

CLINTON COUNTY HIGHWAY DEPARTMENT

736 ROUTE 3, PLATTSBURGH, NEW YORK 12901

TEL. (518) 565-4040 - FAX (518) 563-8068



Karl T. Weiss, P.E. ~ Highway Superintendent

Engineering

David Langlois

William Sweet

Administration

Lisa Garrand

Holly Pellerin

Accounting

Sheri Pavone

Lori Evangelisto

Mailbox Policy for Clinton County Roadways

(December, 2020)

For convenience and practicality, mailbox installations have been allowed within the right-of-way of Clinton County's public highways; however, it is important to recognize that such installations have two very important conditions:

1. The mailbox must be installed in accordance with applicable standards to ensure that mail can be delivered and that the mailbox does not create an obstacle or safety hazard to those that use or maintain the highway, and
2. The mailbox is installed entirely at the owner's risk. In other words, if the mailbox incurs damage during any sort of highway operations or maintenance, the property owner is not entitled to replacement or compensation. In fact, if the mailbox was not installed in accordance with the applicable standards, the owner may even be held liable for injuries or damages that may have been incurred as a result.

Mailbox design and installation standards are available from several sources, and mailbox owners are expected to consult this information prior to undertaking any mailbox installation or replacement. The following standards have nationwide relevance and were developed in cooperation with one another:

- The United States Postal Service (USPS) Mailbox Guidelines. The USPS defines the standards for mailbox construction, as well as the placement tolerance that must be met to accommodate postal operations. Specifics may be obtained from your local post office or online at:
<https://www.usps.com/manage/mailboxes.htm>
- American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials (AASHTO) Roadside Design Guide. The AASHTO Roadside Design Guide, Chapter 11: *Erecting Mailboxes on Streets and Highways* deals with the safety and construction of privately owned mailboxes, mailbox supports, and mailbox turnout designs and is less focused on postal operations. This publication may be obtained online through the AASHTO Bookstore at:
https://bookstore.transportation.org/Item_details.aspx?id=1807

In addition, if the mailbox is to be installed in an area with sidewalks, it is important to recognize that the sidewalks must continue to comply with ADA requirements:

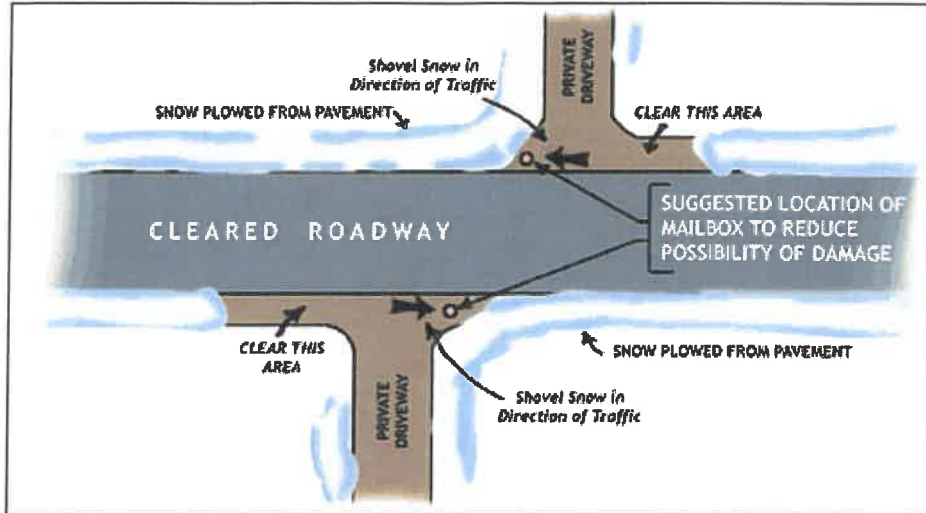
- American Disabilities Act (ADA). The most current version of the ADA Standards for Accessible Design set forth the minimum requirements to ensure facilities are readily accessible to and usable by individuals with disabilities.
<http://www.ada.gov/regs2010/2010ADAStandards/2010ADAstandards.htm#c4>

The Clinton County Highway Department has developed this policy to promote compliance with these national standards and to help further clarify the expectations and responsibilities of Clinton County mailbox owners. Such compliance helps us ensure that we continue to provide safe, efficient and accessible highways for all. The following pages further specify the details associated with mailbox height, location, offset, and post type to minimize the potential hazards and conflicts associated with mailbox installations and to reduce the opportunities for damage to mailboxes.

Mailbox Installation Standards

General Location:

Whenever possible, your mailbox should be located after your driveway opening. This location placement improves visibility, minimizes the amount of snow that comes off the snowplow, and improves the approach for your mail carrier. The diagram below further clarifies this preferred placement:



Mailbox Support Design:

In many cases, it is best to use an extended arm type of post with a free-swinging suspended mailbox. This allows snowplows to sweep near or under boxes without damage to supports and provides easy access to the boxes by carrier and customers. The following picture shows a free-swinging suspended mailbox:



In addition, note the strategic placement of the red reflector on the point closest to the road. This will help your local plow driver see and avoid your mailbox during winter storms.

Offset:

Mailboxes should be set back from the edge of the shoulder – regardless of whether the shoulder is gravel or paved. In other words, the face of the mailbox should be at least **one foot (1')** back from the edge of the normally plowed surface of the highway or the face of curb. Greater offset distances are encouraged whenever possible to allow the mail carrier to get further out of traffic and to further minimize potential damage to your mailbox. The following picture shows a mailbox with a reasonable offset:



Mailboxes in sidewalk areas should follow above guidelines for Offset as well as **leave at least 36" behind the back of the box or the post**, whichever is located the furthest from the road.



Height:

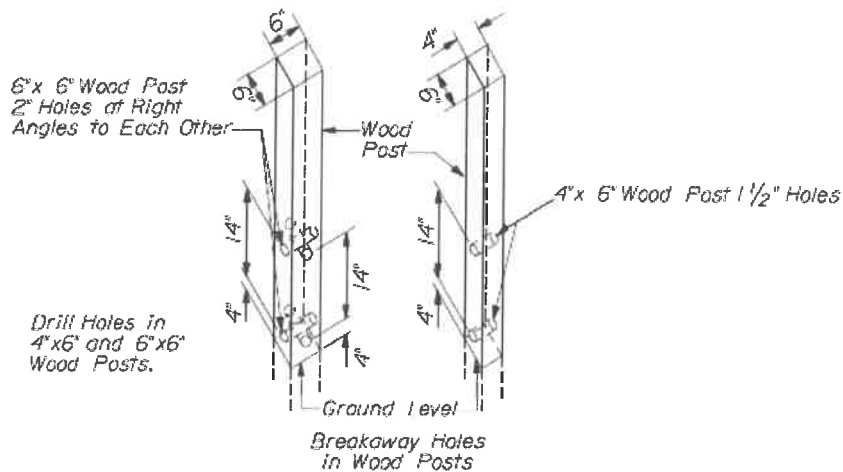
According to USPS standards, a mailbox must be installed with the bottom of the mailbox located between 41" and 45" high above the surface of the highway shoulder. We recommend that this height be closer to the 45" measurement to minimize conflict with the height of the plow truck wing when snow is being pushed back during, or between, winter storms. The following picture further clarifies the height considerations:



Post Size, Type and Embedment:

Mailbox posts must be sturdy enough to hold up the mailbox in all types of weather conditions; however, they cannot be so rugged that they present a hazard to vehicles that inadvertently leave the road. If a mailbox support is struck by a vehicle, it must easily break away. Therefore, the following types of posts are deemed acceptable:

- **4" x 4" wooden posts** embedded **2 feet** into the ground. Larger wooden posts (4" x 6" or 6" x 6") may be used only if the post is drilled through with an appropriate spade bit to create a shear plane. The following diagram indicates the necessary holes and spacing.



- **1" to 2" round diameter steel or aluminum pipe or standard U-channel post embedded 2 feet into the ground.**
- Unacceptable mailbox supports include anything that is filled with concrete, masonry and stone structures, heavy steel structures, and most objects that were intended for other uses (e.g. antique plows, I-beams, and various other household tools and objects).

Clinton County Highway Department **Policy on Mailbox Damage**

It is understood that mailboxes must be placed in the highway right-of-way; however, this does not grant homeowners any legal rights in the highway when needed for highway purposes. According to Section 319 of the New York State Highway Law, mailboxes are considered highway obstructions and are only "allowed" in the right-of-way as a convenience to the owner as it is understood they are required for mail delivery. Additionally, an opinion issued by the Attorney General on February 28, 1966 stated, "When the necessity of keeping the highway open conflicts with an individual's reception of the mail, the later must stand aside." Under the law, a homeowner could even be required to remove the mailbox.

Regrettably, in extreme winter conditions, mailboxes can be damaged during snow removal because they are installed too close to the road in the highway right-of-way as a courtesy to the US Postal Service. In most cases, damage is a result of the force of snow coming off a plow's blade. This scenario is dependent on weather conditions, amount of snowfall, and the weight of snow. County Highway crews do their best to avoid mailboxes, but often times visibility, oncoming traffic and heavy snow work against them. At times, a County plow will accidentally hit and damage a mailbox.

During and after snow events, the Highway Department receives phone calls regarding damage to mailboxes. Such damage is not done intentionally. It is an unfortunate consequence of snow removal with heavy equipment in challenging weather conditions. The best method to protect your mailbox during the winter months is to ensure it is properly attached to the post and to keep the mailbox assembly simple to limit impact surface area from plowed snow. The Highway Department recommends that homeowners check their mailboxes, newspaper boxes and the supporting posts in the Fall: perform the "shake test". If the post is already "shaky", chances are the post is unstable in the ground, and will not withstand the pressure of flying snow. Additionally, check your mailbox for loose or missing parts before winter.

Regarding the County replacing damaged mailboxes, it must be pointed out that there is no statutory or legal authority requiring the County to do so. If a County plow directly hits and damages a mailbox, the County will replace the mailbox with a standard issue black metal box and a single 4x4 post if the current mailbox or post cannot be repaired. The County is not responsible for replacing designer boxes, posts or any style newspaper box. (If you have such a box, you may want to consider removing it for the winter months and replace with standard box.) Boxes need to be installed per US Postal Service Regulations. If a mailbox is damaged from snow coming off a plow blade, the County will not replace the mailbox.

How can you determine how your mailbox was damaged? Typically, if a mailbox is pushed over and has no impact marks, it was probably knocked over by the weight of the snow coming off the plow's blade. If the mailbox or post shows evidence of an impact, it may have been struck by a plow blade or a passing vehicle. The angle at which a mailbox has fallen also helps to determine the source of damage.

If you believe the Highway Department is responsible for damage to your mailbox, please call the highway department at 518-565-4040.