



POLICE DEPARTMENT
CITY OF BURLINGTON

Press Release
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FOUR TO BE CHARGED WITH MURDER IN THE SHOOTING DEATH OF BENZEL HAMPTON

The hunt for the suspects who killed Benzel Hampton, 23, in a shootout in a driveway on North Willard Street on Tuesday Afternoon is drawing to a close. An investigation by Burlington Police Detectives and their colleagues led police to locations in Vermont and Massachusetts, then on to Connecticut, where arrests were made.

As of today, four people will face charges related to the murder. Lesine Woodson, 32, was taken into custody by Burlington Police Officers on Colchester Avenue shortly after the incident. James Felix, 36, was shot several times in the exchange of gunfire on North Willard Street and remains in treatment at the UVM Medical Center. Brandon Sanders, 18, was arrested during a car stop by Connecticut and federal authorities yesterday evening. Johnny Ford, 32, was arrested last night at a Motel 6 in Enfield, Connecticut. It is anticipated that all suspects will be charged with Second Degree Murder.

It is alleged that Felix, Sanders and Ford attacked Hampton in the driveway of 235 North Willard Street some time before 3:00 PM last Tuesday, as Hampton was completing a drug deal with a resident there. The motive for the attack is still under investigation. As Hampton was wrestled to the ground, he and his attackers exchanged gunfire. Felix was shot several times, and Hampton was shot in the head and killed. With Hampton fatally wounded and Felix in danger of dying, the assailants retreated to a nearby Nissan Pathfinder, where Woodson was waiting behind the wheel. They drove towards the UVM Medical Center Emergency Department and flagged down an ambulance on Colchester Avenue. When police responded there, they found that Sanders and Ford had fled. Hours later, the two procured the vehicle that they ultimately used to flee the state. By last night, everyone of initial interest in the murder had been identified, located, and the resulting suspects have been apprehended.

“A fatal shooting in the middle of the afternoon on a residential street is intolerable,” said Mayor Miro Weinberger. “Our officers know that, and worked skillfully over thirty hours to bring all of those responsible for this attack to justice. The message of their work should be clear to all: We will not stand for violence in Burlington, and we will work relentlessly to ensure the safety of all in our community.”

“Minutes before our city’s schools let out, three suspects attacked Benzel Hampton in a driveway a few feet from the sidewalk in a residential neighborhood,” said Burlington Chief of Police Brandon del Pozo. “The gunfire that followed not only killed Hampton and wounded a suspect, but sent bullets everywhere. We were pulling them out of walls and pillars. We are lucky nobody else was injured or killed, especially bystanders. People rightly asked, in the

aftermath, if the suspects posed a danger to the community. The answer was yes: not because their murderous acts targeted everyday people going about their lives, but because people who act this way are a danger to our community, dealing drugs and planning acts of violence as a way of handling disputes. It is why our police officers work hard to make state and federal cases against people who victimize our community with drug sales.”

The arrest of Sanders shut down several lanes of traffic on Interstate 91. The vehicle he occupied, determined to be of interest to the Burlington Police, was initially spotted and surveilled by authorities in Massachusetts, then followed into Connecticut. Ford was later arrested at a motel by a Connecticut SWAT team with the assistance of other local and federal authorities. Enfield police recovered approximately \$16,000 in cash and over 100 grams of crack cocaine from the motel room. Approximately twelve hours after the shooting, Ford entered the MGM Grand Casino in Springfield, Massachusetts, and played poker. Eleven hours later, after a dispute with the casino’s staff, he was ejected by the state’s Gaming Enforcement Division.

Ford has previous arrests in Florida for robbery with a firearm and aggravated battery, carrying a concealed weapon, aggravated battery, petit theft, felony theft, resisting arrest, sale of cocaine, cocaine possession, possession of a controlled substance, and contempt of court.

Sanders has previous arrests in Florida for robbery and larceny.

The murder victim, Benzel Hampton, is also from Florida. In response to media inquiries: he is the same person who came to the attention of the public in January when he led Vermont State Troopers on a 30-mile vehicle pursuit from Middlesex to Essex, during which speeds exceeded 100 miles per hour. The chase ended when Hampton crashed into the truck of another motorist, fled on foot, and was apprehended by state troopers and an off-duty sheriff’s deputy. Hampton was attempting to evade capture on a New York State arrest warrant for his indictment on a felony weapons charge. He was released from custody in Vermont on \$1,000 bail. A quantity of crack cocaine was recovered from his body on Tuesday.

The Burlington Police Department owes a debt of thanks and gratitude to members of Connecticut’s Capital Region Emergency Services Team, and to the special agents of the Federal Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms task force in Springfield, Massachusetts. They did not hesitate to offer assistance in locating and apprehending Sanders and Felix. We are also grateful to the Enfield, Connecticut Police Department for handling the incident quickly, safely and professionally.

The Burlington Police Department has spoken with the sister, girlfriend and estranged wife of Benzel Hampton, and expressed the city’s condolences over his murder. We have reassured them that we have captured the suspects in his killing and will seek justice. Hampton leaves behind two young children.