

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

54 incidents involving homeless individuals in one week, August 1-7, 2025

Welcome to another monthly installment of *Salem News You Don't Get in "The Salem News."* The information in this article comes directly from the Salem Police Department's Case Incident report, obtained under the state's right-to-know law. The numbers for the first week of this month are higher than at any time since I started reporting—**54 police responses** to a variety of events involving the unhoused residents of Salem.

I have organized and annotated the information so that you can see the problems generated by our unhoused, and often transient, population. The point is not to demonize individuals but to be aware of how their actions impact our city. It is difficult to say whether this significant jump in incidents is because unhoused folks are more visible in the warmer weather or because there's a steady influx of unhoused people coming into the city to take advantage of the parks and woods for shelter, of the money they can make panhandling, or to be part of the existing homeless community. Whatever the reason, the number of incidents reported by the SPD is growing.

With five months to look at—March, April, June, July, and now August—we see that in the first week of each month there were, respectively, 33, 32, 41, 44 and 54 events in which the police were called. Extrapolating from the first week of August, the entire month could see over 200 police responses to this one community. All reports are viewable online. (Links at end.)

The same issues are repeated in greater or lesser number each month, however it's worth noting there was an increase in the number of arrests this month (three) and a greater use of the city's public parks, which reduces the likelihood of others availing themselves of these spaces. Incidents involving unhoused people—most of whom are not originally Salem residents—are concentrated Downtown. Riley Plaza, Charlotte Forten Park, and Margin Street in the vicinity of Lifebridge appear repeatedly as loci for police calls, as well as the pedestrian section of Essex Street, which houses many businesses, including the Peabody Essex Museum. What's new this month are police responses to the Salem Green, Collins Cove Playground, Salem Willows Park, and the Visitor Center across from the PEM. No other

specific group of residents engenders as many police responses.

Statistics for August 1-7

. 15 Incidents of Loitering

In the language of police reports, loitering is described as "Unwanted Guests." These are folks who make themselves comfortable on the property of a homeowner, renter, or business. The police are called when a person is asked to move along but refuses, or when an owner or tenant feels unsafe asking loiterers to move, particularly if drugs are involved.

Police responded to three complaints at PEM locations—two to the museum itself and one to the Crowninshield-Bentley House on the PEM campus; as well as individual calls to the Collins Cove Playground, the Derby Restaurant on Washington Street, Eastern Bank on Central Ave, Hendrick Manufacturing on Commercial Street, Salem Green, Walgreens on New Derby, and Wendy's on Lafayette. Additionally, calls were made to addresses (redacted for privacy to owners) on Canal, Derby, Dodge, Lafayette, and May Streets.

.10 Requests for Medical Aid

Police could have been called for anything from a scrape or a fall to more serious physical issues like administering Narcan for an overdose. Eight of the incidents requiring medical aid were treated on scene at Riley Plaza, Dunkin Donuts, the Lifebridge Thrift Store, Speedway on Derby Street, and in front of redacted addresses on Butler, Jefferson, and Lafayette Streets.

Two incidents required an ambulance or drop off to Salem Hospital's Emergency Department: one person experiencing a mental health episode on Church Street, and a redacted situation in the Lifebridge area of Margin Street.

. 9 Well-being Checks

Well-being checks are typically called in by neighbors or friends of the unhoused person, or by someone in an establishment where a person is found sleeping, high, or unresponsive. Police responded to unhoused people at the Salem Public Library, Salem Willows Park, Furlong Park, and in front of redacted addresses at Derby, Gedney, Essex, Jackson, Proctor, and Washington Streets.

. 5 Disturbances

Typically a Disturbance is a loud argument or physical fight. Police may be summoned, or they may come upon such an event in the course of their patrol. Disturbances took place at Riley Plaza, the Margin Street area near Lifebridge, Old Town Hall, Forten Park, and the CVS on the pedestrian section of Essex Street.

. 4 Suspicious persons

What makes a person suspicious? That's a subjective assessment, as we all rely on observation, instinct, and a perception of fear. In the first week of this month, police responded to calls at Salem Depot, the Sofi apartment complex near Salem Station, Salem Willows Park, and on Loring Avenue.

. 3 Arrests

Specific information about these arrests would require additional requests for information, so here I can tell you only that arrests were made at Riley Plaza, Red Line Café, and at or near a redacted address on New Derby Street. One of these was an arrest warrant.

. 2 Disputes

While a disturbance typically involves yelling

and, often, a physical altercation, a dispute does not typically come to blows. Police report that a dispute is usually about money owed or property believed to be misplaced or taken. The caller may be an aggrieved party, or the dispute may be witnessed in the course of a police patrol.

. 1 Mutual Aid

This type of response assists another law enforcement agency. Here an SPD officer helped a Park Ranger remove an unhoused person who was sleeping on the grounds of the Visitor Center on New Liberty Street.

Other Incidents

- 1 **Assault** at Charlotte Forten Park
- 1 **Domestic event** at a redacted location
- 1 **Suspicious item** found at Auto Zone
- 1 **Traffic stop** on Bridge Street
- 1 **Trespassing** event at a redacted address on Lafayette Street

Additional reports by the Community Impact Unit and Directed Patrol officers

The **Community Impact Unit, or CIU**, is the dedicated police unit that reaches out to members of the homeless community in Salem. While specifics are not available to me for this report to you, I have been told by Chief Miller's office that the CIU report is a daily log that tracks the activities and situations of many of the homeless individuals who are known to members of the CIU. It is a proactive initiative aimed at helping those who wish to be helped and assisting those who are unable to advocate for themselves.

In a similar vein, the officers on **Directed Patrol** or **Special Assignment** keep an eye on the homeless community, looking to defuse potential situations and to call for backup as needed. Their patrols on foot or on bike take them to the various parks and locations where homeless people congregate.

In the first week of August, the CIU issued four reports; Directed Patrol and/Special Assignment officers each issued one. I have no access to these reports, so I cannot tell you how many additional incidents are noted, however it is safe to say that the actions recorded in these reports would bring the total number of incidents to well over 60 in the first seven days of this month.

Lifebridge assumes no responsibility

for its clients when they are not on premises. Nor does it have its own security personnel. This leaves the surrounding neighborhoods—residents, businesses, and of course, the Salem Police—to deal with problems created by homeless individuals.

In a Letter to the Editor that appeared in the July 30 issue of *The Salem News*, Rob Lutts, a downtown business owner, decries the lack of action by city government in moving homeless activity out of a major business district. He writes: "My company has made the decision to move out of Salem this fall. We have been a taxpaying business in Salem for more than 40 years that has created 17 professional jobs in Salem. We are sorry to leave, but when the safety of our staff and clients requires us to lock our doors full time, there is clearly something wrong. Wake up, City Hall, you have a problem right behind your office."

In response, Joe Cultrera, a GESNA member and the founder of the Salem Film Fest, one of the city's pre-eminent socially conscious cultural events, asks, "Am I going out on a limb to suggest that trading a business for more panhandling is not a good deal for Salem?"

Not all incidents noted were the fault of residents of Lifebridge, but that facility is the magnet attracting ever more unhoused individuals to Salem. Of significant concern is that many, whether at Lifebridge or not, suffer from untreated mental illness and/or substance abuse. More of the kinds of offenses noted in this report—and others more serious—will take place as ever more unhoused people take up residence here.

There are solutions

"What is being offered by Lifebridge is a congregate shelter and minimal services. An expansion would be a much bigger version of what's already a failure here," says GESNA member, Edward Sacco. With 40 years of experience developing community housing and services for formerly institutionalized persons with disabilities and mental health diagnoses, Sacco advocates an array of cost-effective services, from case management to subsidized apartments to small group living arrangements--all with professional services tailored to each person's needs. "Bigger is always the least effective and most expensive choice," he says.

Additional reading

. Homelessness in Salem: Voices from the GESNA Neighborhood and Beyond

https://img1.wsimg.com/blobby/go/79610166-405f-4f82-8cf8-098e13a7e299/onoh%20news_voices_aug2025.pdf

. Statistics for July 1-6

https://img1.wsimg.com/blobby/go/79610166-405f-4f82-8cf8-098e13a7e299/onoh%20news_incidents_july2025.pdf

. Statistics for June 1-7

https://img1.wsimg.com/blobby/go/79610166-405f-4f82-8cf8-098e13a7e299/onoh%20news_incidents_june2025.pdf

. Statistics for April 1-6

https://img1.wsimg.com/blobby/go/79610166-405f-4f82-8cf8-098e13a7e299/The%20News%20you%20dont%20get%20April%2024_2025.pdf

. Statistics for March 1-7

https://img1.wsimg.com/blobby/go/79610166-405f-4f82-8cf8-098e13a7e299/onoh%20news_incidents_mar2025.pdf

. An Inside Look at Lifebridge, May 2025

<https://img1.wsimg.com/blobby/go/79610166-405f-4f82-8cf8-098e13a7e299/Inside%20Lifebridge-may2025.pdf>

. Senior citizen accosted

https://img1.wsimg.com/blobby/go/79610166-405f-4f82-8cf8-098e13a7e299/interview_camarda_july2024.pdf

. Visit our website & GESNA Facebook page

www.gesna-salem.com

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/1296570384>

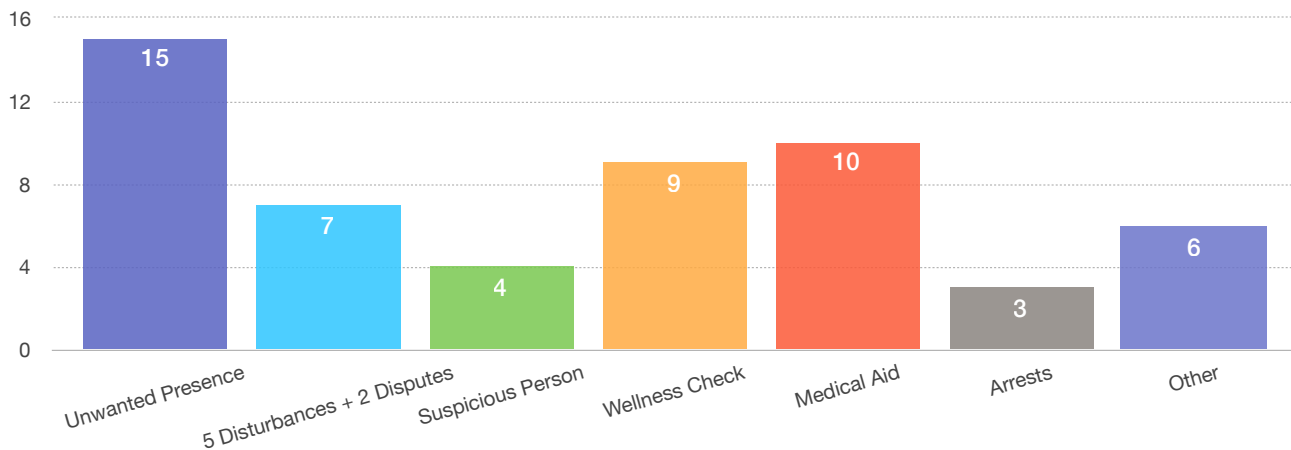
-- Reported and compiled by Joanne Mattera

Incidents: August 1-7, 2025

TYPE	INCIDENT
Unwanted Presence	15
5 Disturbances + 2 Disputes	7
Suspicious Person	4
Wellness Check	9
Medical Aid	10
Arrests	3
Other	6
TOTAL INCIDENTS	54
SOURCE: Salem Police Dept. Terms as used by SPD.	
Infograph courtesy GESNA/ONOH.	

OTHER INCIDENTS: Included Assault, Domestic event, Suspicious item, Traffic stop, Trespassing, and Mutual Aid.

INCIDENTS TOTAL 54: August 1-7, 2025



PERCENTAGE OF 54 INCIDENTS: AUG 1-7, 2025

