

Candlelight vigil honors New Yorker killed on Barbur Boulevard

FROM THE EDITOR'S DESK

By Don Snedecor
The Southwest Portland Post

On Wednesday, December 15, at about 10:47 p.m. Angela Burke, a 26-year-old woman from New York, was struck and killed by a motorist while walking her bicycle across Southwest Barbur Blvd just south of Hamilton Street. She had lived in Portland just four months.

Caleb Pruitt, who was driving his 2008 Subaru Impreza at a high rate of speed when he allegedly struck and killed Burke, was arrested on allegations of negligent homicide and driving under the influence of intoxicants.

A passenger riding with Pruitt was taken to a nearby hospital with non-life threatening injuries. Pruitt has since been released on bail.

On Monday, December 20 at about 5:30 p.m., some 50 people showed up for a candlelight vigil at the place where Burke was killed. Maybe you know the place, the turnout south of Hamilton Street where they often sell Christmas trees at this time of year.

Some came on foot, some by car, but many came by bicycle, wearing reflective gear, and holding signs, and flashlights and candles in this woman's memory. A number of transportation advocates were in attendance at the vigil.

I saw Don Baack, chair of SW Trails there. So was Marianne Fitzgerald, chair of the Southwest Transportation Committee. Maria Cahill, secretary of the Multnomah Neighborhood Association, rode her bike. So did her husband.

"SW Trails, the SWNI Transportation Committee and others have been working to improve safety along the length of Barbur Boulevard, but little has been done," said Baack. "Especially on the Barbur bridges, the narrowest and most uncomfortable sections of Southwest Barbur Boulevard for bicyclists and pedestrians."

I spoke to Mark Lear of the Portland Bureau of Transportation who attended the candlelight vigil. He introduced me to a woman he was speaking to from the Oregon Department of Transportation, the agency in charge Highway 99W/Barbur Boulevard.

I asked Lear why couldn't they install a traffic signal somewhere near where Burke was killed?

Lear said while he thought a signal was a good idea, he thought it should be closer to the Rasmussen Apartments, approximately .75 miles south of the Hamilton signal. That's where the TriMet bus stop is located. According to Google Maps, the next traffic signal south is 1.6 miles away, at Miles Street.

So for now, between Hamilton and Miles Street, you're literally taking your life in your hands if you need to cross the five lanes of

traffic. This isn't right and something needs to change.

Steph Routh, director of the Willamette Pedestrian Coalition, said, "Ms. Burke's death was as senseless as it was preventable. In our community and in our region, everyone should feel safe while walking or biking on our roads. There is no higher priority than preserving life. This tragedy is a mournful reminder of how far we have to go in terms of traffic safety."

I stand with all these transporta-

tion advocates in the candlelight wondering why this had to happen. With some thoughtful planning, perhaps future tragedies could be prevented?

We mourn the loss of Angela Burke and extend our sincere condolences to her friends and family. We cannot imagine their loss.

Police are continuing to investigate this incident. Anyone with additional information is urged to call Traffic Officer Barry Busse of the Portland Police Bureau at 503-823-2216.




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