New Jersey kosher supermarket shooters ‘targeted the location,’ mayor says

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Investigators believe that the gunmen in a Tuesday shootout at a kosher supermarket in New Jersey deliberately attacked the store, though there was no immediate word on their suspected motive.

“Based on our initial investigation (which is ongoing) we now believe the active shooters targeted the location they attacked,” Jersey City Mayor Steven Fulop said.

Authorities had initially said that they did not believe that the JC Kosher Supermarket had been singled out. Fulop did not elaborate on why authorities now believe the market was targeted.

The gun battle left at least six people dead — three bystanders, one police officer and two suspected shooters.

Authorities have not released information on the bystanders or gunmen who were killed, but Chabad identified two of the dead as store owner Leah Minda Ferencz, 33, and Moshe Deutsch, 24, both members of the local Hasidic community.

The slain police officer was identified as Detective Joseph Seals, 40.

The shooting took place at multiple locations, starting at a cemetery, where the officer was gunned down, and continuing at the kosher supermarket about a mile away, where five more bodies were found, Jersey City Police Chief Michael Kelly said.

Fulop said that there were no signs of further threats, although earlier reports had said a third gunman may have escaped the scene, and said he had been in close contact with Jersey City’s Jewish community following the attack.

“I know the entire Jersey City community stands together with the Jewish Community during these challenging times,” Fulop said.

Next to the store, the only kosher supermarket in the area and a central fixture for the growing community, are a yeshiva and a synagogue. Around 100 Jewish families live in the area in the city’s Greenville neighborhood, with most of the families having moved there from Brooklyn in the last few years.

Chabad Rabbi Moshe Schapiro, who shops at the store and attends the synagogue next door, said he spoke with the store owner, Moishe Ferencz, before Ferencz learned that his wife had been killed in the attack.

“He told me he had just walked out of the store into the synagogue not five feet away just before this happened, and then he couldn’t get back for hours,” Schapiro said. “His wife was inside the store. He said, ‘I hope my wife is safe.’”

New York City councilman Chaim Deutsch, a member of the city’s Jewish caucus, said that New York City police was providing extra security to synagogues and other sites.

Seals was credited by his superiors with having led the department in the number of illegal guns removed from the streets in recent years, and might have been trying to stop an incident involving such weapons when he was cut down by gunfire that erupted near the cemetery, authorities said.

The bullets started flying early in the afternoon in the city of about 270,000 people, situated across the Hudson River from New York City. Seals, who worked for a unit called Cease Fire, was shot around 12:30 p.m. The gunmen then drove a stolen rental van to another part of the city and engaged police in a lengthy shootout.

Kelly said that when police responded to the area of the kosher store, officers “were immediately engaged by high-power rifle fire.”

“Our officers were under fire for hours,” the chief said.

Inside the grocery store, police found the bodies of who they believed were the two gunmen and three other people who apparently happened to be there when the assailants rushed in, authorities said. Police said they were confident the bystanders were shot by the gunmen and not by police.

The shooting spread fear through the neighborhood, and the nearby Sacred Heart School was put on lockdown as a precaution.

SWAT teams, state police and federal agents converged on the scene, and police blocked off the area, which in addition to the school and supermarket included a hair salon and other shops. Dozens of bystanders pressed against the police barrier to capture the action on their cellphones, some whooping when bursts of fire were heard.

Video shot by residents recorded loud volleys of gunfire reverberating along one of the city’s main streets and showed a long line of law enforcement officers pointing guns as they advanced, yelling to bystanders, “Clear the street! Get out of the way!”

US President Donald Trump said he had been briefed on the incident, which he called a “horrific shootout,” adding that the White House would be monitoring the situation and assisting local officials.

“Our thoughts & prayers are w/ the victims & their families during this very difficult & tragic time,” Trump wrote on Twitter.

New Jersey Governor Phil Murphy said, “Our thoughts and prayers are with the men and women of the Jersey City Police Department, especially with the officers shot during this standoff, and with the residents and schoolchildren currently under lockdown.”

“I have every confidence in our law enforcement professionals to ensure the safety of the community and resolve this situation,” Murphy said.

One umbrella US Jewish group, the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations, released a statement Tuesday expressing “solidarity for the Jewish community and all the residents of Jersey City, where it appears members of the community were wounded by gunfire, as were members of the police force responding to gunfire from active shooters. We do not know at this point if the kosher supermarket from which they were firing was an intended target. We pray for the safety of all those involved.”

Israel’s consul general in New York, Dani Dayan, praised Seals for making “the ultimate sacrifice.”

“His life was inspirational. His death was heroic. He will be remembered,” Dayan said.

Jonathan Greenblatt, CEO of the Anti-Defamation League, said he was “heartbroken by the loss of life.”

Halie Soifer, executive director of the Jewish Democratic Council of America, said she was “deeply saddened by the horrific loss of life.”

Palestinian-American activist Linda Sarsour, who is from New York and is a supporter of the boycott movement against Israel, said she was “praying this wasn’t a hate-filled act. Unfortunately, there have been instances in the near past that keep our communities on edge especially our Jewish neighbors.”

Democratic presidential candidate Cory Booker, a senator from New Jersey, said that “once again, we’re faced with scenes of carnage, fear, and loss. It’s reprehensible that in America, residents are shot while grocery shopping.”

Presidential candidates Elizabeth Warren and Andrew Yang similarly condemned the attack.