

Mail Delivery Could Be On Its Way

RICHLANDTOWN

Each weekday, weather permitting, Helen Refsnider walks a mile just to pick up her mail.

Then she walks the mile home.

The 86-year-old says it keeps her in shape but she'd rather get her mail like most people, at the curb of her house or in a cluster box nearby.

"I'm an old lady," she said, as she folded up her mail and prepared to make the trek home.

In the near future, Refsnider won't have to travel so far for her correspondence.

Richlandtown officials and the U.S. Postal Service have made progress on bringing curbside and cluster box mail delivery to the tiny Upper Bucks town.

The two sides are still ironing out the details.

"We're not there yet," said Richlandtown Manager Joe Geib.

Last month, a meeting between borough officials and the Postal Service produced a tentative plan to initiate curbside delivery on the less busy side streets and cluster boxes for the more heavily traveled thoroughfares like Main Street (Route 212).

Most Richlandtown residents have never had home delivery. Instead they rent post office boxes at the Richlandtown Post Office, which actually is in Richland.

A box costs about \$44 a year.

Exacerbating the cost is the inconvenience of having to pick up the mail each day. Over the years, residents have lobbied for a change.

Curbside delivery is used in more rural areas. Mailboxes are placed at the curb of

properties so carriers can deliver letters from their truck.

Traffic and parking along Richlandtown's Main Street makes this kind of delivery impossible, said Geib.

Cluster boxes are metal structures with a couple of dozen mail slots. Used primarily in housing developments, postal workers fill the slots each day.

These boxes could be placed in several locations around Richlandtown.

Rod Bealer was pleased to hear progress has been made. Bealer doesn't mind driving to the post office. What he does find offensive is that small sections of Richlandtown are served by home or cluster delivery, meaning they get their mail for free.

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One area is literally yards from his Main Street home. From his window Bealer has a clear view of a cluster box serving a decade-old townhouse development on Windsor Court.

"It's not right that we get charged for our post office box," he said.

The borough and the post office must still decide on the location of the cluster boxes and how many slots will be needed, especially since some residential properties are divided into multiple units and some residents may want to retain their P.O. boxes.

Some Richlandtown residents say they like the security that the post office provides. One woman, entering the post office on Tuesday, said she doesn't have to worry about people snooping through her mail.

Officials must also determine who will pay for the cluster boxes - will the borough bear some or all of the expense or will the one-time cost be passed on to residents?

Homeowners eligible for curbside delivery would have to supply their own mailboxes.

Before any decisions are reached, Richlandtown plans to hold a public meeting to discuss the matter and gather input from the community.

The Postal Service stands to lose money if people cancel their post office boxes. Carriers would also be needed for the new route.

Cathy Yarosky, spokeswoman for the U.S. Postal Service's Philadelphia District, said it is too soon to know the impact of any change.

Officials believe Richlandtown never had home delivery borough-wide. Its post office was once in the center of town and people could walk there easily. But in the early 1990s, it was moved. Geib has previously estimated Richlandtown residents rent about 400 post office boxes there.

Hilary Bentman can be reached at 215-538-6380 or hbentman@phillyBurbs.com

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