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Police: Murder was Random

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Burlington, Vermont - March 30, 2005

"We want to know what's safe and what's not safe," said Maggie Holt of South Burlington.



Three weeks after a brutal rape and murder area residents remain on edge.

"That guy lived four houses away from me," pointed out one woman.

More than 100 people showed up at the forum looking for safety tips and answers.

"Is this a random act?" demanded another woman.

The shocking murder of Laura Winterbottom prompted Burlington Police to join forces with the Women's Rape Crisis Center. Together, personal safety advice was presented to a packed room.

"Your primary danger is from people that you know," explained Lt. Mike Schirling.

Organizers of the event pointed out that in nearly every attack victims know the perpetrators. But in the Winterbottom case that's not

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necessarily true. Police now call it a random act of violence. They say the alleged killer, Gerald Montgomery, kidnapped Winterbottom before he raped and murdered her.

"Post-arrest our investigation has led us to information and witness statements that lead us to believe this was in fact, a random act. We're prepared to say that now. We weren't prepared to say that earlier in our investigation. We'll be presenting additional evidence and witness information to the State's Attorney for consideration of charges related to kidnapping," explained Chief Tom Tremblay.

Many of the fearful at the meeting were also angry. Montgomery was a convicted sex offender before the murder. He was living in Burlington.

"You gotta let the public know," insisted one neighbor.

Residents want to know why Montgomery was not listed on the state's internet sex offender registry that's available to the public. Instead, he was on the registry available to law enforcement only. The reason: he didn't qualify under current law. You have to be a violent or repeat sex offender to get on the public list. Residents at the forum and Chief Tremblay want that changed.

"These people are convicted. It's public record that they have this conviction. And I believe that making that information accessible to the community, so they can have safety plans for the family and their neighborhood, is appropriate."

There are only 140 convicted sex offenders on the public list-- that's out of the 2,200 sex offenders in Vermont. The Chief says all of them should be listed for public viewing. Victims advocates, prosecutors, and many lawmakers, including the Governor agree. And changes to the sex offender registry are being considered.

As for the new developments in the Winterbottom case, Chief Tremblay says it will be up to the State's Attorney to decide whether a kidnapping charge will be added to the murder and rape charges that Montgomery already faces.

[Darren Perron](#) - Channel 3 News



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