

'Zoom-bomber' hits four virtual Concord High classes

School officials are investigating the incidents, which included a racial slur.

By Josie Albertson-Grove
New Hampshire Union Leader

Four virtual classes at Concord High School were disrupted Wednesday by someone impersonating students enrolled in those classes.

Pam McLeod, director of technology for the Concord school district, said the disruptions all appear to have originated in the same place. McLeod said one of the disruptions was a racial slur in the chat, two involved potential pornography, and a fourth incident that McLeod said was unclear.

"We're still investigating and looking through logs, but we believe it to be students," McLeod said. "We just don't know if they're inside or outside the district."

The district notified parents of students in affected classes. McLeod said her office was notified of the disruptions late Wednesday, after information was shared on local Facebook groups.

McLeod said several administrators in the district are working together in the investigation, and said the district has notified the computer crimes unit of the Concord Police Department.

McLeod said Concord did not use Zoom for remote learning in the spring, after press reports about so-called "Zoom-bombers" disrupting

classes.

But over the summer, teachers asked to use Zoom instead of other video-call programs, because Zoom has a feature that lets participants break out into smaller groups.

Zoom does have security settings, McLeod said. "And we were very careful to set the security settings," McLeod said, though there could have been a mistake.

Teachers got several days of training on how to use Zoom and those security features. McLeod said teachers send students links through Google Classroom or other secure platforms, where students have to log on with a password, so the links to calls should not be shared widely.

Students are expected to use their full names on Zoom, and teachers can control who gets into the Zoom call based on each user's name.

Teachers were also taught how to remove someone from a Zoom call, McLeod said, which she said is what happened in all four cases Wednesday. McLeod said the logs she has seen suggest each disruption lasted less than a minute before the user was removed from the call.

Whoever disrupted the classes used the names of students enrolled in the classes, McLeod said.

McLeod said the school district is taking the disruptions to virtual class as seriously as if there had been racial slurs and pornography in real classes.

HUDSON

Conflict of interest cited in proposed Amazon project

Land owner wants two planning board members who live in neighborhood that will be affected to recuse themselves.

By Ryan Lessard
Union Leader Correspondent

The owners of a Hudson golf course planning to sell the land to a company that wants to build a massive, three-building warehouse and distribution center for Amazon and a future tenant are calling for two planning board members to recuse themselves because of a conflict of interest.

Wednesday night's Hudson Planning Board meeting started as planned, with the board hearing from a handful of residents who didn't have a chance to speak at the last meeting in August.

Then just as representatives of Hillwood Investment Properties were about to give a presentation on the financial benefits of their proposed 2.6 million-square-foot logistics center, a lawyer representing the property owners dropped a surprise.

Attorney Thomas J. Leonard, who represents the Friel family, owners of the Green Meadow Golf Club, requested that two

board members who own homes in the neighborhood directly south of the golf course not participate in the board's review of the Hudson Logistics Center project.

He said that William Cole, of 12 Fairway Drive, and George Hall Jr., of 18 Par Lane, both of whom joined the board as alternates in May, cannot reasonably be expected to be impartial because they may be directly impacted by the project. He said both have owned their homes since the 1980s.

"Mr. Cole cannot be indifferent in his review of the proposed mitigation of this property and for the neighborhood," Leonard said. He later said the same of Hall.

He said the neighborhood where Cole and Hall live is the same one in which the bulk of residents who have spoken against the project reside. The project's opponents have cited a number of concerns, including a potential drop in property values.

"In New Hampshire, any owner of property adjoining, across from, or in close proximity to the proposed development is deemed to have a direct pecuniary interest," Leonard said.

The leaders of an organized opposition group called Save Hudson NH also live in that neighborhood, on Fairway Drive and Eagle Drive. Attorney Amy Man-

zelli of BCM Environmental & Land Law was hired by more than 50 neighbors in that area to represent their interest and try to block the project.

"They are part of a neighborhood that claims, in unison, that the development will reduce the value and enjoyment of their homes," Leonard said.

He noted that both Hall and Cole were appointed to the board after Hillwood filed its application last spring, which he said compounds the land owners' concerns.

Some members took umbrage at the implication.

"Is it your assertion, sir, that the town placed these members on this board to jeopardize this project? Because if that's your assertion, that has to be assessed," said alternate member Elliott Veloso.

Leonard said that was not the case.

Members agreed to seek the advice of town counsel before making a decision.

Hillwood representatives said that the financial benefits to the town more than cover any costs related to the project.

The proposed project would bring the town gross tax revenues of \$5.1 million, based on an estimated property value of more than \$252.6 million and a range of projected public service costs of \$320,000 to

\$505,000, they said.

"What that means if you want to put it in simple terms is ... you're looking at spending about six cents for every dollar that you take in of revenue," said planning consultant Judi Barrett.

Economist Russ Thi-beault, a peer reviewer hired by the town, said her analysis is "well supported."

Between the three buildings, developers estimate the Hudson Logistics Center will create 1,400 new jobs and generate \$83.5 million in direct wages. The project also is expected to create 833 temporary construction jobs, developers said.

"I really think about the jobs, more than I think about the tax dollars," Gary Frederick of Hillwood told the board Wednesday. "Just to put it in perspective, just the folks working in these buildings is about a million and a half dollars a week in payroll."

Barrett used Hillwood's job numbers to project indirect job creation from company spending in the community (420) and employee spending (574).

Barrett said her study did not factor in any potential decreased tax revenue from abutting properties, whose values might be impacted by the development.

The next meeting on the project is scheduled for Oct. 21.

STODDARD

Selectman claims recount votes appeared 'magically'

By Damien Fisher
Union Leader Correspondent

Stoddard officials will count the votes in the contested race for the board of selectmen one more time, this time in front of Cheshire Superior Court Judge David Ruoff.

"I'm still the selectman. The issue isn't over yet," said Charles Fosberry, who took the town to court Thursday over the contested votes.

Fosberry won reelection in June by one vote over Stephen McGerty, 108-107. That initial vote count also found one write-in vote for a third party and three blank votes, according to Fosberry. Days later, the recount vote found 110 votes

for McGerty and 109 for Fosberry.

"We got new ballots, magically," Fosberry said.

Fosberry said that while the ballot box was in town hall, waiting for the recount, the deputy town clerk had access to the box. The deputy town clerk is Deborah McGerty, Stephen McGerty's wife.

"She did not have access to the ballots, not at all," Stephen McGerty said Thursday. "The town clerk had taken them and she locked them up and my wife had no access at all to those ballots."

McGerty said it was his wife who made sure the town clerk knew to keep the ballot box sealed and locked

up until the recount. Fosberry's complaint filed in court states that Town Clerk Karen Bell had taken the sealed ballot box home with her on the night of June 23, the first vote. However, she brought it back to town hall the next day, and it remained there until the recount.

The recount was initially set for June 30, but a problem with the way the recount was legally noticed required it be pushed back to July 3, according to Fosberry's complaint. Bell told officials that she broke the seal on the ballot box on June 30 in order to get some data she would need for the recount, Fosberry's complaint states.

Fosberry also contends that the ballot box was only sealed from the top, and access could still be gained

from the bottom of the box.

"I wonder what's gonna be (in the box) when they open it up again and have a new count," Fosberry said.

Stephen McGerty served as a selectman until three years ago, when he stepped down to serve as fire chief. He doesn't understand the legal fight Fosberry is putting up over the seat.

"It's not worth what he's paying an attorney," McGerty said.

Fosberry said he's fighting over having the election stolen from him.

"I'm sick this happened to me," Fosberry said.

The recount is set for Oct. 15 in Cheshire Superior Court. Both Fosberry and McGerty can send three representatives to conduct the count in front of Ruoff.

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