

Salem News You Don't Get in *The Salem News*

220 Incidents involving homeless individuals in one month, March 1-31, 2026

March numbers are in, and there's both good news and bad news. The good news: There were no reported stabbings. The bad news: There were an average of seven police responses to unhoused individuals every day. Responses for Medical Aid were way up, arrests and larcenies increased, and no one knows exactly how many unhoused residents are living in the city.

The largest number of responses, 105, were for Medical Aid. This is understandable in a cold and snowy month. What's not understandable is why **Lifebridge** is not better equipped or prepared to serve its clients in need of medical help. There were 34 police responses to Lifebridge and an additional 42 to Margin Street. That's about 72 percent of the medical responses to a very small radius around the shelter. Our taxpayer-supported police, fire, and emergency services responded to the calls. --Joanne Mattera

105 Medical Aid responses

Including two overdoses, two suicidal persons, and four mental health crises

Lifebridge and adjacent responses

34 to the **Lifebridge** complex, including one each at the Christopher Columbus club, the Canal Street overflow shelter, and the Lifebridge Thriftshop

42 to **Margin Street** around Lifebridge

Additional responses

7 at the Salem Police Department
2 at Riley Plaza
2 at Salem Depot
2 at Salem House of Pizza, Endicott Street

One each to

Burger King, Highland Avenue
Domino's Pizza, Canal Street
Kwik Shop, Jefferson Avenue
Lincoln Apartments, Lafayette Street
Salem Hospital Emergency Department
Salem Public Library
Shaw's Supermarket, Highland Avenue
Steve's Market, Margin Street
Witch City Mall

One each to redacted addresses on

Boston Street
Essex Street
Highland Avenue

Lafayette Street
Mill Street
North Street
Washington Street

37 Loiterings

Typically the police are called when a police-described "uninvited/unwanted guest" lingers on the premises, making customers or residents feel uncomfortable or threatened, or the loitering individuals return after being asked to leave

Multiple calls

Margin Street, 14 times
Washington Street, three times
Hampton Inn, Washington Street, twice
Walgreen's, New Derby Street, twice

One each to

Domino's Pizza, Canal Street
E Market, Norman Street
Howling Wolf Tacqueria, Derby Street
Lifebridge
Salem Hospital Emergency Department
T-Mobile, Washington Street
Wendy's, Lafayette Street
Witch City Mall

If Lifebridge is set up to serve unhoused persons, how is an unhoused person considered to be loitering?

Loitering, continued

One each to these redacted addresses

Becket Street
Carol Way
Charter Street
High Street
Laurel Street
New Derby Street
North Street
Trader's Way

21 Well-Being Checks

Margin Street, three times
Essex Street, twice
Riley Plaza, twice

One each at these venues

The Cove at Salem, Bridge Street
CVS, Essex Street Mall
Domino's Pizza, Canal Street
E Market, Norman Street
Lafayette Park
Lifebridge
Market Basket, Highland Avenue
Ropes Mansion
Shetland Park
South Harbor Garage
Walgreen's, New Derby Street

One each to these redacted addresses

Derby/Congress Street
Lafayette/Hancock Street
Norman/Chestnut Street

9 Suspicious persons

Lifebridge (former Christopher Columbus club)

North Shore Bank, Lafayette Street
Riley Plaza
TD Bank, Loring Avenue
YMCA
Bridge Street
Essex/Highland Street
Lafayette/Lauren Street
Washington Street

6 Arrests

Lincoln Apartments, Lafayette Street
High/Gedney Street
Howard Street
Margin Street
Riley Plaza
Salem Street

6 Disputes

Lifebridge, three times
Margin Street
Riley Plaza
McDonald's, Trader's Way

6 Larcenies

Lifebridge, three times
Derby Street
Margin Street
North Street Shell Station

5 Disturbances

Lifebridge
Boston Street
Lafayette Street
Margin Street
Salem Hospital Emergency Department

4 Shopliftings

CVS, Essex Street Mall, twice
Steve'sMarket, Margin Street
Steve's Liquors, Gedney Street

3 Drunk Individuals

Wendy's, Lafayette Street
Witch City Mall
High Street

3 Trespassings

Witch City Mall, twice
Margin Street

2 Fights

Margin/High Street
Riley Plaza

2 Domestic incidents

North Street, twice

2 Harassments

Lifebridge
Congress Street

2 Keeping the Peace

Washington Street, twice

2 Protective custodies

North Street
Perkins Street

**One each of
Assault**
Witch City Mall

Fraud/Scam
Lifebridge

Lost and Found
Lifebridge

Suspicious item
Walmart

Unknown problem
YMCA

CIU Reports

In addition to the 220 police responses, there were 14 Community Impact Unit reports generated by the Police Department. Although I have requested more specific information from the SPD, it has not been forthcoming. I do know, having spoken to Sgt. Sean Andrus, who leads the effort, that the CIU reaches out proactively to help unhoused individuals as well as responding to negative situations.

Some Takeaways

. The number of incidents is growing monthly. Certainly some of the numbers have to do with the snow and cold in March. Is this due to an increased number of unhoused people in the city? See sidebar, right

. The incidents on Margin and other streets around Lifebridge have increased. Lifebridge residents we have spoken with say this is in part because the (largely inexperienced) staff encourages clients to “take it outside”

. Police responses are also directed to open-to-the-public buildings. In March it was the Salem Public Library and the YMCA; in previous months, the Post Office

. The number of businesses affected by shoplifting, larceny, and loitering is increasing. How long will it be before the Downtown markets and liquor store call it quits? CVS and Walgreen’s are targets for shoplifting. You may think that large chains can absorb the loss—and maybe they can—but when thefts reach critical mass, management begins to place items

behind locked plexiglass barriers. You think the checkout line is long now? Wait until you must wait for a salesperson to unlock the Advil or shaving cream before you go stand in line to pay

. Are you sending an adolescent child to pick up the pizza you ordered or a last-minute item at a convenience store? Maybe think again

. Why does Lifebridge not have 24/7 security to manage unruly clients and a 24/7 medical staff to administer everything from Narcan to CPR to stitching up a cut, rather than relying on Salem’s taxpayer-supported municipal services?

What is the Homeless Population of Salem?

With 220 police responses to homeless activity in one month, I tried to find out the homeless population of Salem. My first outreach was to Capt. John Burke of the Salem Police Department. He responded swiftly but with no real numbers: “We have so many new people cycling in and out of the city that it is difficult to estimate,” he said. “In years past, we knew pretty close to the exact number how many were homeless, but not now.”

So, more than in the past, but no definitive number.

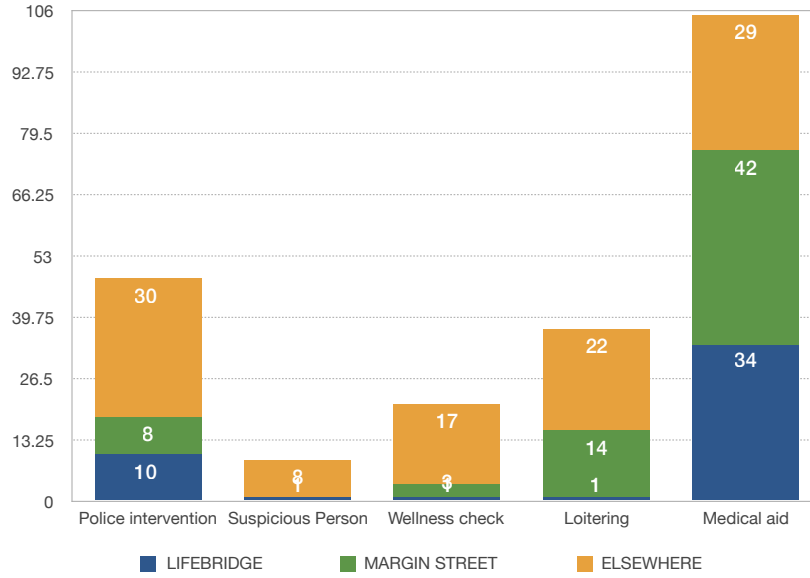
My next outreach was to Mayor Pangallo. In my email to him on Thursday, April 9, I asked: “Can you give me an estimate of how many unhoused people are living in Salem, and if this number is higher than in previous months?”

He has not responded.

Let’s extrapolate from what we do have. As noted, there were police responses to 220 incidents in March. Let’s assume there are law-abiding folks who live at the shelter, as well as unhoused folks living elsewhere who do not provoke a police response. We may then assume that either a few people were the cause of multiple police responses or that there were a couple hundred unhoused people, primarily in Downtown Salem, in the month of March. Either way, these numbers are staggering for our small city center. And we can expect the numbers to increase in the warm weather.

If the mayor responds or if I can get more specific numbers from the SPD, I will report. --JM

INCIDENTS BY LOCATION: MARCH 1-31, 2026



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	LIFEBRIDGE	MARGIN STREET	ELSEWHERE	TOTAL INCIDENTS
POLICE INTERVENTION	10	8	30	48
SUSPICIOUS PERSON	1	0	8	9
WELLNESS CHECK	1	3	17	21
LOITERING	1	14	22	37
MEDICAL AID	34	42	29	105
TOTAL BY LOCATION	47	67	106	220

SOURCE: Salem Police Dept. Terms as used by SPD.

Infograph courtesy GESNA/ONOH.