



**MEDIA RELEASE
MULTIPLE ARSONS**



At approximately 0257 on Thursday February 20, 2020, citizens and an off-duty police officer on his way home observed a trash fire in the vicinity of Ahli Baba's Kebob Shop at 163 Main Street. The citizens and the off-duty officer attempted to extinguish the fire. Multiple officers and the fire department were dispatched and were on scene in less than two minutes. The fire at this location eventually escalated to a second alarm. Crews conducted fire suppression and overhaul, and fully extinguished the fire; the last fire unit cleared the scene at 0520. Firefighters also checked adjacent buildings for fire and smoke.

Witnesses stated that they had observed a male subject igniting trash. Burlington Police Dispatch examined footage from city cameras to follow the path of a suspect, who moved north on Church Street lighting additional fires. Ultimately, four fires were set at various points on the Marketplace, including three in trash cans.

The Burlington Fire Department responded to and extinguished each of these fires. The City Fire Marshal also responded to the scene and assisted with these efforts as well as laying groundwork for the investigation. Officers canvassing the area then reported further garbage fires of apparently similar origin along Peru Street.

Burlington Police Sergeant Brownell further examined city video footage to trace the subject's path prior to his setting the first fire. Sergeant Brownell was able to ascertain that the subject had passed the Champlain Farms on Main Street and was able to work with employees there to obtain photos of a male subject purchasing a lighter at the store. The male in these photos matched the male observed in the incident at Ahli Baba's.

At 0518 hours, dispatch received calls of another fire in a dumpster behind 90 Pearl Street. Video showed the same subject walking through Dunkin Donuts only minutes before the fire.

Acting on sources of information, Sergeant Brownell and other officers were able to identify the subject as Robert Barbin, 57, and go to his residence. As officers were outside the residence preparing to make contact, Mr. Barbin walked out of the building, spotted officers and walked in an opposite direction. Officers called out to him and stopped him. Mr. Barbin was in possession of two shopping bags with wads of paper, ignitable liquid, and a lighter.

Fire Marshal Barry Simays initially estimates \$70,000 dollars in losses at Ahli Baba's, and a total of approximately \$74,000 across all incidents. The building at 155-163 Main Street is valued at \$949,700.

Both BPD and BFD would like to acknowledge many partners in addressing these incidents. Mutual aid companies from the Mallets Bay Fire Department and the Winooski Fire department responded into the city for station coverage, and the South Burlington Fire Department responded to an unrelated medical incident within the City of Burlington on BFD's behalf. Additionally, University of Vermont Rescue also responded to the Main Street fire scene for standby, the Burlington Electric Department responded to address power-related issues, and the Colchester Police Department assisted by attempting to make notifications to property owners.

The results of the Fire Marshal's origin-and-cause investigations for all eight locations identified an incendiary fire cause at each location.

Mr. Barbin will be charged with one count of 2nd degree arson, seven counts of 3rd degree arson, and eight counts of reckless endangerment. Barbin was previously charged with Arson in 2018. Additional details are anticipated to be available in the affidavit of probable cause following Mr. Barbin's arraignment.

Anyone with further information about these incidents is asked to call the City Fire Marshal at (802) 864-5577, extension 1, or the Burlington Police Department at (802) 658-2704.

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