

Albemarle homicide rate highest since 2017

Recent spate in city, county push numbers up as year-end draws near

TYLER HAMMEL
thammel@dailyprogress.com
(434) 978-7268

As homicides in Albemarle County reach their highest rate since 2017, a recent spate of homicides in Charlottesville has meant 2020 matches the city's 2019 rate.

According to Abbey Stumpf, spokesperson for the Albemarle County Police Department, the department has investigated six homicides and one attempted homicide in 2020. Of the six homicides, four are considered domestic incidents and four have happened since October.

"At this point, these are all considered isolated incidents," Stumpf said. "Once the year is completed and more local/regional/national data becomes available, we will, as always, fully analyze the stats and trends for all crime."

Two of those homicides occurred during separate incidents in November and resulted in the deaths of Madeline Colvin and Yvette Fitch. In Colvin's case, 22-year-old Tyler Warr was arrested and charged with second-degree murder and in Fitch's case, 58-year-old James Elliott Fitch was arrested and also charged with second-degree murder. Both men appear to be related to the women they're charged with killing.

Despite the increase in the number of homicides, Albemarle County Police Chief Ron Lantz said that a majority of the 2020 incidents have been domestic in nature.

"We urge everyone in our community to seek the help they need if facing a mental crisis or need assistance in getting out of an abusive situation," he said. "There are tremendous resources in this community we encourage people to use. It's

dailyprogress.com

12/6/20

Homicide

From A1

been a challenging year and we must continue to stand together to support one another."

In the last couple years, homicide numbers fell in the county and city after a particularly violent 2017, which saw the city and county report five and six homicides, respectively, according to annual reports

released by the localities.

Despite the fluctuating homicide rates, annual reports released by the Virginia State Police show that the rate of violent crimes in the two localities has fallen in recent years.

Charlottesville's homicide rate currently matches the 2019 rate of three, according to the city police, though all three of those homicides occurred in November.

The incidents resulted in the deaths of Dre'Shawn McDonald,

Tiewan Benston and Tanya Renee Wheeler. Two men —Tajuan Allen, 22, and Bryan Hatcher, 44— have been arrested in connection to those deaths, while Wheeler's Nov. 28 death is still being investigated.

Unlike in Albemarle County, none of these three incidents are considered domestic, according to Major Jim Mooney, assistant chief of police. Following McDonald's death at the beginning of November, residents of public housing on South

First Street called an emergency meeting and requested increased patrols of the area.

"After the first November homicide, we announced extra patrols in our city housing areas at the request of many residents," Mooney said. "How and where we patrol is driven by crime data, so it changes frequently."

Late last month, residents and officials discussed a very early draft of the action plan during a safety committee meeting of the Charlottesville Rede-

velopment and Housing Authority. As of Nov. 26, the action plan was in the earliest draft phases and was focused on creating short- and long-term safety policies, implementing physical improvements, increasing services and partnering with residents to tackle long-standing issues.

According to Mooney, none of the homicides in 2020 appear to be related to each other and there does not appear to be any obvious factors driving the occurrences.