

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

30 incidents involving homeless individuals in seven days October 1-7, 2025

Welcome to another monthly installment of *Salem News You Don't Get in "The Salem News."* As always, 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. I have organized and annotated the information so that you can see the problems generated by our unhoused, and often transient, population.

—Joanne Mattera

With six previous months to compare—March, April, June, July, August, and September—we see that in the **first week** of each month there were, respectively, 33, 32, 41, 45, 54, and 26 incidents in the homeless community to which the police were called. This month there were 30. When you factor in the remaining three weeks of any month, we're looking at much higher monthly numbers, potentially 132, 128, 164, 180, 216, and 104, respectively. This month could average 120 incidents. No other group in Salem, whether teachers, grocers, teenagers, or grandmothers, engenders as much police response.

(There was no report for May, since I posted *An Inside Look at Lifebridge*. All reports are viewable online. Link at end of article.)

To offer some perspective on these numbers, the good news is that they are not typically for felonies. But there were **four arrests** this first week of October. While the Police Incident Report does not indicate the charges, if I were to guess, they would be drug related. According to eyewitnesses, drug use continues unabated at the Broad Street Cemetery and, reportedly, at Lifebridge itself. I cannot verify this latter charge, but among folks who opt not to stay at the shelter, some have stated specifically that drug sales and use are the reason they stay away.

As I say in each of these reports, my point in publishing them is not to demonize the city's unhoused residents but to make clear that homelessness presents a problem for our city, both financially and in terms of quality of life.

Ever more Salem residents are commenting negatively, whether among themselves or on social media.

Statistics for October 1-7

As in other months, most of the incidents took place Downtown and in the Greater Endicott Street area that abuts the shelter. The police report removes the street number of private homes, leaving only the street name, so it is impossible to know if a call is made to a specific address or to a sidewalk in front of a home, or even to a parking lot on a named street. Businesses, however, are identified.

Incidents are listed in descending order.

.10 Requests for Medical Aid

Eight of the incidents requiring medical aid did not involve an ambulance. Police could have been called for anything from a scrape or a fall to more serious physical issues.

. Responding police went to Lifebridge on Margin Street, as well as to its annex shelter on Canal Street

. Police responses were also made on Boston, Congress, and Front Streets

. Police were dispatched to Walgreens on Derby Street and Domino's Pizza on Canal Street

. Additionally, there were police responses at the SPD itself and the North Shore Medical Center Emergency Department on Highland Avenue

. 8 Incidents of Loitering

In the language of police reports, loitering is described as "Undesirable/Unwanted Guests."

These are folks who gather on the property of a homeowner, renter, or business. Certainly, there are homeless individuals who move along when asked to do so. The police are called when a person is requested to move but refuses, or leaves and returns, or when an owner/tenant feels unsafe asking loiterers to move, particularly if drugs are involved. Loitering took place at locations on Derby and Washington Streets, as well as at specific locations downtown: Culver Insurance, Lifebridge, Merchant Hotel, and Town House Condominiums.

Additional locations:

- . Game Stop on Highland Avenue
- . Lee Fort Terrace

. 7 Well-being checks

Well-being checks are typically called in by neighbors or friends of the person, or by someone in an establishment where a person is found sleeping, high, or unresponsive. Police responded to calls on Derby and Essex Streets, and twice to the Lifebridge overflow shelter on Canal Street. They also responded to identified locations:

- . Charlotte Forten Park
- . City Hall
- . Sea Level Oyster Bar

. 4 Arrests

Arrests on two separate occasions were made on Lafayette Street, as well as one near the Church Street/Washington Street intersection and one at Mary Jane Lee Park on Palmer Street. As I noted at the opening of this report, specifics were not available.

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 kind of 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 the first seven days of October, the CIU issued three reports. I have no access to these

reports, so I cannot tell you how many additional incidents are noted, however I believe it is safe to say that the actions noted within would add to the number of incidents involving homeless individuals.

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 unhoused folks in Salem.

Not all incidents noted here were caused by residents of Lifebridge, but that facility is the magnet which attracts ever more unhoused individuals. 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 continue to take place as ever more unhoused people take up residence here.

We want to see unhoused people helped, but this burden must be shared by more than one neighborhood and more than one city.

A City Official Responds

"The [September] report shows that the majority of incidents weren't criminal, but medical or mental health emergencies. That tells us we're not dealing with a wave of crime so much as untreated illness, addiction, and the instability that comes from being unhoused."

This is correct. But we don't need a crime wave to see an eroding quality of life. And we don't need a crime wave for Salem residents to feel unsafe Downtown. Parents with children, and elderly residents feel especially vulnerable.

I'm not identifying the city official, because their comments were made in a private email to me, but I think their thoughts deserve a public response.

. Police, EMT, and Fire Department responses to Medical Aid and Well-being checks require numerous trips daily to the Lifebridge facilities on Margin and Canal Streets, as well as to locations in Downtown Salem. All that medical

outreach comes at a cost to Salem taxpayers and renters. As a not-for-profit organization, Lifebridge pays no taxes to the city, so we are shouldering the financial burden for these services. Bear in mind that the people being treated are, with very few exceptions, all from out of town—indeed out of region, even out of state. You want affordable housing? If property owners are paying escalating taxes—and we are—homeowners who rent out apartments are going to pass some of that increase onto their tenants. Salem residents are being priced out of Salem while out-of-towners and a non-profit are the beneficiaries of our tax-imposed largesse.

. Our city official rightly identifies untreated mental illness and concurrent drug use as a huge part of the problem. The Community Impact Unit (CIU) of the Salem Police Department endeavors to identify those in need of mental health and substance abuse treatment and tries to steer them into treatment. But many choose not to have treatment, opting to remain on the street with access to drugs.

. Loitering puts a burden on the people and businesses whose stairs, porches, decks, back yards, facilities, and parking lots are being used as hangouts. Often loitering takes place repeatedly at the same locations, so this is not a minor inconvenience, but a daily annoyance to a number of Salem residents. And not everyone has the physical strength or emotional stamina to ask unhoused folks, day after day, to please move along. If drugs or alcohol are involved, the aggrieved parties may feel threatened. That's when the police are called. Also, this bears repeating: Some homeless folks are fornicating, shooting up, and relieving themselves on private property.

. As noted, Lifebridge assumes no responsibility for its clients when they are not on premises. It also has no security force, so the SPD is called upon to act in that capacity. Again, Salem taxpayers are footing this bill.

. Lifebridge is a magnet. Homeless people come here because they have heard there's a place for them to stay. Even when there is no bed for them, or if they opt against staying inside the shelter, they come for the community. A larger shelter will simply attract even more homeless people.

Our city official also notes: *“When people have access to stable housing and support, medical crises, overdoses, and police calls drop.”*

This may be true, but should Salem be the only city in the region providing housing and services? We're paying for people from all over the country who arrive here. (Wonder where all those Mass and Cass folks have gone? Some of them are in Salem.)

Moreover, the move in social services has been away from “warehousing” dozens of individuals in favor of smaller group homes. Social service studies have found that homes with fewer people and a professional staff provide better outcomes for those in need. While this kind of building doesn't turn a profit for “non-profit” developers, it better serves a population that needs safe space. Of course, Salem should not be the only city providing such services. Homelessness is a regional and national problem and should be dealt with by many more cities and towns and federal money.

Lifebridge has not done a good job in the almost 20 years it has been in Salem. I am not a lone voice here. Ask anyone in the immediate and surrounding neighborhoods, and they will tell you things have gone from bad to worse. What makes anyone think Lifebridge will do better in a larger facility? Finally, mentally ill homeless people who choose not to receive treatment continue to live in the city. Even the strongest supporters of an expanded Lifebridge, such as our unnamed city official, agree this is a problem.

As a not-for-profit organization, Lifebridge pays no taxes to the city, so taxpayers and renters are paying for police, fire, and EMT responses to the facility, as well as for cleaning up Downtown and any vandalism that clients may cause.

Read more as www.gesna-salem.com. On the site, click onto ONOH NEWS for the monthly reports.