

# Cheektowaga Source

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SOUTH EDITION

Sunday, January 8, 2012

## USPS public meeting addresses potential closure, 1200 William St. facility

by Jennifer Orr,  
*Cheektowaga Source*

If there's one definite thing Western New Yorkers are skilled in, it's standing in solidarity. Erie County has seen its share of letdowns – economically, socially, industrially, even athletically – but if Western New Yorkers have learned anything, it's that camaraderie can trump the negative, that change will come so long as it's fought for.

And Wednesday night in JFK High School's auditorium, Western New Yorkers put up a fight.

A public meeting regarding the United States Postal Service's proposal to shut down mail processing operations at 1200 William St. saw a huge turnout of

local residents in opposition. What started with a presentation on why the Postal Service's business model should be reformed ended with a public discussion on the detriments of such an assessment.

Kathleen Burns, Western New York district manager for the U.S. Postal Service, opened the evening with a presentation on the need for consolidation of the Buffalo Processing and Distribution Center and the Rochester Processing and Distribution Center. Burns asserted that the need for change came about after initial results from an Area Mail Processing study supported the business case for consolidation.

Burns introduced two main topics before beginning

a slide show linked at the end of this article: Radical Network Realignment and the Area Mail Processing Study.

She noted the particular volume decline in first class mail, adding the Postal Service's intention of radically realigning the network based on 2 to 3 day delivery for first class mail. Due to electronic diversion and the economic status quo, first class mail has seen a steep decline in the past few years – from 98 billion pieces of mail in 2006 to 78 billion pieces of mail in 2008 – and, according to Burns, will continue to decrease so steadily that by 2020, there will be a projected 39 billion pieces of first class mail delivered.



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Congressman Brian Higgins set the tone for the public comments portion of the meeting with his strong opposition to the closure of the 1200 William St. USPS facility.

*Photo by Jennifer Orr*

"To process this much mail, we need less facilities," Burns asserted.

There are currently 487 mail processing facilities today, but if the new business model proposed by USPS goes into effect, there could be fewer than 200 functioning facilities throughout the U.S. by 2013.

The proposed annual savings in the draft AMP feasibility study are approximately \$28,811,411. According to the AMP study, if Buffalo and Rochester's facilities consolidated, there would be a

significant increase in annual savings and only a net decrease of 199 positions. Burns said that USPS has never laid off a worker in its history, and that the new business model would be a beneficial change that wouldn't affect the average customer.

The crowd laughed sarcastically.

Burns explained the benefits of closing down the William Street processing center and consolidating Buffalo's mail with a facility out of Rochester, drawing from an example in which a plant that nor-

mally operates six hours per day would then operate 20 hours each day, ultimately doing the work of three plants in one facility. She noted the efficiency of the proposed consolidation - that it would save billions of dollars and would support a 2 to 3 day service standard for first class mail - and even said that the 700 workers who would lose their jobs would be taken care of.

But the crowd didn't buy it.

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## USPS *Continued from front page*

Many in attendance, including Buffalo Common Councilmember Darius Pridgen, believed that the public meeting was merely a way to keep people believing they had a choice in such a matter. And when Kathleen Burns slipped up and said, "when we consolidate" rather than "if we consolidate," the crowd was uproarious.

Burns called for a 5-minute break, but as attendees were rising from their seats, one man decided to get on the microphone a bit earlier than the scheduled public comment period. Jim Price, a Buffalo native currently living in Sioux City, Iowa, stepped to the microphone and encouraged the audience to reject the break time. Price went on to say that he works at a mail processing facility that was consolidated in September and that the alleged benefits that come with the AMP business model are nice on the ears but hard on reality. He contested the idea that the proposed consolidation will lead to more efficiency and savings, saying, "They want to make your junk mail cheaper and faster; they want to make your important mail expensive and slower."

Price's passionate outburst received a vigorous round of applause from the crowd, who seemed to agree that the proposal and presentation were candy-coated to fool the public into thinking the reformed business model was in its best interest. Several residents shared their concerns and denounced the supposed benefits of closing down the William Street facility. One issue that was addressed was the proposed annual savings estimate, mainly in the area of transportation.

"How are you achieving transport savings by driving our mail to Rochester?" asked Congressman Brian Higgins.

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Congressman Higgins, who has been trying to garner support to keep the William Street plant, spoke confidently that there was no justification in closing the facility. He for months has been objecting to the Postal Service's proposal, even having sent a letter of dissent to the U.S. Postmaster General.

Higgins noted the negative effects of closing the facility on local Western New York businesses and the region's economy, adding, "You should be looking at [the] Buffalo [facility] as a national model, not close it."

Higgins too alleged an attempt by USPS to keep the meeting from public knowledge, quoting the Postmaster General as saying the closure of several facilities is "fairly set."

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Buffalo Common Councilmember Darius Pridgen agreed, saying that a decision, unbeknownst to the public, has been made and that the meeting was simply "a dog and pony show." But whether or not a decision has been made, Western New Yorkers are not going to sit by and watch the Buffalo Processing and Distribution Center close down.

Councilmember Pridgen summed up the crowd's sentiment: "We have not yet begun this fight." For those who were unable to attend and/or speak at Wednesday's public meeting regarding the AMP study, written comments may be sent to: Manager, Consumer and Industry Contact Western New York District 1200 William St. Room 100 Buffalo, NY 14240. All comments must be postmarked by Jan. 20, 2012.

To view the AMP study slideshow presented at the meeting, visit: <http://about.usps.com/streamlining-operations/public-mtg-presentation-buffalo-01-04-12.pdf>.

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