

POUND RIDGE

State faults town procurement, Town Board video stream hijacked

By THANE GRAUEL

Pound Ridge town officials have made complaints with law enforcement and Zoom after Tuesday's Town Board livestream was "Zoombombed," essentially ending access to the meeting for those participating online.

A little more than an hour into the proceeding,, one of the accounts signed in to the Zoom meeting, with an ordinary sounding name, took over screen sharing and gave the other participants an eyeful of pornographic video and an earful of its racially offensive soundtrack.

The Town Board usually has a simultaneous Vimeo video feed of its meetings, in which people can watch but not interact. But Tuesday evening the link appeared to be for a previous Zoning Board of Appeals meeting, not the live Town Board meeting.

The disruption was less noticeable for those attending in-person at the Town House, unless they happened to glance at a monitor showing the livestream. An edited version of the Town Board meeting without the offensive material has been posted on the town's website.

Town Supervisor Kevin Hansan told The Recorder on Wednesday that it was the second time in recent weeks an online meeting had been disrupted. He said the Open Space Acquisition Committee lost control of its meeting to a hacker the previous week.

Such disruptions have become known as Zoombombing. The activity by internet trolls took off about five years ago, after the pandemic lockdown started, and gatherings of all kinds moved out of public spaces and into online meeting rooms.

The Town Board meetings will first place participants in a waiting room before admitting them to the meeting. But true vetting isn't practical when people are showing up for public meetings.

"We don't know every resident, so you gotta let them in," Hansan said. "But I think from now on that's something we'll have to talk to the (Town Clerk) about."

The account that caused trouble Tuesday had the name "Christopher Peters."

Hansan said that in addition to report-

"We don't know every resident, so you gotta let them in."

— Town Supervisor Kevin Hansan on admitting Zoom participants to meeting

ing the incidents to law enforcement and Zoom, officials would be looking at possibly making meeting streams "view only," without the ability for people to interact unless they're known.

Down to business

Most of the meeting's business had been done before things got strange. The board approved, subject to conditions, up to \$147,000 for a new community bus, set a public hearing Sept. 2 for possible extension of the battery energy storage system systems moratorium, and heard the finance director's summary of a recently delivered state comptroller's audit of the town's procurement procedures.

The audit had some pointed conclusions. "Town officials did not procure all goods and services in accordance with Board policy and applicable statutory requirements," it read. "As a result, officials cannot support that all goods and services were procured in the most cost-effective manner, which may have resulted in higher operational costs that would be passed onto taxpayers."

"The Board also did not always properly audit claims before approving them for payment. When a thorough and effective claims audit is not conducted, the Board diminishes its ability to effectively monitor Town financial operations and there is an increased risk that claims could have been paid for inappropriate purposes. For example:

— Town officials did not seek competition or maintain supporting documentation for 28 purchases totaling approximately \$745,372.

— Forty-eight claims totaling approximately \$299,716 were not properly audited by the Board before payment, includ-

ing 23 credit card claims (685 purchases) totaling \$179,716.

— Two hundred twenty-six credit card purchases totaling \$54,359 did not have supporting documentation such as receipts or itemized invoices.

The "key recommendation" from the state was for the town to "ensure compliance with New York State General Municipal Law (GML) and Town procurement policy requirements and conduct a thorough audit of all claims prior to approval for payment."

The audit period was Jan. 1, 2022, to Nov. 27, 2023.

Town Finance Director Steven Conti said the auditors' examination took place over a period of roughly six months, from Thanksgiving 2023 to Memorial Day 2024.

"It went on for a long time," he said, unlike a previous audit in 2012 in which, he said, "everything was fine."

"We weren't taking the first step of getting Town Board approval and attaching the resolution to the claim form," Conti said of the town's documentation during the recent audit. "So, they basically highlighted that point, our process of taking the paperwork from the board meetings to the payment was lacking."

"Since then," Conti said, "based on the audit, we have to do a corrective action plan. In 2024 we adopted a credit card policy. We are still looking at that right now, we're trying to make an update to the credit card and procurement policy. In 2025 we made some modifications with that."

"We've actually started implementing the process as they were here," Conti said. "One of the things that happened while they were here was that we took that, and we started making changes on what they were recommending."

"We look forward to rolling out all these changes that we've done in the last like 18 months," Conti said.

No one from the public discussed the audit results at the meeting, but John McCown, who is challenging Hansan for town supervisor in the November election, wrote a Letter to the Editor on the topic (see Page 6).