

**CITY COUNCIL  
COMMUNICATION:**

**03-215**

**AGENDA:**

MAY 5, 2003

**SUBJECT:**

MAILBOX  
STANDARDS FOR  
RESIDENCES  
RECEIVING  
CURBSIDE MAIL  
DELIVERY

**TYPE:**

**RESOLUTION  
ORDINANCE  
RECEIVE/FILE**

**SUBMITTED BY:**

WILLIAM G. STOWE  
PUBLIC WORKS  
DIRECTOR

**ITEM 57**

**OFFICE OF THE CITY MANAGER  
CITY OF DES MOINES, IOWA**

**SYNOPSIS —**

A number of residents have constructed substantial mailbox structures in the right-of-way which may constitute a hazard to traffic and an impediment to snow removal. Staff recommends ordinance modification defining that a mailbox be supported by a wooden post no greater than a cross section of four (4) inches square or a post with a strength no greater than a two (2) inch diameter standard steel pipe.

**FISCAL IMPACT —**

None.

**RECOMMENDATION —**

**Approval.**

**BACKGROUND —**

During the snow event of February 14, 2003, a Public Works snow plow operator struck a custom-built brick mailbox located at 3416 Rose Avenue. An investigation of the structure at that location and several other custom-built mailboxes in Des Moines revealed that due to their location and construction, they may constitute a hazard to snow removal vehicles. Furthermore, by their location in close proximity to the driven portion of the roadway, custom-built mailboxes constitute a hazard to the motoring public. Consequently, it is being recommended that a provision be included in the Municipal Code to limit custom made mailboxes to the equivalent strength of a wooden 4 x 4 inch post or a 2 inch diameter standard steel post.

The United States Postal Service reports that 11,303 residents in Des Moines have curbside delivery of mail. The Iowa Department of Transportation's web site lists statistics related to fixed objects being struck by motor vehicles. Their information for Polk County for the years 1995 through 1999 revealed that 182 crashes with mailboxes took place, resulting in 52 injury accidents and 130 property damage accidents. Of the 52 injury accidents there were a total of 76 injuries, 7 of which were major. Based on these results

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and those recently experienced by a City of Des Moines snow plow operator on Rose Avenue, it appears necessary to limit the size of mailboxes erected in the right-of-way.

Staff recommends that Municipal Code Section 102-596 DEFINITIONS, be modified to provide the following clarification:

The following words, terms and phrases, when used in this article, shall have the meanings ascribed to them in this section, except where the context clearly indicates a different meaning:

*Breakaway mailbox* means a mailbox approved by the U.S. Postal Service and used for the curbside delivery of mail, which is supported by a wood post no greater in cross section than 4 inches square or by a metal post with a strength no greater than a standard 2 inch diameter steel pipe. Two such posts may be used to support a cluster of four or more mailboxes.

It is also recommended that after July 1, 2003, the City's responsibility for damage to mailboxes upon public property be limited to replacement of the damaged mailbox by the City with a breakaway mailbox of standard size and color selected by the City.

