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The Intelligencer

Residents seeking stamp of approval

By: **HILARY BENTMAN**
The Intelligencer

TEXT SIZE

The mail never gets delivered in Richlandtown. That may be about to change.

Ron Flowers has a mailbox attached to the front of his 125-year-old Victorian home.

He's not sure why; he's never received a single letter.

That's because Flowers lives in Richlandtown, which has no home mail delivery. Instead, residents in the tiny one-quarter square-mile Upper Bucks borough have to rent post office boxes at the Richlandtown Post Office.

The average box costs \$44 a year.

But residents like Flowers are fed up with having to pay for a service others get for free.

Exacerbating the cost is the inconvenience. The Richlandtown Post Office, at Route 212 and Pumping Station Road, is actually in Richland Township, too far or dangerous of a walk for many Richlandtown residents. The office also has only about a dozen parking spaces and can get crowded.

"We have elderly people and they're forced to get in their cars and drive down there," said Flowers.

Two months ago, residents handed a petition of signatures to Richlandtown Council members, asking for help in changing the mail delivery system.

Now, borough and postal service officials are discussing the possibility of instituting cluster box delivery.

Cluster boxes, which are used in new housing subdivisions, are metal structures that can house two dozen mail slots. They would be located around town and postal workers would fill the slots each day. Letters would carry street addresses instead of P.O. box numbers.

While residents would still have to walk to get their mail, it would be closer and they wouldn't have to pay for it.

There are small slivers of Richlandtown that do get home or cluster delivery, said borough manager Joe Geib.

But officials believe Richlandtown never had home delivery borough-wide. Its post office was once located in the center of town and people could walk there easily. But in the early 1990s, it was moved to its current location. Geib estimates Richlandtown residents rent about 400 post office boxes there.

Richlandtown is not the only borough to use the P.O. box system. Cathy Yarosky, spokeswoman for the U.S. Postal Service's Philadelphia District, said it's very common with small rural towns. Most residents in Trumbauersville, for instance, don't get home delivery either and have to rent a box at their post office.

Instituting door-to-door delivery in Richlandtown is not an option because the postal service is no longer adding home delivery routes, said Yarosky.

The postal service views cluster boxes as a more efficient and cost effective way to deliver mail, and that's important, she said, for an organization that lost \$3.8 billion this year and is closing post offices around the country.

There would be a cost associated with installing the cluster boxes. The postal service neither buys nor sets them up, and if Richlandtown switches to this system, the onus could fall on the borough to pay for it.

Richlandtown could choose to pass on the cost to residents, but it would be a one-time fee, said Geib, who is meeting with postal officials to address the delivery issues.

Borough officials would also have to find a place to install the boxes that neither infringes on people's properties nor creates safety issues.

"It's very complicated," said Geib.

As for the postal service charging for P.O. boxes (the cost of which varies depending on size and location), Yarosky said it's a moneymaker.

"The postal service receives no tax dollars and the only way we can stay in business is the sale of our products and services," she said.

If and when Richlandtown gets cluster boxes, residents could still choose to keep their P.O. boxes if they prefer.

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