

**HOUSING AUTHORITY OF THE CITY OF LOS ANGELES
INTEROFFICE MEMORANDUM**

TO: HACLA Board of Commissioners

FROM: Marisela Ocampo, Director of Housing Services *MO*

THROUGH: Douglas Guthrie, President and CEO *Douglas Guthrie*

DATE: August 18, 2020

SUBJECT: USPS Mandated Transition to Centralized Mailboxes at Mar Vista Gardens Update

Background

The Culver City branch of the United States Postal Service (USPS), which currently services the Mar Vista Gardens public housing development (Mar Vista Gardens), has informed the Housing Authority of the City of Los Angeles (HACLA) that it is mandating the conversion from a historical door-to-door mail delivery model to nine (9) centralized mail boxes on a 601 unit, 43-acre property for residents to pick up their mail. Initially, the USPS was proposing 17 centralized mailboxes due to the size of Mar Vista Gardens but reduced the number to 9 with no justification. USPS also informed HACLA that if we did not agree to the centralized mailboxes at Mar Vista Gardens, they would install the centralized mailboxes outside of the property. Since the inception of Mar Vista Gardens in 1954, mail has been delivered to each residents' door daily.

Mar Vista is comprised of 1,824 low-income tenants of which 257 (14%) are seniors and 168 (9%) are disabled. The effect of this action would create a negative disparate impact on our residents and target a low-income community of color with an over 80% Hispanic and 15% Black population.

HACLA's belief is that this substantial change in mail delivery will create more barriers to all our residents and specifically to our senior and disabled population during the already catastrophic COVID-19 pandemic. This change is being mandated by USPS during a time when our vulnerable residents are struggling to pay their rent, losing their employment and health insurance, and fearful of becoming infected with COVID-19. Maintaining centralized locations for mail collection will necessitate community gathering, thus increasing the risk of virus transmission, at a time when all of our local and state health officials are mandating physical distancing requirements to be maintained and asking the public to minimize unnecessary outings.

While HACLA owns and manages 14 public housing developments with over 6,400 units in the City of Los Angeles, the USPS is the sole post office that has initiated this mandated conversion to any of our public housing properties. HACLA requested that USPS engage

with the residents prior to initiating this conversion and they reiterated to HACLA that the USPS resident engagement would only occur after installing the centralized mailboxes. USPS justification for the mandated conversion are alleged dog bites and “harassment” to their carriers. However, USPS continues to inform HACLA of alleged issues after the fact and provides vague information which provides HACLA with a limited opportunity to follow up. HACLA continues to work with residents to ensure that dogs are registered and on a leash.

On August 4, 2020, HACLA met with Claudia Aragon, from Congresswoman Karen Bass’ Office and USPS representatives Roderick Strong, Postmaster and Dennis Powels, Manager. During this meeting, USPS agreed to engage with Mar Vista residents on the mandated conversion.

Resident Engagement on August 13, 2020

The resident engagement meeting was held through a GoToMeeting. Participants included Postmaster Roderick Strong, Mar Vista residents, Claudia Aragon from Congresswoman Karen Bass’ Office and Nick Sundback and Matthew Teclé from Council Member Mike Bonin’s office. Also in attendance was the Los Angeles Times staffer Emily Alpert Reyes and HACLA staff. There were over 56 participants on the GoToMeeting.

Mar Vista residents strongly opposed the proposed transition during the meeting and expressed concerns that they felt discriminated upon, that the proposal is detrimental especially to senior/disabled residents, that they did not understand why Mar Vista was being targeted specifically and why this was being mandated during the COVID-19 pandemic. Other residents expressed concerns that this was being mandated intentionally during a time when mail delivery is of critical importance due to the presidential elections. There was an especially poignant comment by a resident who is blind and has a child with asthma and she expressed deep health concerns on how she would navigate this type of change during the pandemic.

Next Steps

During the meeting, Mr. Strong stated that he would consider resident comments and confer with HACLA on “next steps”. Mr. Strong also expressed that the USPS would do nothing “drastic” and that they would not place the mailboxes on the streets as an alternative. Additionally, the residents have informed HACLA management that they will protest at the USPS office and begin a petition to oppose the transition. HACLA will continue to keep you informed.