

## Nemaha Post Office's Hours Reduced to Two Daily Effective Jan. 12

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Effective Saturday, Jan. 12, 2013, the Nemaha post office will be open two hours daily. About a dozen postal customers attended a town hall meeting Thursday night, Oct. 18, at the Nemaha Community Building.

The proposed hours are 3 to 5 p.m. weekdays and 3 to 5 p.m. Saturdays. The exact hours of operation will be determined shortly. The Nemaha post office currently has window service six hours daily.

"We know that a two-hour day is not the same as being open six or eight hours. We wish we were here six to eight hours. We know how you feel, especially those whose offices are going to be opened reduced hours," said Todd Case, manager of post office operations in the 683 and 684 ZIP code areas.

"We want to balance the needs of our customers with operational needs while still maintaining a presence in the community," Case said.

The Oct. 18 town hall meeting was the third in Southeast Nebraska in communities whose weekday window service post office hours are being reduced to two, four or six hours. A meeting was held in Brownville Tuesday, Oct. 16 and in Crab Orchard Tuesday, Oct. 9. Brownville's hours are being reduced from eight to four hours weekday, effective Jan. 12. Crab Orchard's weekday hours will be reduced from four to two, effective Saturday, Nov. 17. Most reductions will not occur until after the holiday season, Case said.

Seven other town hall meetings are scheduled through mid-November. The first town hall meetings are in locations with postmaster vacancies. Those will continue through March 2013. The realignment of weekday window service hours is under the Post Office Structure Plan (POST). Under the plan, existing post offices are maintained. The offices are staffed by a postal employee with reduced retail hours to match customer usage.

In making the determination to reduce weekday window service to two, four or six hours, postal officials considered the workload at a local post office, proximity to other post offices and walk-in revenue.

The nearest post offices to Nemaha are: Brownville, five miles; Shubert, 8.2 miles and Auburn, 12.6 miles.

Case said the POST plan will be implemented by September 2014.

### Patrons Ask Questions

Ferida Muse, owner of Nemaha's Only Stop, asked Case if post office hours are being reduced in larger cities. Case said an office was closed in Lincoln. He said there are seven offices in Lincoln which serve 250,000 people.

Muse led the effort in 2011 to save the Nemaha office from closing.

"Closing the post office in a small town is killing our towns. People won't want to live here. People aren't going to move here. They're going to move away," she said.

Janice Boden, Nemaha village clerk, said she was concerned that subscribers who receive daily newspapers would receive them late. Boden said subscribers pay a lot of money for their daily newspapers and "who likes to read the news two days late."

Boden asked if the carrier would come to Nemaha at the same time. Case said the carrier would not come in the morning but will still come in the evening.

Under the POST plan, a carrier from Auburn will stop in Brownville before arriving at Nemaha. The carrier will probably arrive in Nemaha at the same time daily, while the carrier will arrive about an hour later at Brownville. The arrival in Nemaha is dependent upon how much time the

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carrier spends at Brownville, he said.

In response to another patron's question, mail placed in the collection box outside the post office will still be collected at 4:30 p.m., as is done now, Case said.

Another patron asked about packages. Case said options include if a customer was not available and the package does not fit into their post office box, the package could be transferred to a nearby post office, especially if they work in that community, such as at Auburn or Brownville.

Also asked was if all paperwork at a post office can be completed with two hours daily operation. Case said he knew two hours was not much time to complete tasks. Some work will transfer to staff at the Auburn post office, he said.

Case also said that postal officials try as best as they can to stagger hours that window service available in communities. It is possible that one person may work in offices in multiple communities. He said it is hard to find persons who want to work only two hours daily.

Charlene Storant currently staffs the Nemaha post office.

Postal Customer Survey Favored Realignment of Hours

Of 127 customer surveys mailed, 38 were returned, about 30 percent. Of the respondents, 34, or 89 percent, favored realignment of hours. There were four respondents, 11 percent, who favored providing retail and delivery service through a rural carrier. No respondents favored the village post office option or relocating post office box service to a nearby office. Some patrons after looking over the survey wanted none of the options but preferred the post office remained open.

The preferred hours for window service varied. One-third of respondents preferred late afternoon. Others preferred early morning or the middle of the day. The late afternoon hours will allow Nemaha postal customers who work out of town a chance to return to town before the post office closes for the day.

"We will not be able to please everyone regardless of what we do," Case said.

Delivery for rural carrier customers, access to the post office lobby and the number of Saturday window service hours will not change. However, the Saturday window service hours may change.

Postal customers are also able to buy services at [usps.com](http://usps.com).

Village Post Office Option

Muse asked about the village post office option. Case said that option would provide stamps and services during the hours the post office is not open.

The post office would not close under that option, he said.

When businesses are found which meet the village post office criteria, establishments are contracted through the U.S. Postal Service (USPS). USPS officials will pay a certain amount for establishment of a village post office. Case did not know how much. The contractor of a village post office must maintain, establish and replenish a quantity of stamps. The only item a contractor must purchase is stamps, Case said.

He said postal officials will continue to lease the building housing the Nemaha post office.

Generally, leases are for five years, Case said.

Postal Service Situation Explained

Case said postal officials considered closing thousands of post offices across the United States because of the USPS' financial situation. After feedback from customers and appeals, postal officials decided to implement the POST plan, he said.

USPS officials studied 87 post offices in Southeast Nebraska, 317 in Nebraska and 13,000

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nationwide. Officials anticipate annual savings of \$500 million, with reduced window service hours and replacing career positions with part-time employees, who are paid less per hour, Case said.

Since 2005, customer retail visits have declined 27 percent. That equated to 40 billion transactions to purchase stamps, and various products and services. Case said that was because of technology and the economy.

"If you lose customers, you lose the dollars they bring into the Postal Service," he said.

USPS lost just more than \$15 billion during the past fiscal year. By government mandate, postal officials can only borrow up to \$1.5 billion. The Postal Service also has to break even over a four-year window, Case said.

More postal customers are doing business online. Customers use the Internet to pay bills, send greetings and invitations, to shop and do social interaction.

Expenses, some of which are beyond postal officials' control, is another factor, Case said.

The rising cost of fuel affects the postal service, which has an enormous fleet of vehicles. Every time gasoline increases by one cent, it costs postal officials \$6.5 million each year, he said.

Postal service officials have taken steps to reduce costs, Case said.

That included consolidating 140 mail processing plants over the next two years because of reduced mail volume. Layers of management have been eliminated, from Washington, D.C., to district and area offices. Some area offices were closed. USPS officials are considering moving carrier operations to other facilities and selling buildings to reduce costs. Executive and postal salaries were frozen. The labor force is being consolidated. There are incentives for clerks to take early retirement. USPS officials are trying to save as many jobs as possible through attrition, he said.

Postal officials also try to be proactive to take advantage of technology to reduce the cost of processing and handling mail.

"As our revenue stream decreases, we have to take action to compensate," Case said.

Postal officials are trying to get legislation through Congress to help USPS financially, he said.

Among the proposals are reducing weekly delivery days from six to five.

The Postal Service will have cash to get through September 2013, Case said. October, November and December is a heavy mailing period, because of the election and the holiday season, he said.