



T TOWN OF BERLIN, VERMONT
Washington County

September 23, 2008

Ms. Debra Essler
District Manager
U.S. Postal Service
1883 Goffs Fall Road
Manchester, NH 03103

Re: **“All Roads Lead to Berlin”***

Dear Ms. Essler:

The Berlin Selectboard on behalf of the residents and business owners of the Town of Berlin are requesting that the U. S. Post Office consider re-establishing a post office or station in the Town of Berlin. An Article reading; “Shall the Town of Berlin vote to request that the United States Post Office create and operate a Post Office within the Town of Berlin?” appeared on the Berlin Town Meeting ballot and was approved on March 4, 2008 by an overwhelming majority of voters. In addition the Town, on two separate occasions, collected over 400 signatures of registered voters requesting the re-establishment of a post office in Berlin. Examples of the numerous letters the Town received in support of a Berlin post office are attached (see Attachment A, Letters of Support).

The Town has had several post offices in the past. One of the earliest post offices, located at Berlin Corner existed from 1824 until 1908. West Berlin also had a post office from 1884 to 1918, and then the name of the village was changed to Riverton. The Riverton Post Office, with its own zip code, continued operation for the village until 1988. The Riverton zip code, 05668, is still on the U. S. Postal Office zip code list, but does not appear to be in use at this time. Currently, Berlin mail is handled through three different post offices located in the surrounding municipalities of Barre City; the City of Montpelier (the State’s capital) and the Town of Northfield supported by three different zip codes. A map of the Central Vermont area is attached as a point of reference (see Attachment B, CV map).

During the past few decades, Berlin has transformed its 36 sq. miles from a predominantly rural community to a conglomeration of residential, commercial, and service-oriented businesses. More recently, the Town has been working towards enhancing its role as the regional economic center of Central Vermont (see Attachment C, Cumulative Employment Growth).

With health care, tourism, retail and services as the fastest growing economic sectors, Berlin is well poised for future growth. With ample open land, it is well equipped to accommodate that growth. The Town has just completed a comprehensive Economic Development Plan. Now that businesses and properties have been identified, the next step will be to create a marketing program for the Town of Berlin. Launching this program will begin with a branding exercise that seeks ways to integrate the “All Roads Lead to Berlin” concept into existing local and regional marketing efforts.

As the Town has continued to grow and the need for a post office has become more apparent over time, the Town has expressed its interest in re-establishing a post office to Washington County lawmakers and Vermont’s congressional delegation. The Vermont State Legislature unanimously approved two separate Resolutions recommending that “the General Assembly requests the Vermont Congressional Delegation work to convince the U.S. Postal Service, based on the compellingly favorable evidence, to locate a post office in the town of Berlin.” A letter of support is being sent to you directly from Vermont’s congressional delegation.

While it is true that much of Berlin, especially the areas located along the Rte 12 corridor is rural in appearance, the function of the Town is now predominantly that of a suburban employment and residential center (see Attachment D, 2008 Berlin Grand List Breakdown). As of 2006, the ratio of people employed in Berlin to working residents of the town was greater than three to one (see Attachment E, Jobs to Population Ratio 2006).

With the assistance of the Central Vermont Chamber of Commerce, the following information about the Town of Berlin is being provided for your consideration:

- With 220 employers, Berlin has more business locations than any other Vermont town without a post office.
- With 2,873 residents, Berlin is one of the most populated towns without a post office. While these numbers may be small when viewed in terms of the nation’s metropolitan areas, they loom large in the Green Mountain State.
- Six of the county’s two dozen largest employers are headquartered in Berlin. That is more than in neighboring Barre or Montpelier. Berlin has already overtaken Barre City as the second largest employing community in Central Vermont.
- Some 5,000 Vermonters are now employed in Berlin, an increase of more than 150% over two decades. There is every reason to believe this trend will continue for decades to come.
- Berlin’s largest employers serve the health industry.
- Central Vermont Medical Center is the region’s largest employer. The others are Washington County Mental Health, Berlin Convalescent Center, Central Vermont Home Health & Hospice, Woodridge Nursing Home, and Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Vermont. These firms are not only likely to continue growing, but also to spawn growth in additional health-related businesses.
- Two Berlin lodging establishments are the largest in the Barre-Montpelier area.
- The Berlin Mall offers the region’s largest retail sales space under one roof.
- The United Parcel Service and Federal Express have identified Berlin as the hub for Washington County distribution.
- Berlin is vigorously pursuing development in a tax increment financing district that could facilitate even stronger economic, employment and residential growth in the years ahead.

All the aforementioned employers and the Edward F. Knapp State Airport are located within three miles of an Interstate 89 interchange which feeds into state highway connectors for Berlin, Montpelier and Barre residents. For example, VT 62 is a high speed multi-lane limited access highway that connects I-89 with adjacent commercial development, commercial development on US 302, Barre City and Montpelier.

Berlin includes several unique business districts, each of which offers different advantages to businesses and customers:

The Commercial District encompasses much of the Plateau area served by U.S. Route 62 and other town connector roads. The purposes of the district are to allow a variety of commercial uses consistent with the area's function as a regional commercial and service center.

The Highway Commercial District encompasses lands parallel and adjacent to U.S. Routes 302 and 2. The historic purpose of the district was to allow for the development of an automobile-oriented highway commercial strip along the heavily traveled state highways. The district's purpose has evolved, however, to promote the continued economic viability of this important regional commercial center.

The Light Industrial District encompasses much of the land adjacent to the Airport. The purpose of the district is to promote a regional industrial and employment center by allowing a variety of industrial, manufacturing, service and office uses at moderate densities.

The Industrial District which includes land within the Riverton hamlet, and near the confluence of the Dog and Winooski Rivers, is intended to encourage a wide range of industrial and commercial enterprises at low densities while retaining the rural character of the surrounding areas. The district is an historic railroad hamlet that offers opportunities for small-scale commercial business activity and home-based businesses.

The Town Center District (Plateau Area), which includes the land surrounding the Berlin Mall, currently houses the Central Vermont Medical Center (Vermont's 3rd largest hospital), Berlin Mall, Elementary School, State Regional Library and other businesses. A task force is currently working to develop this area into a pleasant, pedestrian-friendly Town Center district that serves as Central Vermont's premier destination for professional office businesses, specialty retailers, medical care professionals, affordable housing and other related entities.

Berlin Junction offers an ideal location for wholesale and light manufacturing businesses with excellent transportation facilities and very close proximity to down town Montpelier.

The Highland Conservation District generally encompasses the least accessible and more sparsely developed areas of town. The purposes of the district are to protect fragile natural resources, encourage the productive use of forest resources, promote traditional outdoor recreation uses, and allow low density residential development.

The Modified Residential District includes lands at the eastern end of the Route 302 corridor, adjacent to the City of Barre. The purpose of the district is to maintain the residential character of the area while allowing for commercial uses.

Rural Residential District, Medium Density Residential District, and Residential District are districts that are specifically designed to encourage low-, moderate-, and high-density residential neighborhoods respectively. Residential property ranges from 784 single family homes to 301 homes within five mobile home parks. Berlin also hosts two traditional working farms and several alternative agricultural entities as well as a winery.

In addition to those already referenced, the Town hosts numerous entities unique to Berlin – the Central Vermont and Vermont State Chambers of Commerce, Red Cross regional headquarters, the Amtrak train station, Green Mountain Transit Authority, the Vermont National Guard Brigade headquarters and the Vermont Army reserve office. In addition, there are two of the areas largest nursing homes, Central Vermont Home Health and Hospice, Central Vermont

Community Action, Vermont's State Lottery office, the state's largest health insurance company (Blue Cross and Blue Shield), the State Environmental Court, VAST (Vermont Association of Snow Travelers), numerous state offices and the State Highway District lab and garage, as well as two major shopping centers/malls, eight automotive dealerships, and two major supermarket chains. There are also numerous businesses located in Berlin's industrial area including UPS and FedEx, Pike Industries and Carroll Concrete. The Rte 302 corridor includes major fast-food chains, two locally-owned restaurants and numerous nationally-recognized businesses such as Big Lots, The Dollar Store, Enterprise Car Rental Agency, Radio Shack, Dunkin Donuts, and Windshield World. In addition, DCP Midstream (formerly Duke Energy) is located in the Berlin Junction area. Berlin also hosts the Barre Fish and Game Club and the Montpelier Gun Club.

For years Berlin businesses and residents dealt with the awkward postal and address system but frustration levels began to rise with the implementation of Vermont's E911 system, and the resulting decrease in level of service. At that time, the Town held numerous meetings with the USPS E911 Coordinator to discuss the addresses to be used by Berlin postal customers. The E911 system is supposed to reflect recognizable geographic addresses and locations. However, most residents and businesses were asked to use Montpelier, Barre, or Northfield, Vermont instead of Berlin. Very few residents and businesses in Town are allowed to use Berlin, Vermont as their last address line. To add to the confusion and frustration, some residents and businesses were told to use Berlin in the second line of their address after their street address, such as 444 Vine Street – Berlin, Barre, Vermont 05641. The U.S. Postal Services advised in a letter to these postal customers that it was "absolutely necessary" that this address configuration be used. Recently the Barre Postmaster told Town representatives that using Berlin in the second line actually slows down the process and is in fact inefficient.

The Barre Postmaster, in an effort to assist Berlin, recommended renaming roads in Berlin that are duplicative of roads in the Barre service area. The Berlin Post Office Committee prepared a list of the same or similar names in all three service areas and found thirteen (13) in Barre, ten (10) in Montpelier and eight (8) in Northfield. The Committee did not research the number of residents or businesses that would be impacted by such a change as it felt that this effort would deal with only a small part of the service problems facing Berlin.

Some of the service issues include the confusion that occurs when emergency response by police, fire and ambulance service is slowed as they sort out where exactly the emergency call is coming from or when emergency providers go to the wrong town. There have been many instances of service delivery errors such as when a package was delivered to an apartment house on Richardson Road in Barre when the purchaser lived in a single family home on Richardson Road, Berlin or when packages or letters are sent to residents or businesses within Berlin and are returned as "not deliverable". Restaurants and other businesses have been frustrated by not having a printed address that customers can understand and locate with ease. There is also the impact on businesses from a lost-time perspective when owners have to allow extra time for a "quick" trip to the post office to allow time to hunt for parking spaces or deal with traffic in the crowded historical downtown districts of adjacent cities to deliver outgoing mail. This also adds to the parking difficulties for Barre and Montpelier residents and businesses. Some Berlin businesses are using UPS or FedEx to save on these labor costs.

Some businesses subscribe to national store locator services that use zip codes as a center point for a 40 mile radius circle referring customers to a particular store, which appears on advertising in print ads, news stories, and package labeling. It is a major way that people locate a particular store. One owner explained the issues as follows: "With Barre as my center point, I do not get any response from Burlington area zip code inquiries. I

only get local zip code inquiries. A Berlin zip gets me Burlington. Practically this results in 3 to 10 missed potential customers a day.” There is also an issue with MAPQUEST address listing Berlin businesses. Another owner states the following: “It has my store 10 miles on the wrong road way up in Orange because the addresses are all fouled up on Rt 302. Lost people trying to find my business are always calling after getting lost following Map Quest.” Mail order businesses are particularly impacted by the address and geographic confusion. And finally, in preparing for the 90th birthday celebration of the Wayside Inn Restaurant on Rte 302 in Berlin, one of the invited speakers noted the following on Roadfood.com, a website providing restaurant critiques: “My wife, our one-year-old and I went to the Wayside Restaurant during our trip to VT in October 2007. For whatever reason, my GPS could not find Berlin, VT, which wasn't marked in our thick road atlas either. We managed to find our way there finally, although we took exit 8, instead of 7, off I-89. It was definitely worth it!”

New businesses moving into Town expressed surprise when they discovered that a town the size of Berlin does not have a post office. When you take a look at other Vermont towns that have a local post office (Marshfield, Brookfield, Worcester, Barnet, Calais, East Montpelier, Chelsea, etc.), it seems impractical that Berlin does not.

The current system creates confusion for businesses, customers, and potential residents and investors. For example, the Berlin Mall and Central Vermont Medical Center have a Montpelier ZIP code, E. F. Knapp Airport and U.S. Route 302 have a Barre ZIP code and much of the Vt. Rte 12 corridor has a Northfield ZIP code. Central Vermont Medical Center actually used two addresses: 130 Fisher Road, Berlin, VT 05602 or P.O. Box 547, Barre, VT 05641. Many businesses advertise that they are in Barre or Montpelier when, in fact, they are located in Berlin. This practice only adds to the common misconception that portions of Berlin are part of either Barre or Montpelier. And of course, phone directories that provide postal codes do not list any zip code information for the Town of Berlin. Finally, area banks are impacted by Berlin's lack of a post office and common zip code. To be in compliance with the Federal CRA (Community Reinvestment Act) banks need to identify their efforts to reach out to area residents and businesses. It is difficult to do so in Berlin under the present postal circumstances

The Berlin Selectboard is concerned that the lack of a post office and a designated zip code will have a cumulative negative economic and financial impact on the Town. The Selectboard is therefore requesting a meeting with the U.S. Postal Service to review the Town's proposal to re-establish a post office or postal station in Berlin based on the growth that Berlin has experienced, its importance to the Central Vermont region and the services it provides.

Very truly yours,

Patricia A. McDonald
Chair, Berlin Selectboard and
Berlin Post Office Committee

Attachments A thru E

Cc: U.S. Congressional Delegation
Governor James H. Douglas
Washington County Senate Delegation
Mayors T. Lauzon, Barre and M. Hooper, Montpelier
U. S. Postal Service – Montpelier and Barre

Berlin Selectboard
George Malek, CV Chamber of Commerce
Berlin Post Office Committee
Berlin Website

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Senator Bernie Sanders
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Representative Peter Welch
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Governor Jim Douglas
109 State Street, Pavilion
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U.S. Postmaster (name)
U.S. Postal Service
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Barre, VT 05641-9998

Senator Ann Cummings
24 Colonial Drive
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Senator William Doyle
186 Murray Road
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Senator Phil Scott
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Mr. George Malek, Executive VP
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