

crime and courts

SEARCH WARRANTS SEALED IN CASE OF VIRGINIA GIRL, 13, WHO WAS STABBED TO DEATH

The Associated Press

BLACKSBURG

Search warrants in the death of a 13-year-old girl who police say was slain by a Virginia Tech student have been sealed by a judge as the investigation continues.

The Roanoke Times reports that documents that may contain key details of the prosecution's evidence against the two people charged in Nicole Lovell's

death were sealed several weeks ago.

David Eisenhower, 18, is charged with abduction and first-degree murder in the death of Lovell, who vanished Jan. 27.

Another Virginia Tech student, Natalie Keepers, 19, is charged with accessory before and after the fact and with illegally dumping Nicole's body just across the state line in North Carolina. Authorities say Nicole was stabbed.

Aquifer replenishment touted as a cheaper way to clean bay

Project would treat wastewater, reduce pollution

By Dave Mayfield
The Virginian-Pilot

CHESAPEAKE

Among those who crunch the numbers for city and county budgets, a big wild card in the decade ahead is the Chesapeake Bay cleanup.

Localities have been told they need to sharply cut pollution running into the bay and its tributaries from streets and parking lots. Collectively, the mandate could cost them \$1 billion or more. And what makes it harder to swallow is that proving how much nitrogen, phosphorus and sediments would be kept out of waterways from all that spending will be difficult at best.

On Thursday, representatives of the cities and counties were offered a potential way around the stormwater problem. It came via a presentation by Ted Henifin, general manager of the Hampton Roads Sanitation District, the region's wastewater treatment authority.

He outlined an HRSD proposal that would cut nutrient runoff into the bay by so much that the localities could be spared from the stormwater cleanup requirements.

The HRSD has proposed eliminating almost entirely discharges from its treatment plants into the Elizabeth, James and York rivers. Instead, it would add steps to bring the wastewater to drinking-water standards, then inject it into the deepest aquifer in the region.

The "sustainable water recycling" proposal has

been touted as a way to address coastal Virginia's growing concerns about sea level rise. The Potomac aquifer has been heavily depleted by withdrawals, and that's accelerated the pace at which land is sinking — a process known as subsidence. This makes the region even more vulnerable to rising seas.

Computer models indicate pumping 120 million gallons a day back into the aquifer, as the HRSD proposes, would increase water levels and pressures within it. Geologists say that should slow subsidence.

While Henifin covered that territory in his talk Thursday, he put more emphasis on how the HRSD's proposal might spare local governments from big investments in the bay cleanup. It wasn't surprising, given his audience: the executive committee of the Hampton Roads Planning District Commission, a group of city and county managers and local elected officials.

Henifin ran through slides that showed how the HRSD proposal would cut pollution. In the James, its annual discharge of nitrogen would be sliced by about 90 percent, to an annual total of 500,000 pounds. That would be well below the most drastic limit of 1.6 million pounds the agency projects it could face for the James under guidelines for the federal-mandated cleanup.

That over-compliance would more than cover the amounts of nitrogen localities face having to cut in their stormwater runoff, Henifin said. The same trend generally applies to phosphorus and sediment in the James and in other rivers, he said.

The state Department of Environmental Quality

must OK such a reallocation of what's known as the Total Maximum Daily Load of pollutants, or TMDL. Henifin said he's optimistic the agency would go along. He said he met with Gov. Terry McAuliffe on Feb. 9, and the governor is "all in, at this point" in encouraging the HRSD to move forward.

Whitney Katchmark, who oversees water resources issues for the Planning District Commission, said alleviation of the stormwater requirement wouldn't mean an end to projects that would reduce pollutant runoff. She said that localities are taking steps to limit damage from tidal flooding, and that those projects generally result in less pollution.

The HRSD has estimated its project would cost \$1 billion — which would be recovered from rate-payers — but Henifin has said much of what it plans would have been required eventually anyway under toughening federal guidelines for water treatment. The agency has proposed charging groundwater users to recover its operating and maintenance cost for the new technology, which it estimates at \$20 million to \$40 million a year. Such a fee may require a change in state law.

Federal regulators also must approve the HRSD's proposal.

Members of the planning committee Thursday asked Henifin a few questions but didn't vote on the HRSD proposal. Henifin said that it was too early to seek an endorsement, and that the HRSD likely will ask for one next year, after it completes tests to prove the concept's viability.

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Commission says it has feasible plan for roads

All phases of water crossing wouldn't be done until 2060s

By Jordan Pascale
The Virginian-Pilot

The group in charge of creating a transportation funding plan for the next six years has almost finished its work, but under current assumptions, there's not enough to pay for all the region's priority projects by 2040.

Most notably, only one part of a water crossing could be completed by 2028; the rest is set for 2061 or 2066.

Just exactly what those water crossings are — the Patriots Crossing with Craney Island Connector and expanded Monitor-Merrimac and Hampton Roads bridge-tunnels, or a combination — is still being identified in a two-year environmental study.

So planners have put a placeholder dollar amount, \$4 billion, for one of those projects to be built by 2028.

The Hampton Roads Transportation Accountability Commission, created by 2013 legislation to oversee newly created regional tax revenue for transportation, first started meeting in July 2014.

HRTAC Chairman and Virginia Beach Mayor Will Sessoms said he feels the group is starting to get something done.

"This is one of the most encouraging things we've seen since the beginning of HRTAC," Sessoms said. "Does it get everything we want? No, it does not do that, and we must be honest about that."

But it's come a long way from where it was in November.

HRTAC hired a consultant to come up with a plan to pay for nine priority projects by 2040.

The consultant came back with six scenarios that looked at tolling nearly every water crossing and implementing High Occupancy Toll lanes on some interstates. Tolls ranged from \$1 to \$3.

Despite the heavy tolling, none of the plans was able to be fully funded with current revenue.

"In the end, we did what we were asked to do," HRTAC head Kevin Page said.

None was suitable to the HRTAC board, so HRTAC financial gurus pruned those plans to a realistic one. The plan includes no new tolls or tax increases. Under the plan, projects would be paid for as they are built:

- Finish the Hampton Roads Crossing study by 2018.
- Phase I expansion of the High-Rise Bridge by 2020, Phase II by 2029
- Interstate 64/264 interchange done by 2021
- Phase I & 2 of I-64 expansion on the Peninsula finished by 2019, Phase III finished by 2022, Fort Eustis interchange by 2031
- Phase I of the water crossing by 2028
- U.S. 460/58/13 connector by 2032

Beyond 2040, the second phase of the water crossing plan is set for 2061, and the third is to be completed in 2066. This is the best they can do with what they know, Page said.

A bill in the legislature (SB742) would bring in more gas tax revenue if it passes, but its future is uncertain.

"We are finding the best path, without waiting around for something to happen," Page said. "A lot will unfold in 24 months."

Sessoms urged residents to contact their HRTAC representative in the next 30 days to comment or attend a public hearing during its March 14 meeting at its office at 723 Woodlake Drive in Chesapeake.

This funding proposal will guide planners and help give state officials an idea about project construction readiness, and it will help in the development of the Hampton Roads Transportation Planning Organization's long-term transportation plan, set to be approved in July.

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