. Save the Berkeley Post Office is opposed to its privatization.

The Federal Advisory Commission on Historic Preservation stated that the sale would have an adverse effect on the historic post office because the USPS refuses to agree to protect the building through enforceable covenants. The USPS and city cannot agree on how a protective covenant would be administered, as the city argues that the USPS should not be trusted to honor it.

"It is the ACHP's opinion that the proposed covenant does not sufficiently ensure the long-term preservation of the property since the USPS, as covenant holder, has the unfettered authority to approve adverse effects to the property (including demolition) while having neither the demonstrated experience in holding preservation covenants nor an apparent interest in the long-term preservation of the property," said the ACHP response, signed by Reid J. Nelson, director of the Office of Federal Agency Programs. A better, more qualified

covenant holder would be the State Historic Preservation Office, the National Trust for Historic Preservation, or the City of Berkeley.

The City of Berkeley and the National Trust were in negotiations with USPS for a preservation covenant to preserve the historic features of the building. Abruptly USPS ended these discussions and has entered into a contract to sell the building. The USPS refuses to identify the prospective buyer.

According to Attorney Tony Rossmann, Berkeley wants to avoid unnecessary legal action. But that if the USPS won't answer information requests, the City will go to court to prevent the USPS from quickly disposing of the historic post office as has happened in other parts of the country.

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