

Oakland Heights Mailbox Pavilion Townhall

Background: Over the last few years, Oakland Heights has been experiencing increasing theft at mail Cluster Box Units (CBUs). In the last 90 days the frequency has been about every two weeks. The Board of Directors has been in communication over the last two years with SAPD and the USPS to try to attain a resolution. The Board has also explored numerous security options, such as cameras at the gates, replacing the older CBUs, lighting and cameras at the CBUs in their current place. None were deemed sustainable or reliable to address the issue.

Community Engagement: On September 5, 2023, the Board authorized, by authority of Section 4.12 of the Bylaws of the Oakland Heights Owners Association Inc, the creation of Mailbox Special Committee (MSC) to involve the community to work towards a solution with the mail. This was presented at the Annual Owner’s Meeting on September 6th and a team of volunteers were assembled to work with the USPS and elected officials to gain support for replacement of the current CBUs and find a solution to reliably and sustainably secure them. The MSC reported back to the Board during the Board of Directors Meeting on December 4th, 2023. In their reports they confirmed they had collected 212 signatures to petition the USPS to assist with the CBU replacement. They also reported that there was no viable way to secure the CBUs in the current locations and to provide the best option to prevent theft in the future, the CBUs should be consolidated to secure mailbox pavilions. Based on the MSC report and feedback from community member in attendance, the Board motioned to initiate exploration of the pavilion options and conduct the townhalls.

Mailbox Surveillance Program: While exploring the pavilion option, the Board authorized to conduct a three-week surveillance program on two of the most common vandalized CBUs. This consisted of placing temporary cameras and decoy packages with GPS. In addition, they also reviewed entry gate codes and deactivated ones that were suspected of being used by perpetrators. The program yielded positive results including two open SAPD Cases below and better information on both the behavior of the perpetrators and as well as the mail pick up patterns of residents.

Fast facts learned from the program:

- Most break ins are between 11pm and 4am
- Perpetrators use stolen arrow keys front access CBUs or use force on rear access older CBUs
- Only 25-35% of residents came in a given day to pick up mail and about a quarter of them drove.
- USPS and SAPD confirmed that a mailbox pavilion is the most viable way to end the mail theft issue.

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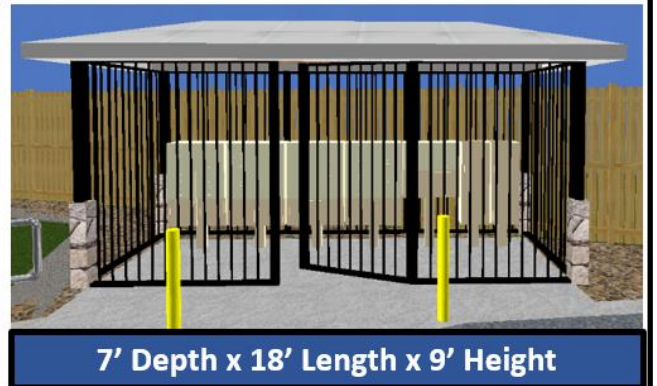
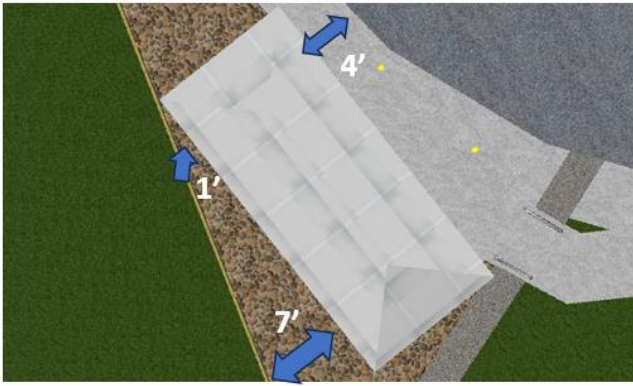
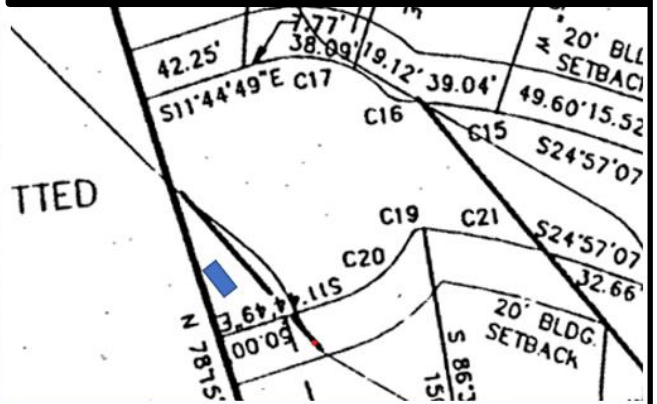
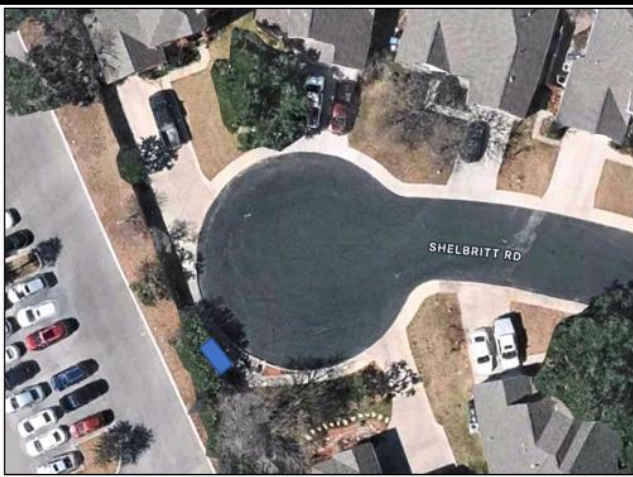
Key information on the mailbox pavilions

- Locations have been cleared by CoSA, USPS and the utility companies. USPS has also agreed to help cover the cost of new CBUs to ensure all CBUs are new and avoid disruption to service.
- Pavilions will be fully equipped with keypad doors, cameras and lights. HOA will also raise the border fence behind the pavilions to the DCRR approved 8ft for perimeter fences. Keypad will turn off at night to prevent any access from 9pm to 5am.
- Traffic impact estimate: east 1 car/hour & west 2-3 cars/hour. Pickup/drop off zones will be established in-front of pavilion to avoid traffic issues for neighboring homes.
- Time to build is approximately 90 days and updated cost is as follows:

- Fence Cost: West \$6,700 & East \$7,000
 - Security Cameras and keypad locks: \$7,600 per pavilion
 - Both pavilions build: \$55,000-\$65,000
 - CBU Replacement: \$16,400
- Total Estimate \$ 100,000 - \$110,000

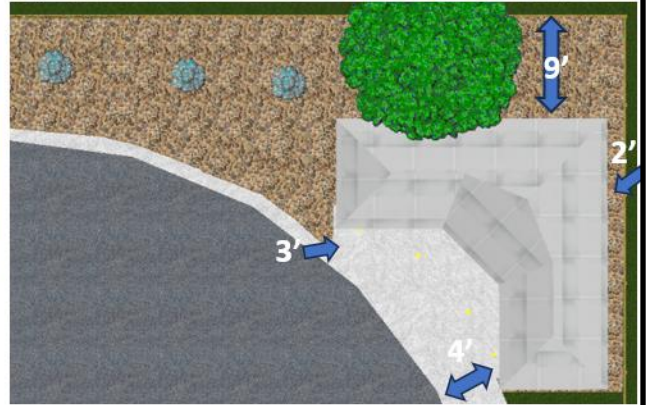
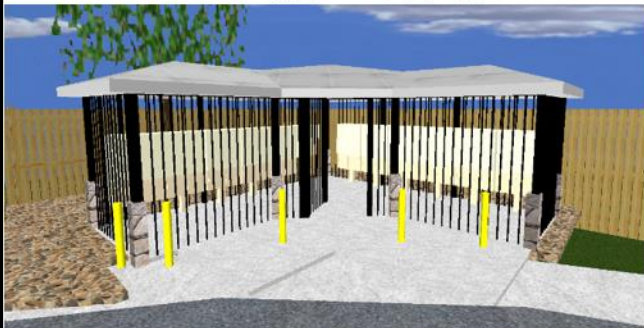
- Impact to Owners: One time \$50 annual fee increase with an 8-year payoff (final cost dependent). The current \$500 annual assessment would go to \$550 in 2025. This is < \$5 impact per month.

East Pavilion- Shelbritt Rd.



7' Depth x 18' Length x 9' Height

West Pavilion- Ascend Terrace



7' Depth x 20' Length x 9' Height

Q & A: Townhalls

Q: How exactly are these thieves breaking into the mailboxes and are the newer boxes safer?

A: With the older rear access mailboxes, the thieves usually force the door open by hand or with a tool and bend the door. For the front access newer mailboxes, while these are stronger, the thieves gain access to the keys used by the postal worker and open them up or according to the post office, they use compressed air and open the locks.



Q: How frequent is this issue?

A: We are experiencing these situations about every two weeks on average. Here are the most recent recorded events:



Q: What are these thieves looking for?

According to SAPD, the thieves target personal financial information such as credit applications and tax information, prescription drugs and packages with items. Most the thieves are usually just carriers who steal from mailboxes and deliver it to individuals who will pay them cash amounts for the mail.

Q: How is the Board involving the community in this decision?

A: **UPDATED** The Board created a mailbox committee during the September Owners Annual meeting and invited all owners to participate. The committee had two teams, one of which was assigned to get signatures to petition the USPS to assist in replacing the CBUs and the other team was assigned to find a viable solution to secure the mailboxes from further theft. The Board took the recommendation from the committee and is now presetting it back to the community through these townhalls to inform the community, answer any questions and gain feedback. Also, the Board sent out an email on 3/11 to ask for alternate solutions that any owner would like considered. All solutions submitted are currently being voted on.

Q: What responsibilities does the Board have for the mailboxes?

A: The USPS has asserted these assets belong to the HOA. Regardless of ownership, Section 4.4 and 4.5 of the DCRR state the Board has a responsibility to protect the assets of common areas. The Board therefore must take appropriate action to stop the theft by securing the mailboxes. More importantly, by allowing this matter to continue, this is encouraging these individuals to come into the neighborhood and look for other opportunities to target such as homes or cars. This has become a significant safety issue.

Q & A: Townhalls

Q. Why can't we just cage the CBUs in their current location?

A: There are 9 CBU locations currently. It would be cost prohibitive to build cages for, run electricity, keypads and cameras to all. Furthermore, ADA requirements prevent the blocking of the sidewalk and require 4' clearance in front of the CBU. The current locations do not have that space.

Q: Who has the committee, or the Board consulted with that can confirm this solution is the best option to secure the mailboxes?

A: The committee and Board have been in communication with the USPS, SAPD and verified this solution with other communities that have taken this approach. The communities that have taken this approach did not have any reported incidents of theft after enclosing the CBUs in secure pavilions. SAPD has confirmed that mail theft is a crime of opportunity. Thieves will move on to select communities that do not offer the mailbox protection.

Q: What support or agreement has been offered by the USPS?

A: The USPS has agreed to cover about half to CBUs in exchange for the HOA covering the other half and installing them all in the new mailbox pavilions. This offer is only available with the condition the HOA moves forward with the pavilions. If the HOA were to keep the status quo and replace only the older mailboxes, the USPS will not provide any support.

Q: How does the cost of these pavilions break down to each household?

A: The cost of this project equates to less than \$5 a month per household. Based on a payoff schedule back to the Reserve Fund of 8 years, each household would see an increase of \$50 next year. Over 8 years this would yield the estimated sufficient funds to replenish the necessary amount in the Reserve Fund.

Q: Why do we need to payback the Reserve Fund?

A: The Reserve Fund is meant to cover future costs of assets the HOA is responsible for. The highest cost is the road project which is every 7 years. The Reserve Fund today has enough to ensure we stay on schedule with the next road maintenance schedule and still cover the pavilions now. However, it must be paid back to ensure roads are covered in the future as well as any other assets the HOA is responsible to replace or repair.

Q. What about the fences behind the pavilions and thieves jumping over them?

A: Based on feedback from the residents near the pavilions, the HOA has agreed they will raise the fence behind the pavilions to the 8'ft allowed by the DCCR for perimeter fences.

Q: How exactly will these pavilions protect the CBUs from getting broken into?

A: The goal design is that the pavilions will be fully encaged so there is no point of entry other than the door which will have keypads with unique codes to each homeowner. The pavilion will also have lights and cameras. Furthermore, the intent will be to program the keypads to only allow access during select hours so it can be turned off from 9pm-5am when crime is most likely to occur. This way, even if there was an attempt to enter with a correct code, the gate would not open. Final design has not been established, but these are the design proposals presented so far.

Q & A: Townhalls

Q: What type of traffic can be expected at each of the pavilion's cul-de-sac?

A: During the Mailbox Surveillance Program, the two CBU locations that were recorded indicated that, despite of the theft and the HOA urging residence to pick up mail daily, only 25-35% of the residents picked up mail on any given day. It also of note, that many of those picking up their mail daily were repeat residents. About 25% of those drove cars and the rest walked. Based on the pavilion distance for many residents, it was estimated the amount driving may increase to about 50%. It was also estimated the average resident will only pick up mail every 4-5 days. With these data points the following traffic was estimated:

East Side with 72 homes

- 50% will drive = 36 cars.
- 25% will pick up mail on a given day= 9 cars
- Break down over 10-hour day= 1 car an hour

West Side with 187 home

- 50% will drive= 94 cars
- 25% will pick up mail on a given day= 24 cars
- Break down over 10-hour day= 2-3 cars an hour

Q: What steps will be taken to mitigate parking issues in front of the pavilions that would impact the adjacent homes?

A: The front area of the property owned by the HOA where the pavilions would be located will be marked as a mail pick up and drop off zone only. This will allow up to three car spaces on the west side pavilion and two space on the east side pavilion. These areas will not encroach on any resident's property fronts or driveways. Adjacent residents will maintain parking in front of their homes for any guests or visitors.

Q: What is the future maintenance cost and who monitors the cameras?

A: **UPDATED** Gate services will monitor access codes. Quotes are still pending but similar solutions show a monthly cost of \$175

Q: Which are the communities that Board of Committee has spoken to verify this pavilion solution does work to stop the theft?

A: Here are three of the ones we have spoken to. All three report zero theft since they engaged their mailboxes.

Harris Ranch



V.J. Vistas



Rampart Crossing



Q & A: Townhalls

Q: Will the Board require the community to vote on this issue?

A: **UPDATED:** Yes, the Board opening the voting between mailbox pavilion solution and other solutions between March 25-April 5.

Q: Why is the Board looking at a \$50 assessments increase in 2025 that will payoff in 8 years versus doing a one-time assessment on owners of \$400? Can an owner select to do the one-time payment instead?

A: The Board is proposing the \$50 option because it lessens the immediate on Owners who may on a very fixed income. The Reserve Fund can support this project as long as it paid back as mentioned before. The Board is not offering both payment options to Owners because this would create an accounting challenge for DAMC to invoice owners different amounts. This would not be feasible for DAMC.

Q: Does the Board have the authority build these pavilions and relocate the mail without a community vote?

A: **UPDATED:** Currently the community is voting on this matter. As with all initiatives, the Board has and will continue to involve the Community. Starting with the Mailbox Special Committee that was open to the whole community, the townhalls open to all the community and finally the option to present alternate solutions sent on 3/11, the Community continues to be engaged to be a part of the solution. The Board does have the authority under section 4.5 of the DCCR to contract a builder to build the pavilions on the proposed Association owned land. This has been verified by the HOA Attorney. The USPS is the authority of mail delivery and they have authorized the use of these pavilions as the point of delivery and they will be the ones to assist the HOA in placing new mailboxes and removing the old mailboxes.

Q: Has a security patrol been considered?

A: Yes, the Board even contacted the next-door plaza (De Zavala Crossing) to see if they would share in the cost. The plaza was not interested, and the cost range was \$30,000 to \$45,000 a year for a single night patrol. This far exceeded operating budget of the HOA.