



Office of Inspector General | United States Postal Service

Audit Report

Sale of the East Hartford, CT Post Office

Report Number 21-208-R22 | October 15, 2021



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Highlights

Objective

Our objective was to determine whether the U.S. Postal Service followed applicable statutory, regulatory, and process requirements in its decision to sell the East Hartford Post Office. Chairman Gerald E. Connolly of the House Subcommittee on Government Operations and Representative John B. Larson requested that we conduct this review.

The East Hartford Post Office is a historic property that stands in the town's Central Avenue-Center Cemetery National Register Historic District. The building was constructed in 1939 and is recognized as the district's most ambitious Colonial Revival building. The East Hartford Post Office provides retail and post office box services, as delivery and distribution operations previously moved to a nearby location in Hartford, CT.

In 2018, Connecticut District personnel requested a study to evaluate the possibility of moving retail operations and selling the facility. The Postal Service conducts studies when considering the need for new or additional space or evaluating options for facilities with excess space. These studies identify alternatives and analyze the costs and benefits of each option. The Postal Service is also required to gather input from the community when considering the potential relocation of retail services. This is to ensure individuals and local officials can comment on proposed projects before any final decision. Before acting on a final decision, the Postal Service Facilities group reevaluates the cost and savings to confirm that the potential outcome of the project is the most financially beneficial one for the Postal Service.

Finding

The Postal Service followed applicable statutory, regulatory, and process requirements in its decision to sell the East Hartford Post Office. This included notifying the public of their intent, holding a public meeting after 15 days of advance notice, and considering comments and appeals for 30 days before reaching a final decision. Further, the Postal Service followed regulations designed to preserve the historic aspects of the property.

The Postal Service notified the community in August 2019 that it planned to relocate retail services at the East Hartford Post Office. In September 2019, the Postal Service held a public meeting to discuss the proposal and solicit the public's views and comments. In November 2019, following a 30-day comment period, the Postal Service notified the community and town officials of its final decision to relocate retail services and sell the facility. As of the date of our report, the Postal Service has not sold the facility.

In September 2021, we visited the East Hartford Post Office accompanied by Postal Service maintenance personnel to observe the condition of the facility. We identified no maintenance issues that required immediate attention for the safety and health of employees or customers.

The Postal Service followed applicable statutory, regulatory, and process requirements in deciding to sell the East Hartford Post Office; therefore, we are not making any recommendations.

Transmittal Letter



OFFICE OF INSPECTOR GENERAL
UNITED STATES POSTAL SERVICE

October 15, 2021

MEMORANDUM FOR: TOM A. SAMRA
VICE PRESIDENT, FACILITIES

A handwritten signature in black ink, which appears to read "Jason M. Yovich", is positioned below the recipient information.

FROM: Jason M. Yovich
Deputy Assistant Inspector General
for Supply Management & Human Resources

SUBJECT: Audit Report – Sale of the East Hartford, CT Post Office
(Report Number 21-208-R22)

This report presents the results of our audit of the Sale of the East Hartford, CT Post Office.

We appreciate the cooperation and courtesies provided by your staff. If you have any questions or need additional information, please contact Shirian Holland, Director, Supply Management and Facilities, or me at 703-248-2100.

Attachment

cc: Postmaster General
Corporate Audit Response Management
Chief Retail and Delivery Officer and Executive Vice President
Vice President Area Retail and Delivery Operations Atlantic

Results

Introduction/Objective

This report presents the results of our audit of the Sale of the East Hartford, CT, Post Office (Project Number 21-208). The report responds to a request from Gerald E. Connolly, Chairman of the House Subcommittee on Government Operations, and Representative John B. Larson to review the U.S. Postal Service's decision to relocate services and the potential sale of the facility. Our objective was to determine whether the Postal Service followed applicable statutory, regulatory, and process requirements in its decision to sell the East Hartford Post Office. See [Appendix A](#) for additional information about this audit.

Background

The East Hartford Post Office is a historic property that stands in the town's Central Avenue-Center Cemetery National Register Historic District. The building was constructed in 1939 and is recognized as the district's most ambitious Colonial Revival building.¹ It has a brick and stone façade with a front entrance defined by symmetrical design granite pilasters and features a diamond lighted octagonal cupola inspired by Mount Vernon.

The 16,541 square foot facility is located on .73 acres on Main Street in the central business district of East Hartford. The facility also houses a 5x13 foot Public Works Administration mural that recalls the early settlements of the Connecticut River Valley. The East Hartford Post Office provides retail and post office box services, as the delivery and distribution operations previously moved to a nearby location in Hartford, CT.

In 2018, Postal Service Connecticut District management requested a study to evaluate the possibility of moving retail operations and selling the facility.

“The East Hartford Post Office is a historic property that stands in the town's Central Avenue-Center Cemetery National Register Historic District.”

The Postal Service conducts studies when considering the need for new or additional space or evaluating options for facilities with excess space. These studies identify alternatives and analyze the costs and benefits of each option. The Postal Service is also required to gather input from the community when considering the potential relocation of retail services. This is to ensure individuals and local officials can comment on proposed projects before making any final decision. Before acting on a final decision, the Postal Service Facilities group will reevaluate the cost and savings to confirm that the potential outcome of the project is the most financially beneficial for the Postal Service.

Summary

The Postal Service followed applicable statutory, regulatory, and process requirements in its decision to sell the East Hartford Post Office. This included notifying the public of their intent, holding a public meeting after 15 days of advance notice, and considering comments and appeals for 30 days before reaching a final decision. Further, the Postal Service followed regulations designed to preserve the historic aspects of the property. As of the date of our report, the Postal Service has not sold the facility.

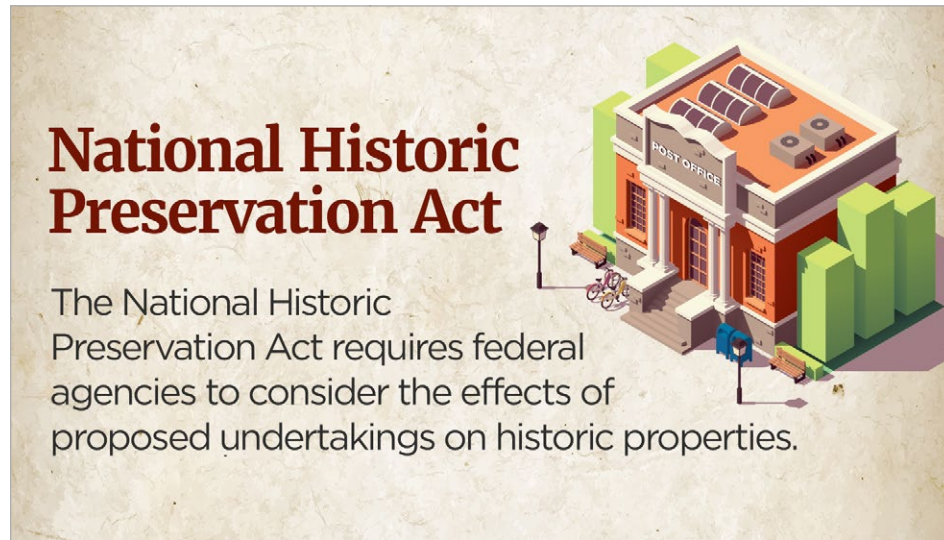
Decision Process to Sell the Post Office

The Postal Service plans to relocate the retail services from the East Hartford Post Office and sell the property because the facility is larger than needed. In 2012, management moved delivery operations to a nearby location as part of a facility optimization effort. As a result, in 2018, the Postal Service initiated the process of right sizing the East Hartford Post Office. This included a planning concept to identify the amount of space the facility required, a study to recommend the most economically beneficial action, and funding requests and approvals to proceed.

The Postal Service followed this process by analyzing alternatives, risks, investments, costs, and benefits before making a final recommendation. The planning concept and study determined that a facility with 15,197 square feet less

¹ National Park Service, National Register of Historic Places Registration Form, Central Avenue-Center Cemetery Historic District, March 2, 1993.

space than the existing post office was needed. As a result of this determination, the study recommended relocating retail services and selling the existing facility.



The Postal Service is required to inform the public of proposed relocation to allow the public an opportunity to provide input.² These steps include:

- Identifying the community that would be affected by the relocation and solicit input from local elected officials.
- Notifying the community at least 15 days prior of the date, time, and place of a public meeting.
- Presenting the proposal to the community including the reason for the relocation, needed size of the facility, and potential site or area under consideration.
- Considering comments and appeals for 30 days after the public meeting.
- Proceeding with, modifying, or canceling the proposal.

² Title 39, Code of Federal Regulations (CFR), §241.4, Relocating retail services; adding new retail service facilities.

³ Title 36, CFR, §§800.3-800.13, The Section 106 Process.

See Table 1 for a timeline of Postal Service actions to solicit community input on the proposed relocation.

Table 1. Timeline of Community Input

Date	Postal Service Action
August 21, 2019	Solicited input from the Mayor, East Hartford
August 23, 2019	Notified the community of the public meeting via the <i>Hartford Courant</i>
September 12, 2019	Presented proposal at the East Hartford public library
October 12, 2019	30-day comment period ends
November 18, 2019	Notification of the decision to proceed with the proposal
December 3, 2019	Initiated the Historic Preservation Process
January 2, 2020	30-day comment period ends
May 26, 2020	Notified State Historic Preservation Office of final covenant

Source: U.S. Postal Service Office of Inspector General (OIG) analysis.

The Postal Service must comply with the National Historic Preservation Act when considering the disposal of historic properties. The National Historic Preservation Act requires federal agencies to consider the effects of proposed undertakings on historic properties.³ This includes assessing possible adverse effects, collaborating with others to establish covenants to protect the historic character of the property, and considering requests from the public to participate in the preservation process.

In considering the effects of the proposed relocation of retail services, the Postal Service requested comments on December 3, 2019 from the Connecticut State Historic Preservation Office, three Tribal Historic Preservation Offices, and the public.⁴ Based on comments and input from the Connecticut State Historic Preservation Office, the Postal Service updated the covenant to preserve the historic features of the East Hartford Post Office when negotiating the sale.

In September 2021, we visited the East Hartford Post Office accompanied by Postal Service maintenance personnel to observe the condition of the facility. We found the exterior of the building was cleanly landscaped, and generally well maintained. One exterior stairwell, intended for basement access, was blocked to discourage trespassing. The customer lobby was clean and in good condition although we did note a few stained and a missing ceiling tile. The overall interior of the building was generally tidy and well lighted. Most of the interior space was used to store old Postal Service forms and records, excess equipment, and blue collection boxes. We found stained or damaged ceiling tiles in much of these unused areas. However, we identified no maintenance issues that required immediate attention for the safety and health of employees or customers.

The Postal Service followed applicable statutory, regulatory, and process requirements in deciding to sell the East Hartford Post Office; therefore, we are not making any recommendations.

Management's Comments

Management agreed with the finding and thanked the OIG for our efforts. See [Appendix B](#) for management's comments in their entirety.

Evaluation of Management's Comments

Although the report does not contain any recommendations, the OIG considers management's comments responsive.

“The Postal Service followed applicable statutory, regulatory, and process requirements in deciding to sell the East Hartford Post Office.”

⁴ Mashantucket Pequot Indian Tribe, Mohegan Tribe of Indians of Connecticut, and the Narragansett Indian Tribe.

Appendices

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Appendix A: Additional Information

Scope and Methodology

Our objective was to determine whether the Postal Service followed applicable statutory, regulatory, and process requirements in their decision to sell the East Hartford Post Office. As of the date of our report, the Postal Service has not sold the facility; therefore, our scope was limited to the processes leading to the decision to relocate services and offer the property for sale. We did not review the calculations included in the financial analyses.

To accomplish our objective, we:

- Identified and reviewed applicable statutory, regulatory, and process requirements regarding the relocation of retail services and sale of Postal Service facilities.
- Obtained and reviewed Postal Service studies and reports regarding the evaluation of the East Hartford Post Office.
- Reviewed required Postal Service documentation and associated timelines associated with communication to the public on the potential relocation of retail services.
- Interviewed headquarters officials to gain an understanding of the current state of the project, as well as the processes to evaluate space requirements, notify and receive input from the community, reach a final decision, and move forward with a project.

- Interviewed Representative Larson and East Hartford town officials to discuss the Postal Service's decision to relocate retail services and sell the facility.
- Conducted a site visit of the East Hartford Post Office to observe the general condition of the facility.

We conducted this performance audit from July through October 2021 in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards and included such tests of internal controls as we considered necessary under the circumstances. Those standards require that we plan and perform the audit to obtain sufficient, appropriate evidence to provide a reasonable basis for our finding and conclusion based on our audit objective. We believe that the evidence obtained provides a reasonable basis for our finding and conclusion based on our audit objective. We discussed our results with management on September 13, 2021, and included their comments where appropriate.

We did not assess the reliability of any computer-generated data for the purposes of this report.

Prior Audit Coverage

The OIG did not identify any prior audits or reviews related to the objective of this audit within the last five years.

Appendix B: Management's Comments



Date: 10/8/2021

JOSEPH WOLSKI
DIRECTOR, AUDIT OPERATIONS

SUBJECT: Sale of East Hartford, CT Post Office
Project Number 21-208-Draft

We received the draft report dated October 6, 2021 on the sale of the East Hartford, CT Post Office. Management agrees with the conclusion of "not making any recommendations" on this project. Thank you for the efforts of your team in this matter.

Regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Tom A. Samra".

Tom A. Samra
Vice President, Facilities

cc: Corporate Audit Response Management
Chief Retail and Delivery Officer and Executive Vice President
Vice President Area Retail and Delivery Operations Atlantic

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**INSPECTOR
GENERAL**
UNITED STATES POSTAL SERVICE

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