The suspect charged for the murders of at least three women on Long Island’s Gilgo Beach more than a decade ago appeared in court this week for a preliminary hearing, where prosecutors presented mounting evidence from the investigation of the case.

The evidence against Rex Heuermann, a 59-year-old architect, includes 2,500 documents and hundreds of hours of video footage taken at his residence and his office, prosecutors said Tuesday in court.

The charges are in connection with the murders of three women—Amber Lynn Costello, Megan Waterman, and Melissa Barthelemy—whose bodies were found near Gilgo Beach in 2010.

Police say Heuermann is also the prime suspect in the murder of Maureen Brainard-Barnes, who was also found in the area. The killings became known as the “Gilgo Four.” The slayings are also one of at least 6 others in the area, but police have not specified whether those were connected to the case that has remained unsolved for years.

Heuermann has maintained his innocence and told his attorney that he did not commit the murders. “We’re prepared to go forward," Michael Brown, Heuermann's attorney, said after the hearing. "We will defend this case in the court of law and we will go to trial in this case.”

Here’s what to know about the case.

When did the murders occur?

On December 11, 2010, Suffolk County police officer John Malia was conducting a missing persons search near Gilgo Beach with his K-9 when officers found the remains of Melissa Barthelemy, a 24-year-old Bronx native. Two days after their initial discovery police found three additional victims along Ocean Parkway in Long Beach.

Months later, police found the bodies of six more people near Gilgo and Oak beaches. The other remains found were linked to victims who may have disappeared as far back as 1996, but police have not been able to identify some of the victims. A female toddler, the toddler’s mother, and an Asian male are among the additional victims.

Barthelemy, Costello and Watermen—the three women who Heuermann was charged with killing—all went missing sometime between July 2009 to September 2010. Brainard-Barnes went missing in July 2007. Police connected the cases because the Gilgo Four were found wrapped in burlap and bound around their ankles. All of the women were in their 20s, worked as sex workers, and were out meeting a client when they disappeared, according to the Gilgo Beach Homicide Investigation site.

Suffolk County Police have not shared many other details behind their deaths amid the ongoing investigation, though investigators say the victims may have been killed at Heuermann’s home, Suffolk Police Commissioner Rodney Harrison said that has not yet been confirmed. Officials have also said that other women who have allegedly had contact with the suspect have come forward, though police still have to vet their stories.

On Aug. 4, authorities identified a new victim, previously identified as Jane Doe No.7, in connection with the Gilgo Beach murders, but it's not clear if the woman, who has been identified 34-year-old Karen Vergata, is connected to Heuermann. Vergata vanished in February 1996, and her remains were found in April 2011.

The murders remained unsolved for years

Police had long been stumped by the murders, with talks of a corruption scandal in Suffolk County possibly leading to setbacks. Disagreements between federal officials and lead investigators on the case created conflict, according to the New York Times. Suffolk County Police Chief James Burke, the former officer in charge of the investigation, did not comply with the FBI on the case, the Times reports. (Burke was later charged with obstruction of justice in a separate case he was working on.)

Patrick Portela, the lead detective investigating the Gilgo Four, was ultimately removed from the case, prior to the creation of the Gilgo Beach Homicide Investigation Task Force in February 2022. Under that force, leadership turned attention to a tip from a witness about a pickup trip that later connected them to the suspect. Authorities officially arrested Heuermann in midtown Manhattan on July 13.

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