



22553

UNITED STATES GENERAL ACCOUNTING OFFICE  
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20548

GENERAL GOVERNMENT  
DIVISION

July 16, 1982

B-208254

The Honorable Paul S. Sarbanes  
United States Senate

Dear Senator Sarbanes:

Subject: Postal Customer Parking Needs Can Be Met  
Without Demolishing the Old Frederick,  
Maryland Post Office (GAO/GGD-82-92)

On April 26, 1982, you asked us to review the Postal Service's plans to demolish the old Frederick, Maryland Post Office. As later agreed with your office, we concentrated our review on (1) the need for offstreet parking for patrons of the new main post office and (2) the need for a letter carrier loading walkway.

We believe that (1) current parking needs are being met although not in the most desirable manner, (2) future parking requirements can be met without demolishing the old post office building, and (3) the cost of demolishing the old building in favor of providing unneeded parking space should be considered.

Our conclusions are based, in part, on the Service's decision that it is not absolutely necessary to locate the planned carrier loading walkway in the area behind the old post office building. We believe this area could be the site for 15 to 20 offstreet customer parking spaces and when combined with available onstreet parking would eliminate the need to demolish the old post office.

To evaluate parking needs, we toured the old and new post office buildings, met with postal and city officials at Frederick, Maryland, and observed carrier operations and customer parking. We also reviewed project files and talked with officials at Postal Service Headquarters and the Service's Eastern Region. We have attached a diagram of the postal facilities in downtown Frederick as an aid in understanding the matters discussed.

PARKING REQUIREMENTS

Postal Service criteria for customer parking are contained in the "USPS Postal Facilities Planning Data and Equipment Layouts" (Publication 37). According to Publication 37, offstreet parking may be provided if public parking is not available. Customers

(990516)

are to be allocated one parking space for every 4 linear feet of post office boxes and two spaces for each customer service window. On the basis of criteria in Publication 37, current operations at Frederick generate the need for 23 customer parking spaces.

The need for 58 offstreet customer parking spaces in downtown Frederick was calculated by the Eastern Region on June 4, 1982, on the basis of current and future needs. The Eastern Region based its estimates on the assumption that two spaces are needed for every 4 linear feet of post office boxes, three spaces for each customer service window, and two spaces for a self-service center. The Region used these criteria, which differ from Publication 37 criteria, to determine that it will soon need 58 customer parking spaces, including about 20 spaces to accommodate planned expansion of the post office box section.

The table below compares parking requirements developed using Publication 37 with requirements developed by the Eastern Region.

	<u>Parking Spaces Needed</u>	
	<u>Publication 37</u> <u>Requirements</u>	<u>Eastern Region</u> <u>Requirements</u>
Current operations		
5 service windows	10	15
50 linear feet of lockboxes	13	25
Self-service center	<u>0</u>	<u>2</u>
Total	<u>23</u>	<u>42</u>
Expansion		
Addition of 40 linear feet of lockboxes	<u>10</u>	<u>20</u>
Total	<u>33</u>	<u>a/62</u>

a/Rounded down to 58 by the Eastern Region to make it correspond to the total number of spaces the area designated for parking can accommodate.

We discussed the above differences with Eastern Region officials who told us Publication 37 is too conservative and outdated for determining parking needs.

To determine the value of the Publication 37 criteria, we reviewed 12 capital investment reports issued by the Postal Inspection Service during the past 2 years. Among other things, these reports comment on the use of parking facilities on recently completed projects. We found that customer parking facilities at most of these projects were constructed using Publication 37 criteria and that those constructed using Publication 37 were judged to have more than adequate customer parking, and in no instance did peak use exceed available space.

In addition, Publication 37 states that the Service is to provide offstreet parking if public parking is not available. Eastern Region officials conceded that their analysis of parking needs at Frederick did not consider public parking and probably should have.

PARKING REQUIREMENTS CAN BE  
MET WITHOUT DEMOLISHING THE  
OLD POST OFFICE AT A SAVINGS  
TO THE SERVICE

Current and future parking needs at the Frederick Post Office can be met without demolishing the old post office building for the construction of a parking lot. Considerable savings could result if the Service decides not to demolish the old building.

Current parking  
needs are being met

Current customer parking needs are being met in Frederick although not in the manner the Service, and presumably some customers, would prefer. Customers are using available parking on the streets around the post office and on a poorly maintained lot behind the old post office building.

Most customers park on the street in front of the post office where 2-hour unmetered parking is provided by the City of Frederick.

Other public parking is available to customers but some of the spaces are metered. The only offstreet parking is a small gravel lot behind the old post office building.

We observed customer parking on several occasions. On each of these occasions there was adequate public parking along the street in front of the post office even though a few customers chose to park on the gravel lot behind the old building. In addition, some customers parked in nearby private lots, but this appeared to be a matter of preference rather than necessity. Although there was some competition for prime space near the main entrance, customers did not have difficulty securing legal parking at a reasonable distance from the new post office at any time.

Having customers park on what amounts to a vacant, gravel lot behind the old unkempt post office is not the type of parking space the Service likes to provide for the public. This situation could be improved by constructing a 15 to 20 space parking lot on the vacant lot to augment the public parking on the street in front of the new post office.

Future parking  
needs can be met

The Service's estimate of future customer parking requirements is based, in part, on its recent decision to add 850 lockboxes to the new main post office with a corresponding need for additional customer parking spaces. In making the decision on lockboxes which added parking requirements, the Service did not consider the availability of public parking combined with the 15 to 20 space lot the Service could construct behind the old post office, or the potential of allowing the public to park in the employees' parking lot.

Using Publication 37 criteria for determining parking needs, we estimate that with the expanded lockbox section, 33 parking spaces are required. These spaces could be provided on the parking lot the Service could build behind the old post office building and along the street in front of the new post office which the City of Frederick would have to dedicate to postal customers' use.

Should this fail to provide sufficient parking, the Service could set aside part of the employee parking lot just across the street from the new post office for use by the public. Our observations of customer parking indicated that part of the employee parking could be set aside for public use and still provide adequate employee parking.

Savings could be realized  
by not demolishing the  
old post office

Considerable savings could be realized by not demolishing the old post office building in order to construct a parking lot.

The Service would save the cost of the demolition and construction, estimated to be about \$342,000. To this would be added about \$122,000 in income from the sale of the old building for a total of about \$464,000.

These savings would be reduced, however, by the costs of constructing the 15 to 20 vehicle customer parking facility behind the old building and a carrier loading walkway near the present carrier parking area. While no cost estimates have been finalized, the Service has calculated that it would cost about \$157,000 for this construction. Therefore, the Service could save close to \$307,000 by not demolishing the old post office.

## CONCLUSIONS

Postal customer parking needs in Frederick can be met without demolishing the old post office building. The requirement for 58 offstreet parking spaces determined by the Eastern Region is excessive on the basis of Service Headquarters' criteria and the availability of public parking. We believe 33 spaces would be adequate with the Service providing 15 to 20 of them behind the old post office and the City of Frederick dedicating the public parking spaces in front of the post office. Additional demand for parking could be met using some spaces in the employee parking lot across the street from the post office.

Whichever course of action the Service takes, it should consider the nearly \$307,000 savings that could be realized by not demolishing the old post office building.

## AGENCY COMMENTS AND OUR EVALUATION

A draft of this report was provided to Postal officials responsible for the activities discussed.

The Senior Assistant Postmaster General who commented on the draft did not agree with the Eastern Region's interpretation of the customer parking criteria guidelines contained in Publication 37. (See p. 2.) We were told that the most recent construction plan, which is based on the demolition of the old post office building, provides for 64 parking spaces--26 letter carrier delivery vehicle parking spaces and 38 customer spaces.

The letter carrier delivery vehicle spaces are for the planned carrier loading walkway in the area behind the old post office building. The construction of the walkway in this area is preferred by the Postal Service but the Service admits that it could "make-do" by relocating the carrier loading walkway to the area presently used for postal vehicle parking.

We did not examine why the Service picked 38 as the number of needed customer spaces for two reasons. First, the Service's choice (38) is close to our determination (33) and thus is too small a difference to note. Second, during our review, the number of desired customer parking spaces was a moving target. Different figures were quoted by different officials.

In commenting on how we determined that future parking needs could be met, the Postal official pointed out that the 33 spaces include onstreet parking which is not the Service's normal practice when it constructs a major new postal building. We recognize that the Service's usual practice is to provide offstreet parking for a major new postal building, but the Service's criteria for customer parking (Publication 37) provides for consideration of

available public parking. In downtown Frederick, public parking, while not under the exclusive control of the Postal Service, is available. (See p. 3.)

It should be noted that the offstreet parking and carrier loading walkway desired by the Service cannot be provided without demolishing the old post office building. The Service would like to demolish the old building even though it recently offered to first sell and then to lease the property on a 5-year term with an option to purchase at the end of that time. The offer to sell or lease with a purchase option is, in our opinion, an admission that customer parking needs can be met without demolishing the old building.

The Postal official who commented on our report stated that the cost analysis contained in the report is an oversimplification. He felt we should disclose that \$182,000 of the cost to demolish the old building was for salvaging certain old items requested by the State Historic Preservation Officer. He felt we should also disclose that costs have increased over the years because of delays in demolition and inflation. The official also stated that the future value of the Service's Frederick investment could be better protected with the old building eliminated, but such future value cannot be quantified.

While we cannot refute the above statements, the fact still remains that if the Service does not demolish the old post office building, it can avoid expenditures of about \$307,000.

- - - -

As agreed with your office, copies of this report are being made available to the Postmaster General and other interested parties. We would be happy to meet with you or your staff to further discuss the matters contained in this report.

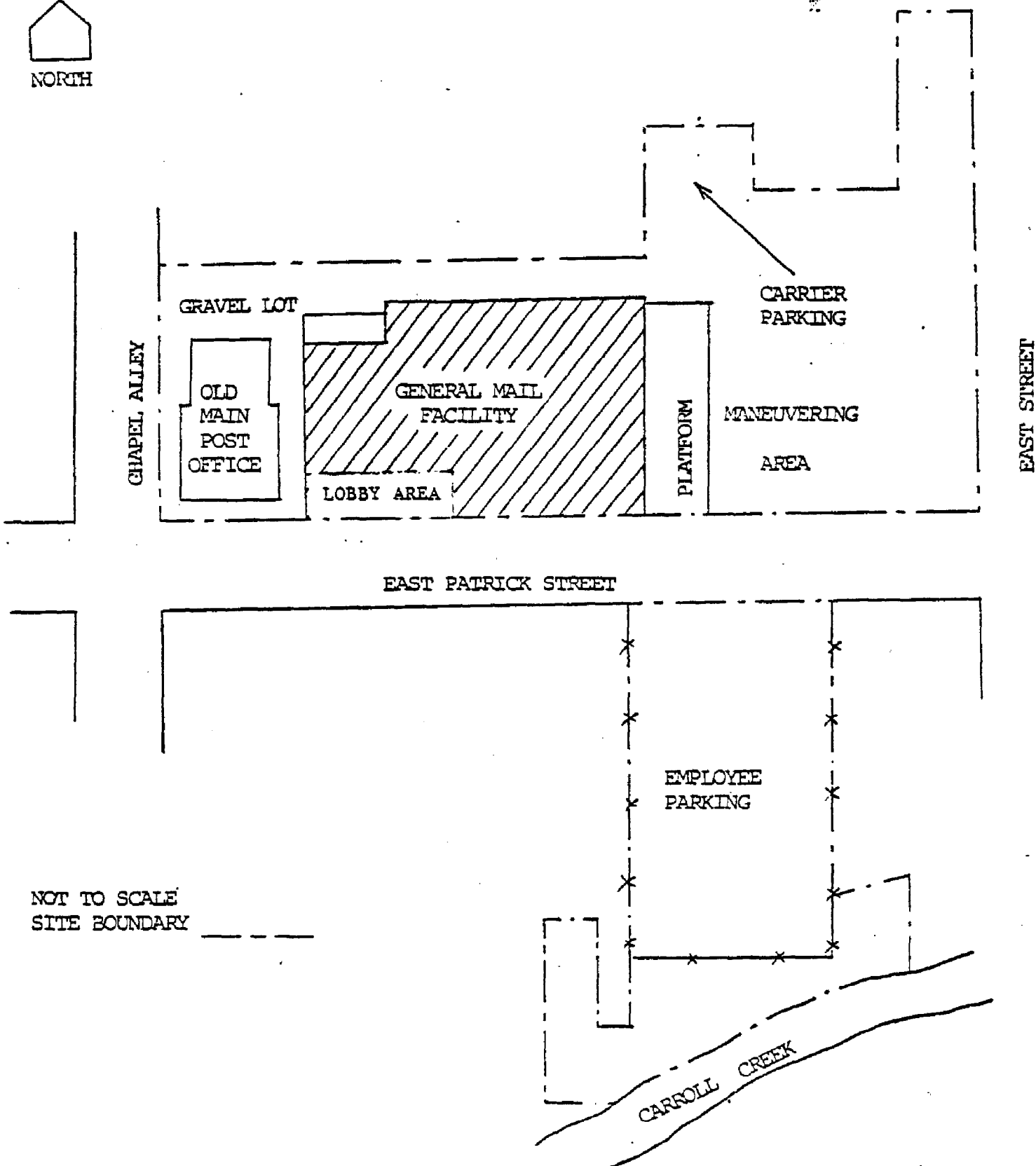
Sincerely yours,



William J. Anderson  
Director

Enclosure

FREDERICK, MARYLAND



NOT TO SCALE  
SITE BOUNDARY