RCMP RESPONSE

Below is a formal response from the BC RCMP to your request. The Supt oversees the Major Crime Unit leading the investigation.

Thanks for the opportunity.

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Dawn Roberts
Director in charge BC RCMP Communications

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Statement from Supt. Sanjaya Wijayakoon, BC RCMP Major Crime

Despite a case having transitioned into the judicial process, no file is ever closed. As in any case, should further information come to light in any such matter, Southeast District (SED) Major Crime investigators will forward those findings to the BC Prosecution Service (BCPS) for its consideration. I can confirm that the RCMP is not currently seeking any additional suspects and the file remains open. Given that status we will limit our comments accordingly, in order to protect any future court processes.

As you are likely aware 56-year-old Arlene Susan Westervelt died on June 26, 2016, while canoeing and picnicking along the shores of Okanagan Lake near Lake Country B.C. Despite an extensive search of Okanagan Lake by local fire and rescue personnel that evening.

Arlene’s body was recovered the following day in 35 feet of water, approximately 100 feet from the shore by specially trained divers of the RCMP Underwater Recovery Team. The matter started as a sudden death investigation lead by the BC Coroners Service, but transitioned into a criminal investigation lead by the RCMP.

We are not able to discuss specifics around our investigative findings, however can share this general overview. As with any criminal investigation physical and digital evidence was gathered in accordance with any legal authorizations required. The investigation also looked at Arlene’s actions and behaviours prior to her death, as well as those of the suspect. During the course of this investigation, regular discussions took place with the BC Prosecution Service.

Ultimately, all of the investigative findings were provided to Crown, in order for them to do a fulsome charge assessment. On April 6, 2019, after a lengthy police investigation 63-year-old Lake Country resident Lambertus (Bert) Westervelt was formally charged with second degree murder of Arlene Susan Westervelt.

With respect to questions around member conduct. For general background, internal conduct is subject to Privacy Act restrictions and only in those cases where the matter results in a Conduct Dismissal Hearing would the case be a matter of public record. A list of those hearings are available at http://www.rcmp-grc.gc.ca/even/en/t/3/e. If the allegations are also criminal in nature, a statutory investigation would also be launched and only in such cases that charges are laid would the information be a matter of public
record. Additionally, if a person is no longer employed by the RCMP they are no longer subject to Code of Conduct, and any on-going internal Code of Conduct investigations would cease.

In this case, should there have been allegations of misconduct related to one of our officers in relation to this investigation, these allegations would have been disclosed to the BC Prosecution Service (BCPS) and assessed with respect to the potential impact on prosecution. It is our understanding that the charge assessment and subsequent stay of proceedings made by the BCPS is unrelated to the conduct of any RCMP members or employees.

In closing we would like to add that the RCMP remains committed to supporting the victim’s family moving forward and providing any information necessary to further advance the judicial process. Our thoughts remain with Arlene Westervelt's family, and all those impacted by this tragic situation.

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