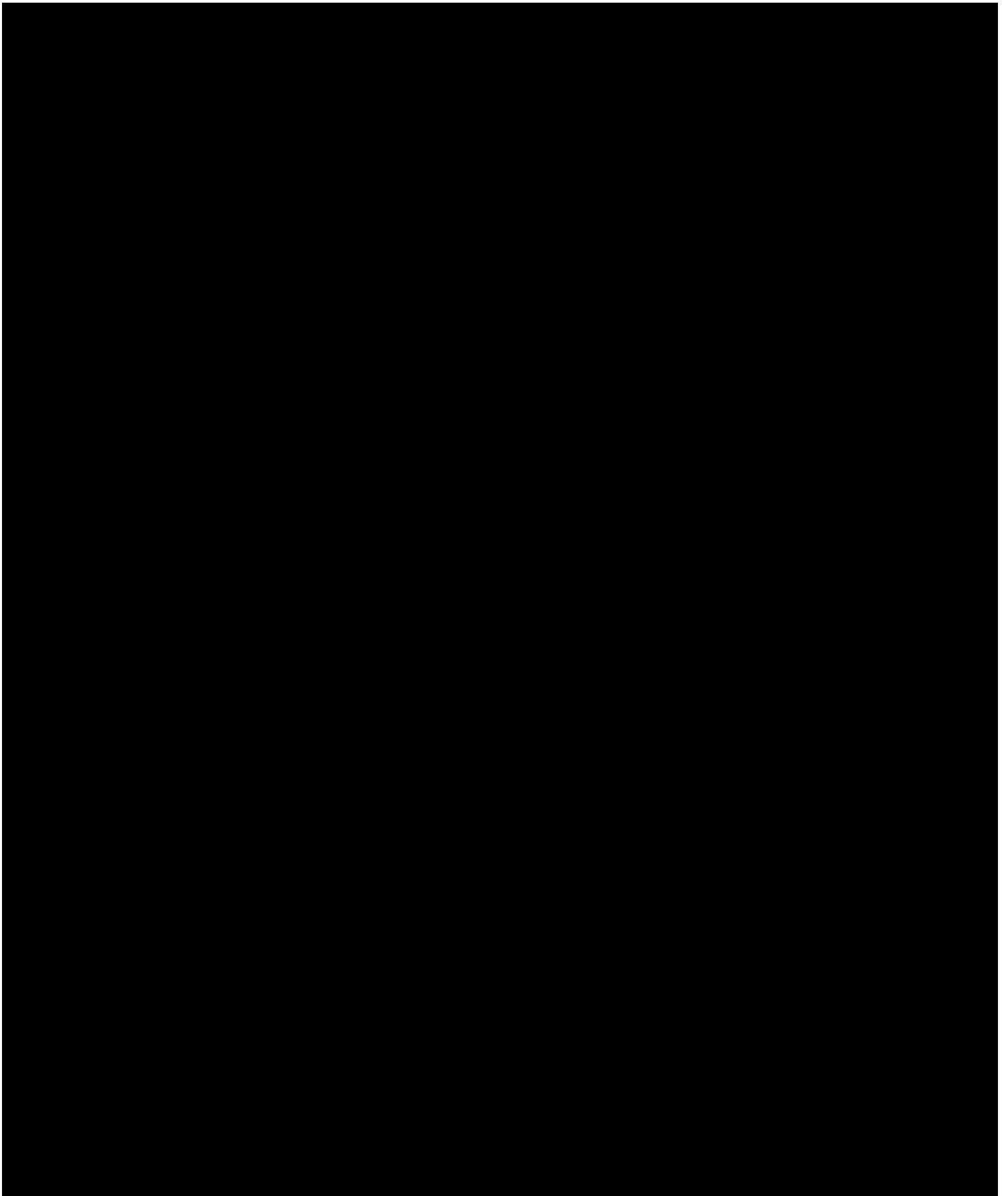


**Public Comments**

**Pertaining to CRA**

**1<sup>st</sup> Quarter 2024**



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**Sent:** Sunday, December 17, 2023 2:43 PM

To: PHIL Comments Applications <[comments.applications@phil.frb.org](mailto:comments.applications@phil.frb.org)>

Subject: [External] AmeriServ 8th ward

NONCONFIDENTIAL // EXTERNAL

**PLEASE NOTE: This email is not from a Federal Reserve address.**

Do not click on suspicious links. Do not give out personal or bank information to unknown senders.

It is very disappointing to receive a letter from AmeriServ bank about the closing of the 8th ward office. The office sits across from Conemaugh Memorial Medical Center. CMMC is the largest employer in the city of Johnstown. I know that there are many employees that use the convenience of having that office so nearby. Personally, I will have difficulty getting to another bank due to my work schedule. I believe I will have to probably look for a better banking option. That really upsets me since I have been a customer for over a quarter century. I am sending this email for myself and many other employees, and the neighborhood elderly that will inconveniently have to look for another option. Just hope that the bank considers a better option than to close the bank completely.

Thank you respectfully,



February 5, 2024

Federal Reserve Bank of Philadelphia  
Ten Independence Mall  
Philadelphia, PA 19106  
ATTN: Ms. Laura Gleason

Dear Ms. Gleason,

I am responding to the complaint received by \_\_\_\_\_ regarding the closure of our Eighth Ward Branch located at 1059 Franklin St., Johnstown, PA 15905.

AmeriServ Financial Bank understands the importance of maintaining a strong and accessible banking network to serve our customers and contribute to the local economy. However, after careful consideration and analysis, our Senior Management team and Board of Directors have concluded that closing this branch is necessary for several mitigating reasons.

The following responses address the questions posed in your email dated January 31, 2024:

1. As stated in the filing, to mitigate the inconvenience caused by the closure, we are in the process of exploring and/or implementing the following options to provide alternative banking solutions to include:
  - a. As previously mentioned in our application, we informed our customers that we have two offices located near (within 1-3 miles) the Eighth Ward location...our downtown Johnstown office and our Westmont branch. The Westmont branch currently offers extended hours Monday – Saturday. We are extending hours on Friday evenings at our downtown branch drive-up from 4:00PM until 6:00PM on a trial basis prior to the closing of the Eighth Ward branch. This will allow customers, including those affected by the branch closure, to access banking services during off-peak hours.
  - b. Our employees are always committed to assisting all customers in becoming familiar with our digital platforms including online banking, bill pay, and remote deposit capture. Our staff is available to provide personalized training and support, helping customers navigate through the various features and functionalities of our online and mobile banking platforms. Each branch manager will personally send a welcoming letter to the customers that transfer their accounts to one of our other conveniently located branches. In addition, we will be organizing special event days so the customers can visit their new branch location to personally meet the branch manager and staff, enjoy refreshments, and learn more about the products and services.
  - c. Out of the 948 customers that Eighth Ward currently services, just 16% or 158 customers are “frequent users” of physical branch services and in-person staff. This statistic leads us to believe that the remaining customers whose accounts were initially opened at the Eighth Ward branch either years ago or just recently have been utilizing other branch locations and online services for their daily financial needs.

- d. We are considering continuing to operate the ATM machine that is currently located in the drive-up lane until the building is bought, with regular maintenance and replenishment of cash so customers can still access accounts, check balances, and perform various banking activities using the machine. Additionally, our customer support team will be available to assist with any ATM-related inquiries or issues that may arise.
  - e. We are also in the process of upgrading our ATM network to depository machines to provide additional convenience for our customers to make deposits during non-banking hours. As of today, we have completed 71% of our branch ATM installations and the remaining machines are scheduled for installation this year. Our downtown and Westmont offices have already been upgraded to depository ATM machines.
2. AmeriServ has not received any correspondence to date from the consumer who contacted the Reserve Bank regarding the closing of the Eighth Ward branch.
  3. We did receive one additional letter from a customer who expressed his concern regarding the closure of the branch. After responding to him via letter and phone, he was satisfied with the options that were offered and was very complimentary on our level of customer service.

Refer to Attachment A – Copy of Customer Correspondence



In addition, we have received one business customer that reached out to us via phone regarding the branch closing and to discuss alternative solutions for their banking needs.

4. Refer to Attachment B – Copy of the Response



We value the role the regulatory agencies play in maintaining the stability and integrity of the banking sector. We are committed to working closely with your agency to ensure a seamless closure process that prioritizes the interests of our customers, employees, and the broader community.

If you have any further questions or require further information, please do not hesitate to contact me directly or our designated point of contact for regulatory matters, Shana Stiles, at 814-533-5344.

Thank you for your attention to this matter. We look forward to continuing our positive and collaborative relationship with your regulatory agency.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Kerri L. Mueller'.

Kerri L. Mueller

Senior Vice President/Retail Banking Division

[kmuller@ameriserv.com](mailto:kmuller@ameriserv.com)

# ATTACHMENT A

January 17, 2024

*Jeffery Stopko, President & CEO  
AmeriServ Financial  
216 Franklin Street  
Johnstown, PA 15901*

Mr. Stopko,

You and your company do a terrific job. Very seldom can someone say they have no complaints about a company but, in my situation, this is the case. And I, along with so many others, appreciate the generosity of the donations and sponsorships you give to so many events and causes.

I have been a customer at the 8<sup>th</sup> Ward Ameriserv Financial location since it was U.S. Bank. Perhaps I'm small time and small town, but I feel most of Johnstown is as well. We find a business, a restaurant, a gas station, or a hardware store that we like, and we stick with it. Maybe it's the location, or the quality, or the staffs' attitude, a willingness to help, a friendship. I haven't moved around a lot in my 42 years, and a lot of us don't, which is why Ameriserv, especially this branch in the 8<sup>th</sup> ward feels like home to so many.

The staff at this location has wished me congratulations on my marriage and watched my family grow. In the summer time, my three sons and I ride our bicycles to the bank and say hello to the staff and do a few minutes of banking every week or so. They all have accounts and are now ages 4, 9, and 10 and we have been doing this since my two oldest traveled in my double bike trailer. The 8<sup>th</sup> ward location has become THEIR bank as much it is mine.

Perhaps it's because I don't know the staff as personally at the Westmont, downtown Johnstown, and Richland locations, but it just seems colder, more emotionless – not rude or subjugating, just "let's do your business and move on", which I feel is like most other banks. I hope this letter joins thousands of others stating that the 8<sup>th</sup> Ward location in particular is your quintessential home town friendly bank and one to champion and put face forward, not a location to close down. I can't imagine the collective reality of everyone who works at Conemaugh Hospital and nearby neighborhoods on where and how to do their banking, now driving out of their way before or after work or filling out paperwork and opening new accounts with other banks. It would be just as devastating a reality for some if Santo's, or the Honey Bear gas station, or Bantley Hardware, or Icare closed their doors.

In closing, I honestly don't know if it is out of convenience or spite that, if the 8<sup>th</sup> ward branch of Ameriserv Financial closes, my business will most likely move across the street to First Commonwealth Bank.

At the very least, please let this letter serve as a deep felt congratulations, respect, and appreciation for the staff at the 8<sup>th</sup> ward office; they are not just another banking location they're like family.

As of now, a life long customer,

# ATTACHMENT B

January 25, 2024

Dear

First and foremost, I thank you for reaching out to me and sharing your feelings about our bank. Over the course of my career, I have received many letters from customers. Yours, however, is one that will stick with me long after I put this letter in the mailbox.

I appreciate your kind words about our bank, the Eighth Ward office, and its team of highly seasoned professionals. As you know, when you are in the customer service business, the people who service your customers are your most valuable asset.

We are planning to close the AmeriServ Eighth Ward office. This is not a decision that was arrived at lightly. Unfortunately, the COVID pandemic changed the way a lot of people not only bank, but shop and do just about everything. We have not been immune to this change in customer behavior and have been forced to make hard choices. Many times, the choices we make are good for the company and enable it to not only survive but thrive. This is one of those decisions. While the decisions we make sometimes are not always popular with customers and communities, they make it possible for us to continue providing our customers with in-person and online banking for life experiences that make me proud to say I work for AmeriServ.

I ask that before you start the process of taking your business elsewhere that you continue to give our other community offices the opportunity to provide you with the exceptional customer service to which you have become accustomed. Our folks who work at the Downtown Main office and Westmont and University Heights are top notch and I believe you will find them to be just as friendly and helpful as the Eighth Ward staff.

In the coming week, I will ask Kerri Mueller, senior vice president – retail banking, to contact you. Kerri is responsible for managing our branch network and will be more than happy to help you navigate your next steps with our bank. Kerri will introduce you to our AmeriServ bankers at the office of your choice and will personally ensure that you are comfortable with your new banking relationship.

Once again, thank you for taking the time to contact me and if I can be of service to you in the future, I ask that you do not hesitate to contact me directly at 814.533.5310.

Sincerely,

Jeffrey Stopko  
President and CEO