

Knoxville, Tennessee postal facility the latest impacted by nationwide restructuring program

Jane Wise

3 December 2023

No questions were answered at a public United States Postal Service mail processing facility review (MPFR) meeting in Knoxville, Tennessee on Thursday, which was held to share the preliminary findings of a facility review that began in October and take public comment on them. The audience of about 50 USPS workers was already well aware of the findings which had been published two weeks prior to the meeting.

Knoxville is one of 29 cities across the country currently undergoing MPFRs as part of the nationwide Delivering for America (DFA) plan, which will consolidate mail processing operations from local processing centers into mega regional centers. In addition to slashing costs, the program will result in the loss of tens of thousands of jobs and make access to postal services more difficult for many around the country, especially in rural areas. Pro forma public meetings, such as the one on Thursday, are window dressing for the process, which is well underway throughout the USPS network.

Gary McClellan, USPS executive plant manager in Knoxville, delivered the report of the facility review in a three-slide presentation that took less than 10 minutes to deliver. The Knoxville P&DC (Processing & Distribution Center) will remain open as a Local Processing Center (LPC). Originating package mail will be processed in Louisville, Kentucky, while the destination mail operation will remain in Knoxville.

McClellan announced at the beginning of the presentation, “Today, before we dive into our presentation, I want to make two points very clear. Based on the initial facility review, the facility is not closing. It will be repositioned as a local processing center. There will be no career layoffs as part of this

initiative.”

If McClellan was waiting for cheers of relief from his audience, none came. Of the 463 employees, 63 will be reassigned. In other words, 14 percent of the career workforce at the Knoxville facility will either need to relocate to a USPS job elsewhere or start over in a new job. One worker, who had been reassigned once before, told local news, “I’d hate to move my family again, but I’d hate to start over, too, so I would have to move.”

Almost as an afterthought, McClellan stated that the number of pre-career employees, part-time workers, would be reduced “in accordance with the respective collective bargaining agreements.” A worker told the *World Socialist Web Site* after the meeting that there are approximately 150 pre-career employees at the Knoxville P&DC. “[T]hat’s 150 families that could have a detrimental impact—that may be looking for a job right after the New Year,” he said.

During the public comment portion of the meeting, union officials from the American Postal Workers Union (APWU) and the National Postal Mail Handlers Union (NPMHU) made statements against the initiative to shift originating processing to Louisville. Both denounced the initial findings of the MPFR, citing population growth in Tennessee and Knoxville and population decline in Louisville as reasons why the Knoxville P&DC should not be repositioned as an LPC.

But the APWU has done nothing to seriously oppose Delivering for America. Indeed, from the beginning the union bureaucrats have been enablers of Postmaster General DeJoy’s plans to cut 50,000 jobs and Amazonify the workforce by hiring temps and part-time workers. They have done little to alleviate the attacks on the wages and health of carriers caused by

punitive route evaluation systems rolled out this year. Nor have they intervened in the accelerating package load carriers must contend with as last-mile carriers for Amazon.

Tensions during the 20-minute meeting grew as USPS spokesperson Evelina Ramirez repeatedly responded to audience questions about the findings of the MPFR by declaring that the purpose of the meeting was to gather oral comments, not answer questions. “We have a lot of questions,” one worker retorted amid the charged silence in the auditorium.

“Pointless!” was what one worker speaking to the WSWS said of the meeting. “Why even have us come down!” Another worker commented, “It’s a checklist. They’re contractually obligated to be here.” One worker correctly surmised the outcome of the meeting, “This process is nothing but a facade. They’re going to do what they want to do, regardless of what this input says today.”

Speaking to the *World Socialist Web Site*, workers expressed frustration at the lack of information they are receiving about the plans to reposition the Knoxville facility into an LPC and Delivering for America. “They’ve [USPS] been keeping information from us and we’ve been trying and trying to get it,” one worker said. When asked about the impact of the proposal on the Knoxville facility, another worker commented, “Well, you know about as much as I do.”

From the beginning, Postmaster General DeJoy has sought to conceal the full impact of Delivering for America, which is part of a longer-term push, with the support of both major parties, to privatize USPS. Last April, the Postal Regulatory Commission opened a public inquiry docket to provide transparency to recent and planned changes to the network associated with DFA’s strategic plan. But the regulatory agency has admitted it does not have the staff or resources to keep pace with the rate of changes in the USPS that are underway.

Postmaster General DeJoy was appointed by the board of governors during the Trump administration but has the support of Democratic appointees on the board as well. The USPS board of governors is comprised of investment bankers and logistics company executives who will profit from the systematic dismantling and eventual privatization of the US Post Office, a process which benefits from

secrecy and obfuscation. DeJoy himself has substantial conflicts of interest through his ownership of companies with contracts at USPS.

The Delivering for America plan for the restructuring of its network is based on the hub-and-spoke model used by Amazon. The deployment of DeJoy’s plan is already in the second wave of its rollout, with the opening of massive Regional and Package Distribution Centers (RPDC), which will be the hubs of the network’s system.

In September, over 300 APWU workers were laid off and many were reassigned from mail centers in Charlotte, North Carolina when the RPDC in nearby Gastonia went online at the beginning of October. West Virginia is set to lose its only mail processing facility in Charleston when outgoing mail processing operations get moved to the RPDC in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, which is set to open in early 2024.

Mail processing facility review meetings such as the one in Knoxville are planned throughout the country as 60 RPDCs are coming online. An estimated 4,560 positions will be eliminated once the consolidation of P&DCs into RPDCs is complete.

In opposition to these historic attacks on the post office, workers across the country have formed the Postal Workers Rank-and-File Committee.

“The only way forward is to organize ourselves, put forward our own program of demands, and place rank-and-file workers in every position critical to our job security, safety, wages, bargaining and so on,” the committee said in its founding statement. “We must prepare action from below to assert the will of 635,000 career and non-career USPS workers to make sure our needs and interests take absolute priority, and not the slash-and-burn policies of corporate-controlled politicians.”



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact