

Ruth Ann Barrett

October 24, 2021
Jessie Burke
Chair
Old Town Community Association
and
Mingus Mapps
Commissioner
City of Portland

Dear Jessie and Commissioner Mapps:

UPDATE: ARREST IN OLD TOWN DOUBLE MURDER of October 24th, 2021

When I lived in Old Town and my friends and family saw a headline like this they would immediately call me to make sure it wasn't my apartment building or street corner or me. I could assure them that the murder or shoot out wasn't even nearby and I was not personally threatened.

But then there it was, way too close. In May of 2017 in the lobby of the apartment building where I lived Jacob Shroyer was brutally stabbed to death, his groceries strewn across the lobby in puddles of blood.

I had been writing a blog at the time documenting the danger on the street in early 2017 using photographs to show, as best I could, the criminal behavior on NW Flanders from NW 3rd to NW 6th. I lived on the corner of Flanders at NW 4th on the second floor. I walked the neighborhood.

So here is some advice I am offering without being asked. Invitations to share the experience of living in Old Town by me or other resident living in Old Town are far and few between and I know you both have been working on increasing the Behavioral Health Unit, among other solutions, so I think it is a good time to share what I learned in 2017 since this double murder is before us.

Of course we don't have details yet - did the couple live in the neighborhood either housed or unhoused? What was the motive or was it another random killing, this time early in the morning. And for me, do I know the victims? Are they friends? Details count to people who are closest to the situation.

Back then the murder was emphasized as being random, the word, random, suggesting "accidental" as in being in the wrong place at the wrong time. This did not reduce fear and hyper-vigilance to dangers that were real. "At least the murderer was caught" was the most common response I heard back then. I'd stay away from that one. It's insensitive. Insisting on "solutions" as a pass to being heard on this topic by city leaders isn't, in my opinion, a good idea either. The solution(s) to making Old Town safe is above the pay grade of many city and county staff and elected officials let alone residents who have near zero expertise as crime fighters and criminal justice experts.

I might also recommend a discussion among Board members who may not be as sensitive and understanding of the situation in recognizing the effect on Association members and may have reasons to downplay the event, as was the case in 2017. Crime of this magnitude is very bad for business. It doesn't rent apartments nor activate retail.

Back then the advice was to buy pepper spray and take the free police course on personal safety. Neither are useful when the bullets start flying or knives are involved. Leaving sheafs of paper giving a myriad of numbers one can call for mental health services, etc. with residents who live at the crime scene isn't going to do it either.

There is also the possibility that this time things will be different. That's what I'm hoping for as my experience last time was woefully inadequate on (1) the part of the landlord, (an opportunity to admonish residents to guard the front door and - unsaid but implied given the context, with your life), (2) the police ("you're on your own" there are only six police officers downtown), and (3) the Office of Neighborhood Involvement, crime education team. Among the many papers ONI staff handed out, was, and I quote, the advice "make sure you keep your porch light on." Right.

So, let's hope for a better way to recognize the damage done to the residents and to nearby businesses, especially to those persons closest to the crime scene and to the victims, and not just move on with business as usual. Old Town then and now is a grieving community. It is Portland's Caring Community despite the constant positioning of it as Portland's Entertainment District, an emphasis on business rather than people.

There are many experts on addressing the magnitude of violence, not just criminal justice experts, but community and faith leaders from neighborhoods where this level of violence is not all that unusual. Let's see what could be done, what we haven't thought of to address concerns, allay fears and introduce plans for reducing violence in Old Town and the City Center.

It could get worse.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Ruth Ann Barrett". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a small red dot at the end of the final stroke.

Ruth Ann Barrett

PDXdowntowner.com

415-377-1835

UPDATE: ARREST IN OLD TOWN DOUBLE MURDER

News Release from Portland Police Bureau

Posted on FlashAlert: October 24th, 2021 4:29 PM

Portland Police Homicide Detectives booked Michael S. VanDomelen, 45, of Portland, into the Multnomah County Detention Center on 2 counts of Murder in the First Degree.

The victims, an adult male and adult female, will be identified after the Oregon State Medical Examiner confirms their names and notifies family of their death. The M.E. will determine cause and manner of death, but these are expected to be the 71st and 72nd homicides of 2021 in Portland.

Portland Police Homicide Unit detectives continuing their investigation. If anyone has information about this incident, they're asked to contact Detective Jeff Pontius Jeffery.Pontius@portlandoregon.gov 503-823-0433 or Detective Steve Gandy Stephen.Gandy@portlandoregon.gov .