

The Oregonian

Sewage Overflow May Have Reached Tryon Creek

By The Oregonian

April 8, 2018

Rags clogging a sewer pipe, coupled with the weekend's heavy rains, caused an unknown quantity of sewage to overflow from a manhole on the 9400 block of southwest Portland on Sunday.

The sewage flowed onto the street, into a private yard and possibly reached nearby Tryon Creek. As a precaution, the public is advised to avoid contact with Tryon Creek for 48 hours.

City crews cleared the blockage and restored service about 2 p.m., about four hours after the release is believed to have begun.

The city of Portland's Bureau of Environmental Services reports that this sewage overflow is not related to the combined sewer overflow reported to affect the Willamette River.

Heavy Rain Causes Sewage and Stormwater Overflows into Willamette River

By Lizzy Acker

April 8, 2018

Portland officials are telling people to avoid contact with the Willamette River for 48 hours after heavy rain caused several overflows of the combined sewer system into the river at around 9:15 a.m. Sunday morning.

"Because of increased bacteria in the water," wrote the Portland Bureau of Environmental Services in a press release, "the public is advised to avoid contact with the river downstream from the Ross Island Bridge for 48 hours after the event ends."

According to the release, officials haven't yet determined how much combined sewage and stormwater has been released into the river, and the overflows were still happening on Sunday morning.

This is the first combined sewage overflow of the year. The last one happened on Oct. 22, 2017.

A combined sewage overflow is roughly 80 percent stormwater and 20 percent sewage, the city said, adding that before the Big Pipe project was complete in 2011, there were an average of 50 combined sewage overflow incidents in the Willamette River a year. Since the completion of the project, that number has dropped by 94 percent.

Witnesses Believe Police Justified in Killing Suspect at SE Homeless Shelter

By *Lizzy Acker*
April 8, 2018

Updated: 7:45 p.m.

Three witnesses to a fatal officer-involved shooting late Saturday night at a Southeast Portland homeless shelter say the man police killed had burst into the facility and was slashing and stabbing himself with a knife before he was killed by officers.

"It was horrific," said Morgan Thomas Pickering of Portland during an interview Sunday morning across the street from the Cityteam Ministries shelter on Southeast Grand Avenue. Pickering was waiting in the rain across the street from the shelter to retrieve his belongings. "We were all scared for our lives."

Police say the man who was shot was a suspect in an earlier carjacking. They did not release his name, pending an autopsy, but family identified him as John Elifritz, a Portland native who had addresses in Clackamas County. A cousin said Elifritz, 48, had struggled at times with methamphetamine use, but was trying to get his life back in order.

Pickering and the two other witnesses, both of whom declined to be identified and were checked into the facility at the time of the incident, all say the police were justified in shooting the man, who they say was acting erratically.

"The Portland Police Bureau values human life and accepts the authority to use lethal force with great reverence," said Portland Police Chief Danielle Outlaw in a statement Sunday afternoon. The chief did visit the scene of the shooting Saturday night, a bureau spokesman said.

"I am aware a video was taken of this incident by a community member and that video was posted to the internet," she added. "Please be reminded that deadly force investigations are extremely complex and take time. The Police Bureau is committed to transparency and will ensure the entire investigation is released in a timely manner that does not impact the integrity of the investigation."

A vigil for Elifritz was held on the street corner outside the Cityteam shelter Sunday afternoon. By 4:30 p.m., about 40 people had showed up, some holding signs that read, "More Mental Health Care, Not More Cops." Friends had placed a framed photo of Elifritz at the site, which was surrounded by candles, flowers and a teddy bear by Sunday night.

Kirk Smith wasn't part of the vigil, but he was among a small group of men standing outside the shelter doors. He said he was attending a meeting inside the shelter Saturday night when the shooting began.

"There were eight cops here and they could have took him down," Smith said. "They used the bean bags and then they shot him. It didn't make any sense. They could have tased him and took him down and went and got him help. He was begging for help. He wasn't saying anything, but you could tell just from his actions."

Carl Shellhammer was also inside the shelter that night. He said police first shot the man with "bean bag, plastic, knock-down bullets and he just kept getting back up."

"(The police) were doing it in the best way that they could without hurting any of the other people in the building," he said.

Sunday evening, the ACLU of Oregon released a statement from Executive Director David Rogers on the shooting.

"Was there any attempt to de-escalate the situation before officers open fire inside the homeless shelter full of innocent bystanders? If not, why not?" the statement read. "We join many in the community by calling for a prompt, thorough, and transparent investigation into this shooting. The public deserves to get a detailed account of why this man was shot and what actions Portland Police took to avoid yet another fatal shooting."

The ACLU called on Portland officers to use body-worn cameras as a means to "increase transparency, promote police accountability, and help ensure interactions with community members are fair and lawful."

Officers responded at 7:30 p.m. to a report of a crashed vehicle at Southeast Martin Luther King Jr. Boulevard and Stark Street, according to police. When they arrived, the driver had fled.

Officers learned the car, a silver Honda CRV, had been stolen in a carjacking earlier in the day, Sgt. Chris Burley, a Portland Police Bureau spokesman, told The Oregonian/OregonLive Saturday night.

The shooting occurred as police responded to a report of a crashed vehicle that was involved in carjacking earlier in the day, police said.

A short time later, a clerk at Jackson's Gas Station, at the corner of Southeast Grand and Washington Street, called 911 to report a man with a knife, talking about suicide and murder inside the station's convenience store.

Police responding they learned there was a man outside Cityteam Ministries Portland Shelter, a long-term and emergency homeless shelter, holding a knife to his throat. Officers responding located the suspect inside. By then, dispatchers were instructed to call for an ambulance, as there were reports the suspect was bleeding heavily from his neck.

Cityteam Portland Executive Director Mike Giering on Saturday said an Alcoholics Anonymous meeting had just begun at the time of the shooting. The witnesses said the meeting was in progress when the suspect came through the door, shirtless.

One witness said a shelter employee gave the man a jacket. Shortly after, police arrived.

Pickering, who filmed part of the incident on his phone, said the man had a knife and was "stabbing himself in the neck."

Pickering and two others described the man as erratic and shouting, slashing and stabbing himself with a knife. They said police fired either rubber bullets or bean bags, but they didn't subdue the man, who then lunged at officers with the knife in his hand.

At that point, the witnesses said, officers shot him.

"Three, four, five shots," Pickering said. "He just dropped."

Medical responders determined the man was dead at the scene, police said.

Inside Portland shelter before shooting

Pickering called officers' action "absolutely 100 percent justified," adding, "Cops did everything right."

"I applaud their actions," he said. "They actually saved lives."

The two other witnesses echoed Pickering, calling the chaotic scene terrifying.

The men said buses took most of the between 30 and 40 people at the shelter to another location. Those who remained spent a cold night in the rain, waiting for their belongings to be released from the shelter Sunday morning.

Investigators will work to determine if the suspect armed with the knife posed an immediate threat to others in the shelter, officers or himself when police used deadly force against him.

Sunday evening, Mayor Ted Wheeler released a statement on the shooting.

"Last night officers responded to multiple calls for service regarding a suspect that ultimately ended in an officer involved shooting," the statement read. "The loss of a life is always tragic. My priority is to discover the facts and circumstances regarding this incident. Already, there are those who want to immediately define what happened. It would be highly irresponsible for me to participate in speculation at this time. I urge us all to allow investigators to do their work, to uncover the facts, and to report on their findings."

In 2016, consultants hired by the city of Portland were critical of a longstanding Portland police training tenet, commonly referred to by officers as the "21-foot rule" – the idea that someone with a knife who is within 21 feet of them can attack faster than an officer has time to pull, aim and fire a gun.

"The 21-foot rule should never be seen as a green light to use deadly force or as creating a 'kill zone,'" experts have found, yet that lore seems to remain "inculcated" in the Portland Police Bureau, the California-based OIR Group wrote in a report in 2016 on Portland officer-involved shootings and deaths in police custody.

The consultants then urged the bureau to clarify training on the 21-foot rule so it's not used to justify a police shooting when a suspect armed with a knife comes within 21 feet of an officer. It's unclear if that training was ever altered.

The rule's origin? More than 25 years ago, a Salt Lake City police officer performed rudimentary tests and concluded an armed attacker who bolted at a cop could clear 21 feet in the time it took most officers to draw, aim and fire their gun. The conclusion was repeated in training videos. But in May 2015, police chiefs attending the Police Executive Research Forum conference expressed concern that some officers consider the 21-foot rule a legal justification to shoot someone, instead of seeing it as a general warning for officers to protect themselves when they encounter a person with a knife, the report said.

Portland police have not said how many officers fired their weapons nor released the identities of the officers involved. The officers have been placed on paid administrative leave until the investigation and a grand jury hearing have concluded, protocol for the bureau.

Elliot Njus, Samantha Swindler and Maxine Bernstein contributed to this report.

The Portland Tribune

City Warns Public to Avoid Willamette River

April 8, 2018

Heavy rains trigger Combined Sewer Overflows of runoff and sewage from outflow pipes.

Record-breaking rain on Saturday triggered the city to issue a Combined Sewer Overflow warning on Sunday morning.

At 9:15 a.m. on April 8, the Bureau of Environmental Services warned the public to avoid the Willamette River downstream of the Ross Island Bridge for 48 hours after the overflows end.

KOIN 6 Meteorologist Joseph Dames said downtown Portland eclipsed the one-day rainfall record for April 7 with at least 1.23 inches of rain. That caused the sewer pipes that carry both runoff and sewage to overflow from several outfalls into the river.

The overflows were continuing Sunday afternoon, BES said. The volume was not yet known.

Combined sewer overflows (CSOs) are rare and occur during periods of heavy rain or snowfall. A CSO is about 80 percent stormwater and 20 percent sewage.

According to BES, since completing the Big Pipe project in 2011, the number of CSOs have dropped by 94 percent to the Willamette River and 99 percent to the Columbia Slough.

The 20-year, \$1.4 billion project constructed a series of improvements, from disconnecting downspouts on residences to allow rainwater to be absorbed naturally in the ground to the construction of big pipes on both sides of the river and along the slough to store and convey large quantities of flows to the Columbia Boulevard Wastewater Treatment Plant.

Before the project, CSOs occurred to the Willamette River from multiple outfalls an average of 50 times a year, with some instances lasting days. Today, overflows occur an average of four times per winter season and once every three summers, BES says.

Sunday's overflow was the first of 2018 and the first since October 22.

You can find out more information about CSO events at www.portlandoregon.gov/bes/31030.

One Dead in Officer-Involved Shooting in SE Portland

By Jim Redden

April 8, 2018

UPDATE: Shooting took place inside a homeless shelter where suspect had fled after crashing a reported stolen vehicle.

Police shot and killed a man who crashed a stolen car in Southeast Portland Saturday night.

The shooting took place inside a homeless shelter.

The name of the adult male suspect was not immediately released.

No officers were injured in the incident. Those involved in the shooting are on administrative leave, which is police policy. Their names were not immediately released.

Police say that at 7:30 p.m. on April 7, Central Precinct, Transit Division and Gang Enforcement Team officers responded to a reported crash involving a stolen vehicle at Southeast Martin Luther King Jr. Boulevard and Southeast Stark Street.

As officers responded to the crashed vehicle, they learned the driver fled. Information was also broadcast that East Precinct officers had taken a report that the crashed A silver Honda CRV been taken by force from the 7500 block of Southeast Knight Street at 4:35 p.m on Saturday.

When officers arrived in the area, they searched for the suspect that had fled the scene of the crash. During the search, officers located the suspect inside the Cityteam Ministries Portland Shelter, located at 526 Southeast Grand Avenue.

As officers contacted the adult male suspect, shots were fired. Officers immediately requested emergency medical personnel respond to the scene.

"Right inside the doorway, they had barely stepped inside, they went right inside, yelling commands and then they started shooting," witness John Terrio told KOIN 6 News

Once on scene, emergency medical responders determined the suspect was deceased. Portland Police Homicide Detectives, assisted by the East County Major Crimes Team and Multnomah County District Attorney's Office, responded to continue the investigation.

According to police, he officers will be interviewed by investigators within 48 hours. As part of the use of force review process, the Portland Police Bureau Bureau will conduct an internal review of the entire incident and the case will go before the Police Review Board (PRB), which is comprised of community members, Bureau members and representatives from the Independent Police Review Division.

Evidence will be presented to a grand jury, which is standard practice.

Wheeler Urges Patience in Police Shooting Investigation

April 8, 2018

UPDATE The victim is identified as John Elifritz by KOIN 6 News, a news partner of the Portland Tribune who posted a cell phone video of the shooting on its website.

Following a protest over the police shooting of possible car jacking suspecting in a homeless shelter on Saturday, Mayor Ted Wheeler called on the public to allow the investigation to proceed.

"Last night officers responded to multiple calls for service regarding a suspect that ultimately ended in an officer involved shooting. The loss of a life is always tragic. My priority is to discover the facts and circumstances regarding this incident. Already, there are those who want to immediately define what happened. It would be highly irresponsible for me to participate in speculation at this time. I urge us all to allow investigators to do their work, to uncover the facts, and to report on their findings," Wheeler said in a Sunday evening statement.

The victim is identified as John Elifritz by KOIN 6 News, a news partner of the Portland Tribune who posted a cell phone video of the shooting on its website. The video shows people inside the shelter scrambling and trying to get outside after a white male bursts in. Police rush in moments later and confront the man, who seems to hesitate and then move towards them before being shot.

The ACLU of Oregon released a statement which said in part, "The video shows a disturbing and chaotic scene of people in the shelter running and yelling in fear, while others looked on, including one person in a wheelchair, as Portland Police officers enter the building with guns drawn. In less than a minute, officers shoot and kill the man, while members of an already traumatized population, Portland's homeless community, watch in horror. Was there any attempt to de-escalate the situation before officers open fire inside the homeless shelter full of innocent bystanders? If not, why not?"

In a Sunday afternoon statement, Portland Police Chief Danielle Outlaw said, "The Portland Police Bureau values human life and accepts the authority to use lethal force with great reverence. I am aware a video was taken of this incident by a community member and that video was posted to the internet. Please be reminded that deadly force investigations are extremely

complex and take time. The Police Bureau is committed to transparency and will ensure the entire investigation is released in a timely manner that does not impact the integrity of the investigation."

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Once on scene, emergency medical responders determined the suspect was deceased. Portland Police Homicide Detectives, assisted by the East County Major Crimes Team and Multnomah County District Attorney's Office, responded to continue the investigation.

To read an earlier Portland Tribune story, go to tinyurl.com/y9t7qqke.

Wheeler to Deliver Two-Part State of the City Address

*By Jim Redden
April 8, 2018*

Traditional address will be held Thursday morning at Portland Community College - Southeast, followed by question-and-answer session at City Club of Portland's Friday Forum luncheon.

In a break with tradition, Mayor Ted Wheeler will deliver a two-part State of the City address this Thursday and Friday.

Both will be hosted by the City Club of Portland, which historically scheduled the annual address as one of its weekly Friday Forum luncheons.

But this week, the longstanding civic organization will host the traditional address at 9:30 a.m. on Thursday, April 12, at Portland Community College - Southeast, located at 2305 S.E. 82nd Ave.

Doors will open at 8:30 a.m. Tickets are \$5 for members and \$10 for the general public. They can be purchased through the club's website at www.pdxcityclub.org.

According to the mayor's office, in his second State of the City Address, "Wheeler will outline his vision for the future of our city, his strategies for dealing with the critical issues facing our community, and the role Mayors across the country are playing in leading a national dialogue."

Then, at noon on Friday, Wheeler will answer questions during the club's regularly scheduled weekly lunch at the Sentinel Hotel, 614 SW 11th Ave. According to the club, the session will allow members to dig more deeply into the details of the previous day's address.

The event will be moderated by moderated by Rukaiyah Adams, chief investment officer at the Meyer Memorial Trust. Tickets can also be purchased through the club's website.

Willamette Week

Portland Police Shot and Killed a Man Inside a Homeless Shelter After He Allegedly Burst Into an AA Meeting With a Knife

*By Katie Shepherd
April 8, 2018*

A graphic video captured the deadly encounter between nearly a dozen officers and a suspected car jacker in a Portland shelter.

Portland police shot and killed a man inside a homeless shelter Saturday night, after he allegedly stole and crashed a vehicle in Southeast Portland, then burst into an Alcoholics Anonymous meeting wielding a knife.

The man, who has yet to be identified by officials, was allegedly involved in a carjacking. Police say he crashed the stolen vehicle and fled on foot. He tried to hide inside the Cityteam Ministries Portland Shelter on Southeast Grand Avenue.

A graphic video captured by a witness shows a gaggle of Portland police officers entering the shelter as people ran to the back corner of an open room. Officers shouted for the man to drop a weapon, though it is unclear if the man was armed at the time of the shooting.

Officers fired on the man after less than a minute in the room.

On Sunday morning, three witnesses told *The Oregonian* that the man killed by police had rushed into the shelter shirtless during an Alcoholics Anonymous meeting, waving a knife and cutting himself. "It was horrific," the man who took the video told *The Oregonian*. "We were all scared for our lives."

The videographer, Morgan Pickering, told *The Oregonian* he felt the shooting was justified. "I applaud their actions," he said. "They actually saved lives."

That is unlikely to quash controversy in a city where police have fatally shot three people in the past 16 months.

The shooting has already sparked outrage among activists and observers who have been objecting to excessive use of force and the criminalization of homelessness in recent months. It is unclear whether the man shot and killed by officers was homeless or had any association with the shelter.

The Portland Police Bureau says it will release the identities of the officers involved in the shooting Sunday. The officers will be placed on paid administrative leave pending a grand jury decision on whether the fatal shooting was legally justified.

New Details of Shooting Raise More Questions About Police Decisions in a Portland Homeless Shelter

By Katie Shepherd

April 8, 2018

John Andrew Elifritz, a 48-year-old shipyard worker, was fatally shot by Portland police Saturday. Social media posts indicate he had been suffering from a mental health crisis.

As more details emerge about the fatal police shooting that left a 48-year-old man dead in a homeless shelter on Saturday, advocates have raised concerns about how officers approached the deadly encounter.

Posts on social media indicate the man killed, a dockworker, may have been suffering from a mental health crisis over the past week.

And the American Civil Liberties Union of Oregon tonight questioned whether officers needed to shoot a man holding a knife who was separated from officers by the length of a room.

"Bystander video of the fatal shooting of a man in a homeless shelter in Portland last night raises serious questions about how police handled the situation and whether lethal force was called for," says ACLU executive director David Rogers. "Trained police officers should use the least amount of force necessary."

Portland police training may have led officers to open fire on a man armed with a knife from the considerable distance shown in the graphic videos captured by witnesses in the shelter.

A 2016 review of Portland Police Bureau training, published by the OIR group, which regularly analyzes PPB's practices, raised concerns with a long-taught "21-Foot Rule."

The rule, which an officer told a grand jury he had been taught in training, says that officers should not let a suspect with an "edged weapon" like a knife approach closer than 21 feet. A review of the rule in 2009 led several police chiefs to say that the "21-foot rule should never be seen as a green light to use deadly force or as creating a 'kill zone.'"

The OIR Group, a private consultant, urged Portland police to "ensure that its officers have not misinterpreted the principles behind the 21-foot rule and provide more contemporary training designed to ensure that officers recognize the appropriate considerations in determining whether and when to use deadly force against someone wielding an edged weapon."

Police have not yet identified the officers who fired the fatal rounds, or the man they killed. But family members said he was John Andrew Elifritz. His Facebook page says he was a 48-year-old shipyard worker with a young daughter.

Social-media posts from the mother of Elifritz's child, and their close friends, indicate that he was suffering from a mental health crisis over the past week.

Those posts date from before and after police killed Elifritz.

"John hadnt been himself for like the last week," a family friend wrote.

Another friend of Elifritz posted on his Facebook page, saying: "My friend John, was also in crisis when, he was profiled and murdered."

Court records show that Elifritz had been convicted of motor vehicle theft in the 1990s. He was also convicted of reckless driving and endangering another person in 2013.

That's relevant because on Saturday, police were pursuing a man who allegedly stole a car by force, crashed it, and then fled the scene. Officers say they followed Elifritz to the homeless shelter, where he had interrupted an Alcoholics Anonymous meeting. Witnesses say Elifritz had been cutting himself with a knife when police showed up at the shelter.

Bystander videos show people hiding in corners of the room as officers entered and shouted for Elifritz to drop the knife he was holding. Elifritz at one point responded by yelling "No."

Officers appear to fire several bean bags at Elifritz before entering the room and firing bullets at the man as he stood across the room, separated from officers by several feet and at times by a short wall forming a barrier between them.

While Portland police have not yet identified the officers involved in the shooting, the agency did say those involved had already been placed on paid administrative leave pending a full investigation.

PPB spokesman Sgt. Christopher Burley says the agency cannot comment on the bystander videos that captured the moments leading up to the shooting, but the agency is aware of the footage.

Mayor Ted Wheeler urged the public to remain patient as investigators looked into the circumstances of the shooting.

"The loss of a life is always tragic," he said in a statement. "My priority is to discover the facts and circumstances regarding this incident. Already, there are those who want to immediately define what happened. It would be highly irresponsible for me to participate in speculation at this time."

Oregon Ballot Measure to Fix Housing Finance Prohibition Passes First Milestone

*By Nigel Jaquiss
April 8, 2018*

Oregon Department of Justice issues ballot title for measure that would allow local governments to leverage housing dollars.

The Oregon Department of Justice this week published the proposed ballot title for a likely statewide measure that would increase public funding for affordable housing.

Currently, the city of Portland and most local jurisdictions in Oregon cannot leverage the proceeds of bonds to increase the supply of housing.

Here's what that means in real terms: In 2016, Portland voters approved a \$258 million housing bond to build new affordable housing or purchase existing units. Under current law, the city must own projects financed by that bond and cannot leverage other key funding sources, including some private dollars.

So during the short February legislative session, lawmakers passed House Joint Resolution 201 and referred to voters a measure that would allow leverage and public-private partnerships financed in part with bond proceeds.

The measure drew widespread support, including an enthusiastic endorsement from Portland Mayor Ted Wheeler and his city council colleagues.

"HJR 201 will help address the enormous community need for affordable housing throughout Oregon," said Feb. 2 written testimony signed by all five council members.

Getting a clear, non-threatening ballot title is critical to success for ballot measures.

Here's what the DOJ proposes:

"Amends Constitution: Allows local bonds for financing affordable housing with nongovernmental entities. Requires voter approval, annual audits."

There was little opposition to the measure in the legislature. It passed the House unanimously and passed the Senate 24 to five.

Comments on the ballot title—a forum for critics to make themselves known—are due by April 16.

The Portland Mercury

Police Fatally Shoot Man in SE Homeless Shelter

By Alex Zielinski

April 8, 2018

UPDATE 2:10 pm :

Portland Police say they'll release the names of the involved officers Sunday evening. In an afternoon press release, Police Chief Danielle Outlaw made her first comments on the shooting:

"I am aware a video was taken of this incident by a community member and that video was posted to the internet. Please be reminded that deadly force investigations are extremely complex and take time. The Police Bureau is committed to transparency and will ensure the entire investigation is released in a timely manner that does not impact the integrity of the investigation."

ORIGINAL POST 11:30 am:

A carjacking investigation led Portland police to fatally shooting a man inside a Southeast homeless shelter Saturday night.

The man, who has yet to be identified, had allegedly crashed a stolen Honda CRV on SE Martin Luther King Jr. and Stark, according to Portland Police spokesperson Christopher Burley.

Police tracked down the suspect in the Cityteam Ministries homeless shelter on SE Grand (a block away from the car) around 8 pm, interrupting an Alcoholics Anonymous meeting. A video of the encounter, captured on Instagram by witness Morgan Pickering, shows at least a dozen armed officers flooding into the building, all aiming their guns at a middle-aged man in a red and blue coat.

After a series of gunshots, the video cuts out. According to Burley, the man died at the scene.

It's still unclear why police fired at the man. Burley does not mention whether or not the man had a weapon, only that officers shot at him. In the minute-long Instagram video, it's not obvious that the targeted man is holding anything, but there's at least one officer heard shouting "Drop the knife!" (I originally—inaccurately—thought an officer said "drop the gun!" not "knife"). In his post, Pickering writes that officers first fired beanbags at the suspect before upgrading to lethal ammunition.

In an interview with the Oregonian shortly after the incident, Pickering said the man had arrived at the shelter shirtless and was "stabbing himself in the neck," frightening shelter visitors and staff. The police have yet to back any of these claims up.

In an early Sunday press statement, Burley said the unidentified officers who shot the man have been placed on paid administrative leave until an investigation into the shooting—and the subsequent Grand Jury trial—concludes. It's unknown how many officers actually fired at the suspect.

This fatal shooting comes in the midst of Mayor Ted Wheeler's contentious push to add nearly one hundred new officers with city budget funds.

Man Shot in SE Homeless Shelter Was 'Looking For Help,' Witnesses Say

*By Alex Zielinski
April 8, 2018*

Police accountability advocates gathered on the corner of SE Grand and Washington this afternoon to hold a small vigil for the man shot last night by police at the nearby Cityteam homeless shelter. Attendees held signs decrying police violence and talked about the “sloppy” nature of the shooting while men who’d witnessed the shooting watched from outside of the temporarily-closed shelter.

“It was intense,” said Kirk Smith, who’s been living at the short-term shelter for a month. He was inside the shelter last night when the now-deceased man entered, shirtless. Smith said the man was “twitching and freaking out” when he came inside.

“He looked crazed, you could tell he was looking for help,” Smith said. A shelter volunteer gave the man a jacket, Smith added.

Then, as the room full of men watched, the man began cutting his own neck with a knife, Smith said. “There was blood running down all over him,” Smith said. Smith was the one that ran outside to alert the police, who were already on the search for a carjacking suspect in the area.

According to Smith, around eight police officers entered the shelter with semi-automatic rifles pointed at the man (who they suspected was the carjacker). After the man waved his knife at a police dog who had entered the building, the officers shot him. This piece of the story has yet to be confirmed by police.

Smith, who hasn’t slept since Friday night due to the incident, doesn’t understand the officers’ logic.

“The guy was begging for help, he was suicidal,” he said. “They could have Tased him, taken to get some help. They didn’t need to shoot him.”

Erik Clemson was also inside the shelter during the shooting, a moment he described as “surreal,” like he was watching it in slow-motion. When cops showed up, Clemson said, “It escalated so quickly—and I think that’s what [the police] wanted to happen.” Clemson agreed with Smith that it wasn't the best way to handle what appeared to be a clear mental health crisis.

Portland police plan on releasing the name of the officers involved in the shooting this evening.