

Homeowner Submission 001: Replace old Mailboxes & Caution of Theft Signage.

Basically, my proposal is a common sense, little to no cost, fully ADA compliant, and, most importantly, very friendly to the senior citizen and handicapped residents of Oakland Heights, not just because my wife and I are in that category, but because I know there are many others. And the intent is to exhaust all self-help efforts before proceeding to a more costly solution.

Let me begin by quoting the decal posted on many of our mail box clusters. It states, in part: **“THIEVES WANT YOUR MAIL! Do not leave mail in the boxes overnight.”** Part of the rationale for a centralized cluster at great expense is that only 25% of residents pickup their mail daily. Meaning, 75% of residents currently do not pick up their mail daily and are contributing to the enticement of mail box theft. Should any resident not be able to pickup their mail, a trusted neighbor could easily perform the task. I have performed this task for a handful of my neighbors over the years and it really isn't a burden. About 23 or 24 years ago, there was a rash of vehicle break ins in the neighborhood because people were leaving expensive stuff in clear sight in their vehicles in the driveways overnight. All residents were cautioned to be vigilant and to eliminate the enticement. In no time at all, the problem was solved. Bottom line, if there is no mail in the boxes overnight, the thieves will soon not waste their time coming to our neighborhood.

Mail box keys are also a problem. Not the ones that we use to retrieve our mail, but, those that belong to the USPS. There are two. One is used at the Gate to enter Oakland Heights and I learned today in speaking with the Postman that it should be deactivated as they use the keypad. Perhaps the thieves have this key and are using it to enter our neighborhood during the night which is when most mail box theft occurs. And of course the other key, a master key to open the boxes completely. Apparently someone at USPS gave or sold that one to the thieves.

Recommendations:

1. Keep existing mail box cluster units where they are currently located. If some units need to be replaced due to age, do so. Apparently there can be some cost sharing with the USPS.
2. Ensure that the “caution of theft” signage is placed on all mail box clusters. Current signage has been placed by a USPS employee. Perhaps they can add more signage, or, perhaps we could enlarge it and make it more visible.
3. Most importantly, advise residents to take full responsibility for collecting their mail on a daily basis before nightfall so as to eliminate the enticement for theft over night, since most thefts occur between 11PM and 4AM. **We are the problem. Therefore we have the collective ability to solve it.**
4. The locks on the mail box clusters need to be replaced. I suspect that master keys were never in possession of an OHOA person or representative of OHOA since the mail box clusters were purchased and placed in our community. USPS compromised the keys are therefore responsible to remedy the situation..
5. The USPS key access to the main gates needs to be deactivated. Before deactivation, we must ensure that only USPS employees use the key and that other services do not.

6. The USPS delivery folks need to come up with a schedule that has our neighborhood mail delivered at about the same time of day, everyday. Currently we are between 10 AM and 5 PM which fosters our complacency in retrieving our mail.

Successes:

There must be many city wide. I know of many folks across the city who live in both gated and un-gated communities, with mail boxes on their property or community clusters such as ours, and, have never experienced our mail box theft problems.

FEEDBACK FROM THE BOARD AND SPECIAL MAILBOX COMMITTEE ON THE ABOVE.

Intro: First off thank you for your interest in solving this problem and being proactive to submit an alternate solution. We are also grateful for your diligence in picking up your mail daily. This is very much appreciated.

Feedback on Recommendations:

1. Currently there are dozen units in the west that need to be replaced. The USPS will only agree to assist Oakland Heights in the cost if we move forward with the mailbox pavilion solution. They will **not** assist if we simply replace the units in the current locations. If the HOA replaces the units in the current location, it will be about \$18,000 to \$20,000 depending on final configuration required. Also of note, if the HOA moved forward with the solution above and the theft continues, the USPS will require the HOA to rebuy the mailboxes originally committed and place only new ones in the pavilions. Their condition for the pavilions includes non-disruption of current service, which is in part why they have agreed to cover half of the cost. This will add over \$30,000 to the Pavilion project.
2. We can request this now for current boxes from the USPS while the community is evaluating these options. They have not had any impact yet, but we can ask the USPS to add more. It won't hurt.
3. We have been notifying to the community to pick up their mail daily for almost 12 months now via emails, Newsletter, Nextdoor.com etc. The HOA has no authority to force residents to pick up their mail daily. Despite all the notification, the impact has been non-existent and theft has actually increased over the last six month with an event averaging every two weeks.
4. The locks of the mailboxes are strictly within the jurisdiction of the USPS. The HOA does not have any of the master keys or any control over the locks. The USPS does change the locks if they know they are compromised, but this may take many months as the master keys cover large areas.
5. This was done already a few months back. The thieves are using resident's codes to get in. The HOA has tried to deactivated codes they believe are routinely being compromised, but with residents continually providing their codes to vendors and contractors, these codes will continue to be compromised.
6. The HOA has no governance over the USPS delivery schedule. Their routines are fairly consistent in delivering mail usually between 11am and 1pm.

Successes:

According to the USPS and SAPD this is a city-wide problem with cluster boxes across many communities, especially medium and high-income neighborhoods. HOA has also spoken with other HOAs experiencing similar issues. Councilman Manny Pelaez is even hosting a townhall of this specific issue on March 26th at 9:00am at UMMC. The only success we have seen are communities who enclosed their mailboxes. Please see Townhall Q&A document for a list of those communities.