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Urban Warrior | Post office has their stamp

GROUP FIGHTS FOR BELMONT SITE

By Carla Anderson
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AT FIRST, when word came out that the U.S. Postal Service planned to close its Lancaster Avenue branch in the Belmont section of West Philadelphia, local activists George Dunbar and Aisamah Muhammad just got mad.

The neighborhood already lacks a drugstore and a supermarket - not to mention a library branch and a community center, they said. Now some federal official had decided to pick up stakes and remove another government service, making the many senior there walk more than a mile to the University City post office at 40th and Locust.

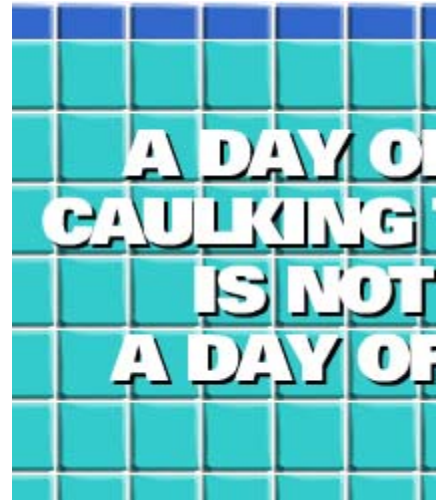
But then they got busy. No way they'd let it happen, said these two leaders of the Lancaster Avenue Association, which is struggling to keep the retail strip alive. The post office, which serves Mantua as well as Belmont, is too important an anchor for the avenue.

"This neighborhood already feels like a forgotten land," Dunbar said. "Well, we can't just sit here and wait. OK. We have to insist that we get better representation from our elected officials."

Said Muhammad, "So many of the elderly people who live here have stuck it out through all of the problems, and neglect. They deserve better than this."

The Postal Service agrees. That's why it decided to move out of the rented Belmont building and operations to University City.

"The roof leaks, and there are parts of the building where the floor appears to be sinking," said Seamus, the delivery manager for the Philadelphia post office. "It really was about the safety of the workers and not about the money."



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But if the federal government can't demand decent maintenance from its landlords, then I don't kr

And since the building is rented anyway, why not just move to different building in the same neigh

Fortunately, this story might yet have a happy ending.

After calling all their local politicians as well as the newspaper, it appears as though Dunbar and I might win their fight.

"It's true," Santiago said. "We are reconsidering the closure of that office from a human point of vi community is made up of a lot of older folks."

I say "Bravo" to Dunbar, Muhammad, and all the other active residents of this hardscrabble come for having the nerve to stand up and demand decent service.

And I question officials who blame their decision to move on the building's disrepair.

All buildings require maintenance. When people walk away, rather than stay and do repairs, bligh something this neighborhood already has its fair share of. Doesn't seem like the post office should add to the problem.

The Postal Service is due to make a final decision on the issue next week, Santiago said.

Let's hope it's the right one.

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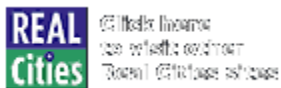
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