

Flowers makes initial appearance: Huron man accused of murdering Woonsocket woman  
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BY: ROGER LARSEN

A judge took a defense request for a reduced bond under advisement Tuesday as murder suspect Shannon Flowers of Huron made his initial court appearance.

Flowers, 42, faces first-degree murder charges in last week's deaths of 20-year-old Brittney Chua of Woonsocket and her unborn baby girl. An alternative felony count charges him with fetal homicide.

Judge Jon Erickson set a preliminary hearing for next Wednesday, although the case could be presented before a seated grand jury instead.

A number of people were in the Huron courtroom for the brief appearance.

After Erickson informed Flowers of his rights, defense attorney Jeff Burns asked that the judge set a bond that is attainable. Flowers is currently being held at the Regional Correction Center without bond.

Burns said Flowers would agree to abide by any bond conditions set by the court. He said Flowers is a lifelong resident of the community, has been employed at Earl's Alignment for many years and has a family here. He said the defendant is a homeowner with significant ties to Huron and has no criminal history.

Burns also said the defense plans to contest the charges and that the case will take time.

But Beadle County Deputy State's Attorney Jeff Banks asked that Flowers continue to be held without bond.

While Flowers has significant ties to the community, he is accused of two murders, the most serious charges one can face in South Dakota, Banks said.

He told the judge the manner of the deaths and the facts and circumstances surrounding the investigation indicate the defendant is a threat to both himself and to the community.

Chua was beaten to death with a pipe last Thursday. The preliminary autopsy report indicates she was struck in the head five to seven times.

Her body was found Saturday morning at the city compost pile near the former Dakota Pork plant on the eastern outskirts of Huron.

In court papers, the state said the victim was 16 to 20 months pregnant at the time of her death.

Authorities, acting on a tip from a friend of Flowers, also found burned possessions

belonging to the victim and the pipe allegedly used to kill her on a farm southwest of Huron.

The motive in the case remains under investigation. The two, married to other people, were having a sexual relationship, but it's unknown, pending the results of further tests, whether Flowers was the father of the unborn child.

An unnamed citizen told authorities Flowers had admitted the crime to him and that he had discarded the body in the compost pile.

The citizen, who is cooperating with authorities and has not been charged, also said Chua had told Flowers she was pregnant.

Authorities are uncertain where the crime occurred pending results from forensic tests.