



POLICE DEPARTMENT
CITY OF BURLINGTON

MEDIA RELEASE

Over the weekend the Burlington Police Department (BPD) received several reports of a man with a rifle who was in the vicinity of the protests occurring in Battery Park. He was masked and wearing a hat. He exhibited no behavior that could be categorized as unlawful or criminal, and refused to identify himself. Owing to Vermont's status as an "open-carry state," there was initially no option but to monitor the individual. The BPD consulted with the States Attorney's office and confirmed this. Community members, including protestors, were nonetheless concerned by this recurring behavior. BPD officers and investigators worked to obtain and confirm the man's identity as Jordan Atwood, 25, of Winooski. Mr. Atwood has had numerous previous contacts with law-enforcement, including a 2019 case that resulted in pre-trial conditions not to possess firearms. Last night, officers were able to locate Mr. Atwood near the intersection of Battery and Pearl Streets. He was again armed with a rifle and pistol. Officers took him into custody and seized the weapons.

A detailed timeline follows:

On 8/29/20 at 2032 hours BPD dispatchers received a complaint from a witness alleging an individual with a rifle was threatening people. The BPD was already monitoring the male subject via camera. He carried an apparent rifle on a sling and was standing in the police department's auxiliary parking lot at the northeast corner of North Avenue and Sherman Street. The male was not threatening anyone and engaged in apparently calm conversations with several people. Vermont is an open-carry state, and callers were informed the male was exercising his Constitutional rights. The suspect was monitored for an extended period of time and did not engage in obvious criminal activity.

On 8/30/20 at 1945 hours we received multiple calls about a male carrying a rifle. It was reported the male was not threatening anyone, but standing with the rifle at the corner of Battery and Pearl Streets. Lieutenant LaBarge, the Officer in Charge, responded to the area and located the male. Once the male was clear of the protest site, Lieutenant LaBarge engaged the male in conversation at the corner of Monroe and George Streets. The male told Lieutenant LaBarge he was exercising his Constitutional rights. Lieutenant LaBarge acknowledged that but discussed the fact the subject was causing alarm and discussed the need for the suspect to be responsible. The suspect refused to identify himself, and officers at the time had no right to compel such

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identification. He left the area in a vehicle that arrived to pick him up, driven by a third party. Lt. LaBarge was able to make a tentative identification after the fact.

On 08/31/20, the Detective Bureau undertook additional investigation and confirmed Lt. LaBarge's tentative identification. The male's identity was ascertained to be Jordan Atwood, 25, of Winooski. He was found to have conditions of release in relation to a previous reckless endangerment charge from 2019 that prohibited him from possessing a firearm. At that point, detectives began the process of applying for appropriate warrants.

On 08/31/20 at 2326 hours, BPD dispatch received a call about a male walking north on Church Street carrying a rifle. The male was not reported to be doing anything threatening. An officer located the male who was cooperative, but refused to identify himself. Lt. LaBarge responded to the area and reacquired the suspect at Cherry Street and Battery Street and was able to confirm Mr. Atwood's identity. Mr. Atwood was in possession of a pistol and an AR-15-style rifle. He was taken into custody without incident and lodged at corrections for violating his conditions of release.

Additionally, there have been press inquiries relating to other, earlier incidents on Monday night. At 2027 hours, police attempted to respond to a call of a fight where a suspect was alleged to be armed with a rifle at 10 N. Champlain Street. Demonstrators were marching from Church Street to Battery Park at the time, proceeding west on Pearl Street, and the disturbance was reportedly caused by residents of 10 N. Champlain clashing with demonstrators. As officers attempted to respond to the area, demonstrators blocked the entire roadway at Pearl St. and Pine St. and affirmatively refused to allow officers to pass in order to respond to the call. This can be seen in video footage obtained and aired by WCAX, which shows protestors with interlocked arms purposefully obstructing the street in the presence of several marked police cruisers with lights illuminated, and an officer who exits and attempts to explain the nature of the call for help and obtain cooperation from the protestors. The act of blocking a roadway is a criminal violation. Demonstrators also blocked the passage of citizens in private vehicles at the intersection of Pearl and Battery Streets and at Park and Monroe Street. When officers could not get to the scene of the fight and gun by car, they proceeded on foot. During this time a rock was thrown at an officer. At the scene of the fight, officers interviewed residents but were met by no other parties nor complainants. The weapon was discovered to be a BB gun. Absent complainants, reports were taken and no arrests were made. The BPD seeks further information about this event.

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“The Burlington Police Department holds as its highest object the mission of keeping people safe,” said Acting Chief of Police Jon Murad. “This means all people. This investigation and the apprehension of Mr. Atwood is fully indicative of that. We had a person whose behavior was, on its face, lawful but was nevertheless troubling. His behavior frightened and alarmed community members, including those exercising their right to free speech. Good, additional investigation work instead discovered him to be committing violations of the law, and he was apprehended appropriately. In Vermont, firearms possession is a right, but it must be exercised lawfully. Our First Amendment protections are also rights, but they too must be exercised lawfully. When an exercise of free speech includes people blocking traffic and other people’s rights of movement, and, of greater concern, includes people preventing emergency vehicles from responding to emergency calls, it has transformed from an exercise of free speech into an exercise of disorder. Additionally, throwing rocks at our city’s police officers is unacceptable, and I condemn that behavior. The BPD will continue to prioritize keeping all people safe; neighbors protesting, neighbors not protesting, and our officers included. We hope to be able to work with our neighbors, including those in Battery Park, to that end.”

Anyone with additional information about these incidents is asked to contact the Burlington Police Department at (802) 658-2704.

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