

WEDNESDAY  
JANUARY 3, 2007

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# METRO

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## Double homicide charges dropped

BY JOHN STEVENSON

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Double homicide charges against Jamal Manta Watson were dropped Tuesday, reportedly because some witnesses were afraid to take the witness stand against him, while another retracted his identification of Watson as the killer.

However, Watson was indicted by the county grand jury Tuesday on unrelated charges of being a habitual felon and illegally possessing a firearm as a felon.

Prosecutor Jim Dornfried wrote in court paperwork that he could not proceed on the murder charges because key witnesses would not testify.



WATSON

According to Dornfried, one witness had been shot by an unnamed person, and another would not cooperate because she "feared for her safety." Dornfried also said the retracted identification weakened his case irretrievably.

## Prosecutor Jim Dornfried wrote in court paperwork that he could not proceed on the murder charges because key witnesses would not testify.

Before the dismissals Tuesday, Watson had been accused in the Aug. 2, 2005, shooting deaths of 28-year-old Tauarus Hamlett and 24-year-old James Webb.

The victims were gunned down outside an abandoned house in the 100 block of South Maple Street.

According to police, two men walked up and fired several shots into the victims as they talked with friends.

Based on a tip to officers, Watson was arrested without a struggle in October at the Triangle Pointe Apartments on Discovery Way, about six miles from the murder site. The second alleged gunman never was found.

Defense lawyer Michael Driver said Tuesday that, despite Dornfried's assertions, he wasn't aware of any threats against witnesses in the case.

"I certainly haven't talked to any witnesses who told me they were afraid to testify," he said. "But I still think their credibility was shaky at best. I think this was just another case in which police conducted a poor investigation and poor identification procedures were used."