

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

206 Incidents involving homeless individuals in one month, September 1-30, 2026

While the Lifebridge/Riley Plaza nexus remains the primary site of police responses to homeless activity, nearby Charlotte Forten Park has emerged as a companion location. This public park on Derby Street, completed in September 2019 at a cost of \$1.5 million, has become unsafe for most Salem residents because of the increasing numbers of unhoused individuals and the presence of drugs—sales, use, and paraphernalia. The police have put up lights to deter overnight sleepers and stepped up dedicated Walking Patrols in the area. Indeed, much of Derby Street is now an active site for the unhoused.

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Despite the presence of trashbags and the efforts of the Public Services Department, Downtown remains unkempt with the usual assortment of nips, needles, cigarette butts, and food trash strewn about. Riley Plaza is full of people and their belongings. And as you will read in the statistics here, disturbances, assaults and arrests are up in this area as well.

Meanwhile in Lynn, Mayor Jared C. Nicholson has issued an executive order to create a task force to address escalating homelessness, substance use, and mental health crises. Even Lynn's City Council has gotten involved: "We must ensure downtown is a safe, clean, and welcoming place for all, while treating people

experiencing homelessness with dignity and compassion," said Council President Coco Alinsug. Over to you, Salem City Hall.

68 Medical Aid Responses

As I noted last month, because homeless people do not have primary care physicians, all medical responses start out as emergencies, often requiring a full 911 complement of police, fire, and EMT resources. This is the most expensive way to treat illness. We are seeing another trend as well: unhoused people walking into the Salem Police headquarters on Margin Street to seek help directly. Perhaps this is not surprising, as Lifebridge and Riley Plaza are close by.

37 Responses to Lifebridge vicinity

24 to Lifebridge, including a suicidal person
6 to Riley Plaza
4 to the Salem Police Department, including a *Section 12*, described as "involuntary hospitalization for psychiatric care"
2 to Margin Street
1 to the Salem Post Office

19 Responses to Downtown locations

7 to Speedway on Derby Street, including an overdose
2 to Charlotte Forten Park on Derby Street

One each

Bunghole Liquors on Derby Street
CVS on Essex Street
Furlong Park on Bridge Street
Hawthorne Hotel on Washington Street
Koto Grill on Washington Street
Lead Mills Conservation Area on Lafayette Street
On the Grind Café on Jefferson Avenue
Peabody Street Park
Silver Moon Comics at East India Mall
Steve's Market on Margin Street

10 Responses to redacted addresses

2 on Washington Street

Continued: Responses to redacted addresses

One each

Bridge Street
Congress Street
Derby/Congress Streets
First Street
Front Street
Mill Street
Norman/Holyoke Streets
Summer/Chestnut Streets

2 on Highland Avenue

Target
Walmart

19 Well-Being Checks

The police respond to calls about people who appear to be unwell, injured, or high. Responses may be via cruiser or officers on bike/foot patrol.

11 responses to specific locations

2 to Witch City Mall
2 to Steve's Market on Margin Street

One each

McDonald's on Canal Street
North Shore Bank on Lafayette Street
Riley Plaza
Salem House of Pizza on Endicott Street
Visitor Center on New Liberty Street
Waterfront Hotel on Derby Street
Wendy's on Lafayette Street

8 Responses to redacted addresses

Balcomb Street
Boston Street
Congress Street
Derby/Norman Streets
Jackson Street
Lafayette Place
Margin/High Streets
Norman/Summer Streets

49 Unwanted Presences

I've grouped three categories here—**Loitering**, **Suspicious Persons**, and **Trespassing**—because all involve people being where they were not invited. If a polite request by a homeowner or shopkeeper is ignored, or if the same people keep returning, the police are called. However, if you spend any time walking around Downtown, you know that loitering is an everyday occurrence pretty much everywhere.

23 Loitering Responses to specific locations

3 to Speedway on Derby Street
2 to McDonalds-- Canal Street and Traders Way
2 to South Harbor Garage
2 to Witch City Mall

One each

Bank of America ATM on Highland Avenue
Brix Apartments on Washington Street
Broad Street Cemetery
CVS on Essex Street
Domino's on Canal Street
Finz restaurant on the Wharf
Flying Saucer Pizza in Lappin Park
Lifebridge
Museum Place Garage
Salem Five bank on Washington Street
Starbuck's on Washington Street
Village Tavern on Essex Street
Walgreens on Derby Street
Wendy's on Lafayette Street

11 Responses to redacted addresses

2 on Charter Street
2 on Lafayette Street

One each

Central Street
Derby/Washington Streets
Essex Street
Fort Ave/Columbus Square
Heritage Drive
Jefferson Avenue
St. Peter Street

13 Suspicious Persons

2 at Charlotte Forten Park

One each

Lifebridge
Salem Police Department on Margin Street
South Harbor Garage
Witch City Mall

Responses to redacted addresses

2 to Washington Street

One each

Federal Street
Harrison Avenue
Highland Avenue
Margin Street
Washington/Essex Street

2 Trespassers

O'Donnell Funeral Home on Washington Street
Witch City Mall

17 Responses to Breach of Peace

Disputes are typically verbal. **Fights** are physical. **Disturbances** and **Noise** disrupt the peace and chip away at Salem's quality of life. If you live Downtown on a residential street near Lifebridge, you have heard all of this at night.

9 Disturbances

3 at Riley Plaza (including one noise complaint)
2 at Charlotte Forten Park

One each

Hampton Inn
Lifebridge
Walgreens
Redacted address on Washington Street

3 Disputes

Fire Department on Lafayette Street
Riley Plaza
Wendy's on Lafayette Street

3 Fights

Lifebridge
Margin Street
Speedway

2 Drunk Individuals

Lifebridge
Bridge Street

[Note: Activity on Margin Street and Riley Plaza is often spillover from Lifebridge. This makes walking by the facility uncomfortable for many people, particularly children, those walking pets, many women, or anyone who feels vulnerable.]

12 Assaults, Harassments, Threats

These often physical confrontations up the violence quotient, both within the homeless community and to the community at large,

4 Harassments

Lifebridge
Planet Fitness on Trader's Way
Salem Public Library on Essex Street Speedway

4 Assaults

2 at Speedway on Derby Street

One each

Christopher Columbus Club on Endicott Street
Riley Plaza

3 Domestic incidents

Lifebridge
Charter Street
Goodhue/Beaver Streets

1 Threat

Lifebridge

6 Arrests

The number of arrests is rising. Police step in to curtail disruptive or violent behavior, which increases as greater numbers of unhoused people gather in one spot. Substance abuse and mental illness exacerbate the problem.

3 at Riley Plaza
1 at Artists' Row
1 on Dodge Street
1 at Lifebridge

5 Taken into Protective Custody

This public health intervention allows police officers to detain and assist individuals incapacitated by alcohol or drugs so they can get medical help. Homeless advocates who are concerned about "criminalizing" unhoused people should understand that Protective Custody is not an arrest.

2 at Riley Plaza
Charlotte Forten Park
Hawthorne Hotel
Washington/Front Streets

8 Thefts

I have included two categories here:

Shoplifting, which takes place in a store, and **Larceny**, which is defined as depriving another of money or objects from their person or possessions. (There were no reported break-ins to cars or homes this month.)

2 Shoplifting

Busa Wine & Spirits on Traders Way
Walgreens on Derby Street

6 Larceny

2 at redacted addresses on Derby Street
Charlotte Forten Park
Lifebridge
Speedway
Redacted address on Charter Street

12 Individual Events

Specifics are incomplete, but police were called to address these events around town:

2 at Lifebridge

. Unknown problem

. Vandalism

One each

Check Property on Charter Street

Cyclist/pedestrian accident on Highland Avenue

Items Held for Safekeeping at Pioneer Terrace

Lost/Found at Tabernacle Church on Washington

Malicious Damage on Union Street

Missing adult at Pioneer Terrace

Police Info at Journeymasters on Essex Street

*Sex Crimes at Riley Plaza

Trash Dumped at Salem Five Bank

Unknown Problem at Speedway

** This could be an individual who neglected to register as a sex offender or a more active personal assault on another*

10 Walking Patrols

In addition to specific responses, the SPD sends officers to specific locations. Ten Walking Patrols were sent this month to observe and interact with unhoused people in Charlotte Forten Park.

There were also six Community Impact reports, each containing documentation of interactions with unhoused persons over a period of days.

Contextualizing the information

Medical Aid and Well Being Checks constitute the greatest number of police and emergency service responses. There were 86 in September—averaging almost three a day.

Lifebridge continues to generate the most calls. The police responded 35 times for medical aid, including a suicidal person; harassment, domestic violence, fights, threats, larceny, loitering, vandalism. And as many clients have noted to my neighbors or me, much of the activity that takes place on Margin Street around the facility is because staff has urged the clients to “take it outside.”

Why is Lifebridge not required to maintain its own 24/7 medical staff and security team? The low-paid staffers are ill-equipped to deal with problems. If Jason Etheridge, the director of

Lifebridge, can make over \$292,000 a year, surely this organization can come up with money to pay a staff to deal with its problems instead of using taxpayer-funded police responses.

Beyond Lifebridge, there was more activity in the city’s parks. We saw 18 police responses to Riley Plaza, including disputes, disturbances, assaults, arrests, and two people taken into protective custody. And that’s just what was reported and recorded. If your instinct tells you to avoid this location, listen to it.

While neighborhood vigilance and police patrols have (mostly) kept the unhoused population from setting up camp in the small High Street Playground, Charlotte Forten Park has seen so much activity that the SPD has erected flood lights to deter unhoused people from settling in overnight. Police responded to numerous disturbances, and an individual was taken into protective custody. You will see the possessions of unhoused people piled up or in carts both in the park and along the river walk. Drug use is much in evidence.

Venture downtown and you will understand that untreated mental illness is a serious issue. Neighbors are confronted with it daily. What you may not realize is that many police responses are to the same group of individuals.

Downtown businesses are hard hit. At Speedway alone there were 14 responses to fights, harassment, loitering, larceny, and an overdose. The incidents you read about in this report are just the tip of the iceberg. Business owners know that if they make too many claims for theft or damage, their insurance premiums will increase or the policy will be cancelled. So they absorb the losses and tend not to call the police. If you know any business owners, ask them to confirm this.

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Summary of the recent Public Health, Safety and Environment Committee Meeting at City Hall

On Wednesday evening, September 23, the Public Health, Safety and Environment Committee, chaired by Councilor Ty Hapworth, met to review the current encampment ordinance, which permits public camping only when emergency shelter beds

are unavailable within a 15-mile radius and with specific parameters. (Google “What are the terms of the current camping ordinance in Salem, Ma”).

Captain John Burke, Support Services Division Commander at the Salem Police Department, delivered a Power Point presentation to explain how the current ordinance has been implemented and administered. You can view the video in the link below so I'll use the next few lines to summarize Capt. Burke's presentation. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HIYiUI8LpJ4>

. He opened with images of the now-gone encampment at South River. His description: “Drugs, overdoses, violence, thefts,” as well as “rodents climbing in and out of tents.”

. “When you concentrate encampments, you have problems. Within a week, it [an encampment] will look 50 percent worse.”

. He went on to further describe activities that take place in Riley Plaza, Charlotte Forten Park, and elsewhere: “Fighting, drinking, defecation” and noted that “dangerous individuals inhabit the space.”

. “Citizens have lost wide areas of public space.”

. Capt. Burke noted that lights have been installed in Charlotte Forten Park “because certain individual have taken up residence there.”

. As to the number of homeless persons in Salem, Capt. Burke replied, “We've identified approximately 95 individuals”

. A listing showed the annual number of incidents involving unhoused individuals in the past several years:

--2022: 1526

--2023: 1620

--2024: 2104

--2025: 2166

--2026: 1902 so far this year

[Figuring at least 200 incidents per month for the last four months of this year, we are on track for about 2700 incidents by the end of the year.]

. On Salem being the epicenter of homeless activity on the region, Capt. Burke said, “I see certain communities bearing way more of the

burden than others. We're one of the centers. The solution is more of a regional plan.”

. Capt. Burke is not in favor of relaxing the camping ordinance in any way: “**I believe this ordinance should stay the same.**”

In a post-presentation Q&A with the City Councilors, a few comments stood out:

. **Ward 1 Councilor Erin Turowski:** “I walk through Forten Park all the time and I see things unattended. It would be easy for someone to put something in among the belongings.” [Reference was to the 2013 Boston Marathon, when a device-filled backpack killed three people in the blast and wounded many others, including 17 people who lost limbs.] “I do worry about that,” she said.

. **Ward 2 Councilor Andrew Smith:** “What percentage of the homeless are mentally ill?” Capt. Burke responded: “About 70 percent.” Smith then asked, “What is the cost of service calls?” Capt. Burke: “Quite a bit,” noting that responses require cruisers and fire trucks. “We have an entire unit devoted to responses.”

. **Ward 4 Councilor Tim Flynn** commented, “Everything shown [in the slides] is exactly what I have seen. It's a bad, bad, bad, situation.” He noted that many homeless campers who inhabit the woods off Highland Avenue “track through yards to get to where they are going.” He added, “Having campers in the woods is not safe. As a former firefighter, I am concerned with fires.”

After the meeting ended, I asked Capt. Burke why, if there are only 95 homeless people known to be living on the street there are over 200 police responses a month. His response: “Some require multiple responses.”

Capt. Burke did not have to add that Lifebridge has its own subculture. I see it in the SPD report I work from each month. The police respond to drug use, thefts, fights and other forms of violence, as well as requests for medical aid.

Note: On Wednesday, October 14, the Public Health, Safety and Environment Committee will convene to consider a proposal by Witch City Action to expand the ordinance homeless camping. If you are against this plan, which will allow unhoused people to take over more municipal spaces, come and speak out.

More Voices on Parks and “Camping”

Ty Hapworth, Councilor at Large, speaking out on his Facebook page, September 20, against easing the camping ordinance: “We’ve seen overdoses, fires, needles, human waste, rodents and people preying on our most vulnerable friends and neighbors. And we’ve seen a public park serving one of Salem’s most diverse, working class neighborhoods become effectively unusable for the families who depend on it.

“Compassion cannot require us to preserve those conditions. And I’m begging us not to convince ourselves that it does .”

“I won’t support sanctioned encampments or treating our playgrounds, parks, and public spaces as permanent places to live. Those spaces belong to everyone, and everyone should be able to use them safely. Public safety and compassion can’t be competing responsibilities. We owe it to our neighbors to do both.”

Tom Kusterer, Salem resident, whose dwelling overlooks the site of the former South River encampment:

“If an encampment starts, it will assuredly devolve in the same manner that the South River encampment did . . . I think it would be incredibly unwise to weaken the camping ordinance. Instead, Salem should ensure that the ordinance is properly enforced so people can get the help they need.

“As an additional note, during its existence, I spoke with five people from the encampment. Only one of them was from Salem, the other four were not . . . One of the people I spoke with told me he came to Salem because camping was easy and drugs were available. If it becomes easier to camp in Salem, rest assured that people will come from all over to camp here.” (Excerpt from Kusterer’s letter to the City Council)

Mill Hill Alerts email sent October 6

“A registered sex offender has listed their address at 56 Margin Street.” The alert included a photo of the male offender and noted his crime: “enticing a child under the age of 16”.

The Salem Patch reported On October 7 that the city was awarded \$425k for the renovation of High Street Park. It quoted Governor Healey:

“We’re making it easier for families to get outside, for kids to play and for everyone to enjoy what makes our state unique. This is about improving daily life for our residents and making our communities stronger.”

[Note High Street Park is right behind Lifebridge, How will a more inviting park not attract more unhoused people to set up camp?]

Cynthia Johnson, Salem resident, volunteer “Salem Woods abandoned camp cleanup . . . Red Trail, adjacent to the high school. Lots of burned material, cans, shoes, batteries, propane tanks, fabric, tents. Site previously cleaned by volunteers in March of 2024, but you’d never know it.”

(From a Facebook post, October 7)



Above: Trash in Salem Woods
Below: The cleanup waiting to be removed



Another Mayor Acts on the Homeless Crisis (Hint: It's not Mayor Pangallo)

Last month Mayor Mark Dion of Portland, Maine, was quoted in the *Portland Free Press* as saying, "It's uncomfortable for some people to hear it, but if we don't confront the situation, it's only going to get worse." [Page 6 of last month's *Salem News You Don't Get in The Salem News*]

Closer to home, Lynn's mayor has addressed the issue. From the *Lynn Item*, October 1, in an article titled *City Looks to Shrink Homeless Population*, we read:

"Citing increasing homelessness, substance use disorder, and mental health crises that are escalating risks to public health and safety, Mayor Jared C. Nicholson issued an emergency executive order creating a task force to address those issues. Police Chief Chris Kelly and Chief of Health and Human Services Lisa Tobin will assemble and co-chair a Downtown Lynn Health and Safety Task Force, which will be charged with formulating a plan for addressing the crisis. The task force will have 90 days to come up with recommendations for better collaboration with treatment programs, healthcare providers, relevant state agencies, landlords, businesses, residents, surrounding communities, and the criminal justice system . . ."

The article continues:

"This week, some of my fellow elected officials and I walked downtown to hear directly from residents and businesses and see firsthand the public health and safety concerns affecting our community," said City Council President Coco Alinsug. "We must ensure downtown is a safe, clean, and welcoming place for all, while treating people experiencing homelessness, substance use, and mental-health challenges with dignity and compassion."

Guns in the Hands of the Homeless

I wish the bleeding-hearts-for-the-homeless would understand that the issue we have in Salem is not simply a matter of providing unfortunate people with a place to live. Drug dealing, violence, and now guns have become problems that impact the home-

less community as well as the Salem community at large. Here's a press release from the Salem Police Department dated September 25:

"On September 18th at approximately 8:03 a.m., Salem Police officers responded to Harrison Avenue for a report of a disturbance.

"Responding patrol officers arrested Hector Ramos, age 33, who is unhoused in Salem, and charged him with Assault and Battery with a Dangerous Weapon.

"Detectives assigned to the Salem Police Department's Criminal Investigation Division continued the investigation and subsequently executed a search warrant on Ramos' vehicle. During the search, detectives recovered a Glock .40-caliber firearm equipped with a large-capacity magazine.

"Detectives also recovered three additional large-capacity magazines, containing a total of 66 rounds of .40-caliber ammunition. Based on this discovery, Ramos has also been charged with carrying a firearm without a License to Carry and possession of a large capacity feeding device."



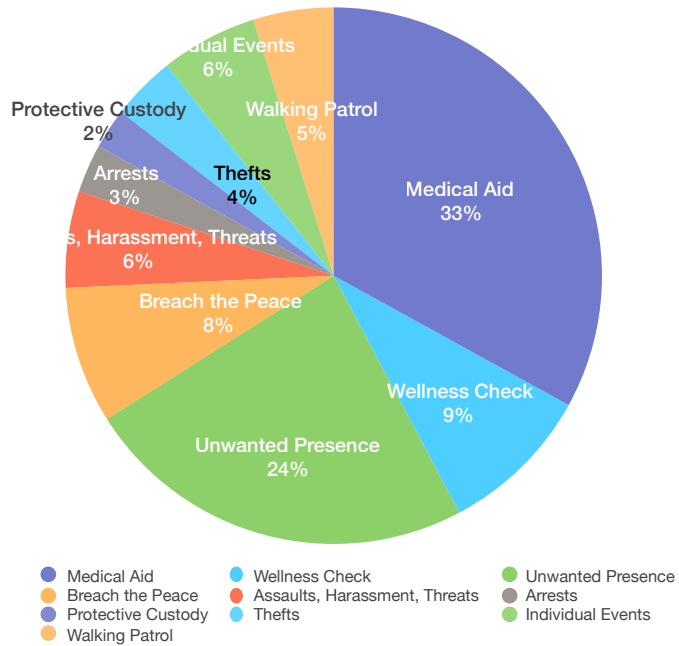
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This newsletter is compiled and edited monthly by Joanne Mattera

Incidents: September 1-30, 2026

TYPE	INCIDENT
Medical Aid	68
Wellness Check	19
Unwanted Presence	49
Breach the Peace	17
Assaults, Harassment, Threats	12
Arrests	6
Protective Custody	5
Thefts	8
Individual Events	12
Walking Patrol	10
TOTAL INCIDENTS	206
SOURCE: Salem Police Dept. Terms as used by SPD.	
Infograph courtesy GESNA/ONOH.	

PERCENTAGE OF 206 INCIDENTS: SEPTEMBER 1-30, 2026



INCIDENTS TOTAL 206: SEPTEMBER 1-30, 2026

