



Deputation Regarding Community Mailbox System

Date: Monday June 15, 2015

To: Planning and Growth Management Committee

Submitted by: Wendy Komiotis, Executive Director, METRAC

METRAC is a Toronto community-based organization founded in 1984 to prevent violence towards women and youth. This deputation is submitted in response to discussions about Canada Post's announced plans to replace door-to-door home delivery service with a community mailbox system.

For 30 years, METRAC has served as a community safety leader and expert in Toronto and internationally. We focus on building safe neighbourhoods, learning environments and workplaces for all people at risk of gender-based violence. Our Community Safety Audit was recommended by the City of Toronto for implementation across all neighbourhoods and is recognized as a best practice by UN-HABITAT.

In wards where they have been installed, our audit process has identified common safety problems posed by community mailbox systems.

Lighting

- Current community mailbox systems are not located in areas that are well lit, consistently lit and free from obstructions.
- Inadequate lighting creates safety concerns for people who tend to collect their mail at night (e.g. shift workers). Lighting becomes a concern for many more Torontonians in the limited daylight of winter months.

Sightlines

- Community mailbox systems can decrease sightlines, which reduces peoples' sense of safety and tends to increase levels of fear.
- Decreased sightlines make it easier for crime and illegal activities to occur in hiding spots, particularly when combined with inadequate lighting.

Accessibility

- Design and location of community mailbox systems may not be accessible to people of all abilities, bodies and ages (e.g. Torontonians who use wheelchairs, crutches, and scooters).
- As Torontonians grow older, accessibility of services and property will be a growing concern.

Maintenance

- Sidewalk maintenance around community mailbox systems is a challenge (e.g. pavement evenness and curb cuts, ice and snow removal).
- It presents safety and well-being concerns for everyone, especially seniors, people who use mobility devices and parents with strollers.
- Stories of people who sustained injuries retrieving mail have been reported in other municipalities (e.g. www.cbc.ca/news/canada/hamilton/news/man-who-broke-leg-at-super-mailbox-has-a-message-for-canada-post-1.3033098, www.globalnews.ca/news/1118443/woman-hurt-retrieving-mail-worries-about-safety-around-superboxes/).

Garbage/litter and vandalism

- Community mailbox systems may increase garbage and litter as unwanted mail is left in the surrounding area. They may also attract vandalism.
- People can stop using these areas because of mess, which leads to increased isolation and perceptions of fear.
- Stories of increased garbage and litter have been reported in other municipalities (e.g. www.yorkregion.com/news-story/4575875-messy-mailbox-photo-on-twitter-leads-canada-post-to-clean-it-up/).

Crime concerns

- Mail theft is an increased concern with community mailbox systems (e.g. new credit cards, bank cards, personal information).
- Stories of mail theft have been reported in other municipalities (e.g. www.chilliwacktimes.com/news/299932761.html).

Taken together, these concerns make community mailbox systems a challenging option for mail delivery to Toronto residents. The concerns must be addressed in mailbox installation and upkeep to reduce negative ramifications to neighbourhood safety and fear levels. Possible alternatives for the location of community mailbox systems should also be explored, such as high traffic indoor spaces.

Appendix: Example of Scarborough Village Area

Images below were taken at a Safety Audit at Scarborough Village area (Kingston Road and Eglinton Avenue East). Safety concerns include:

- inadequate lighting
- blocked sightlines to the road
- garbage and litter
- uneven pavement and steep slope toward the mailboxes
- snow and ice-clearing challenges
- unreachable top boxes for some community members (e.g. those who use wheelchairs and scooters, little people)

