

Sidewalk memorial area for Katie Bunt swells after tragedy, city makes compliance changes

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ALTON - The City of Alton is faced with a difficult and sensitive situation in Downtown Alton across from Hayner Library where a sidewalk memorial was started for Katie Bunt, 21, of Wood River, who died early Sunday after being hit by a car in a parking lot.

Caleb A. Lenhardt, 21, of Bethalto, was charged with two counts of first-degree murder, one count of failure to report a traffic crash involving injury or death and aggravated battery in the case that occurred at 3 a.m. Sunday in the Downtown Alton parking lot. Lenhardt allegedly ran into a group of people in the parking lot and Bunt was a victim. Ashely Allgood was also transported to an area hospital for injuries in the incident.

The sidewalk memorial location where people are remembering Katie grew to what city officials estimated 900 square feet area and had numerous messages written to or about the young woman.

Alton Mayor Brant Walker said he has had complaints about some of the messages, written in permanent marker on the sidewalk that had profanity and one had a Fight Club reference, which the mayor didn't think was appropriate. Cleanup on the sidewalk started Thursday morning and continued in the afternoon as city employees power

washed the sidewalk with the markings. Flowers and beads were left on a pole shown in a photo above where the incident began.

Walker said the city has to clean the area up because of ADA compliance issues, but he will devote two or three parking spaces just behind it, so those who are remembering Katie can gather. He said there is supposed to be a memorial for Katie on Saturday and the city will allow the process to continue through then in the parking lot.

The problem Walker and staff discovered was alcohol that was left after Wednesday night and burning candles. He said there were several electric candles, which were all fine. He said many of the messages were touching, too, but written in permanent marker. Balloons and flowers were also left, which were also thoughtful, the mayor said. The city is taking any burning candles or other special items left for Katie to the family.

“We are incredibly sensitive to what happened and feel terrible for the family and others who loved Katie,” Mayor Walker said. “It is a horrible tragedy. We just can’t allow vandalism, leaving alcohol and burning candles on the sidewalk, where any minor could possibly pick it up. We also can’t allow vulgarity or messages with offensive racial connotations or broken glass in the area.

"The sidewalk area has to meet ADA compliance standards and be wheelchair accessible. We do understand the grieving process and want people to be able to grieve with respect. We will move the chairs into the parking lot right behind it until Saturday and leave two or three parking spaces where people can gather. We extend our condolences to the family and realize this is a terrible tragedy."





