

# 5 finalists named for Federal Way City Council seat

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Five finalists have been selected in the running for the vacant Federal Way City Council position 5.

The five names were announced at Tuesday night's council meeting, after being narrowed down from 24 applicants who hope to fill the seat vacated by former council member Mark Koppang.

Finalists include Jimmy Brown, Leandra Craft, Jack Dovey, Mehdi Sadri and Renae Seam.

This appointment will serve from the date of the appointment until the certification of the 2021 general election, and will fill the remainder of the term through December 2023.

The city council also unanimously passed a resolution that would allow city staff, with consent of the individuals, to conduct criminal background checks on the five final applicants.

Background check results would be provided to City Attorney Ryan Call, not any member of the city council or staff.

Criminal background checks would look for only criminal convictions, not arrests or charges, unless there are charges still pending.

Only felony crimes or misdemeanor crimes within the past 10 years will be considered, unless they are convictions involving a sex offense, domestic violence, violent felony, crimes of dishonesty/theft or driving under the influence.

Juvenile convictions of any kind will only be considered if they involve a sex offense, domestic violence or violent felony.

# Ex-basketball coach returns to teaching following misconduct allegations

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Jerome Collins is back teaching in the Federal Way School District, despite the school district's third-party investigation having found he violated the district's code of conduct by failing to report a 2016 incident involving a videotaped sex act.

Collins, a longtime high school boys basketball coach and former PE teacher at Federal Way High School, is now teaching physical education at Brigadoon Elementary, district officials told the Mirror on Sept. 15.

"He is not returning to his role as a teacher or coach at Federal Way High School," wrote the district in a statement provided by FWPS General Counsel Alex Sheridan and Chief Human Resources Officer David Brower.

"He will be unable to return to coaching in Federal Way Public Schools for the foreseeable future."

Collins was immediately placed on paid administrative leave on Oct. 15, 2018, pending a review of allegations of unprofessional conduct.

The district determined Collins "violated the reasonable expectations of a professional educator when he failed to further investigate facts presented to him of alleged student misconduct in 2016," according to the Sept. 15 statement to the Mirror.

Collins could not provide comment without first contacting his legal counsel, he said on a brief Sept. 16 phone call with the Mirror.

Two years ago, former Federal Way High School student Tally Thomas sued Federal Way Public Schools, Jerome Collins and former FWHS student Jalen McDaniels, accusing Collins of intentionally covering up a sex scandal to save the school's chance of a state championship and filed a \$3.5 million tort claim against FWPS.

The case was dismissed on June 17 this year. Thomas, now 21, alleged "she was videotaped against her will [by McDaniels] and without her knowledge performing oral sex on a unnamed Federal Way High School basketball player and that the recording was viewed by several other students," the Mirror reported in 2018. "The claim also alleged that head basketball coach, Jerome Collins, was aware of this incident, had watched the video in question, and failed to report the situation to the authorities."

According to King County Superior Court documents, the case has been dismissed because the recording of Thomas took place in a private apartment after school hours, away from district property and had no connection to the district.

"When Thomas learned of the act, she told



MIRROR FILE PHOTO  
Jerome Collins, shown coaching the Federal Way High School boys basketball team in a 2016 state tournament semifinal game.

her father — a former District coach and teacher — who went to the school and demanded to speak to [a suspect], McDaniels, their parents, and the head basketball coach for whom both boys played (Defendant Jerome Collins)," documents state. "The intent of this meeting, according to Plaintiff's father, was to see that the video was destroyed and that it was not further disseminated."

Neither Thomas nor her father wanted this to be further reported, and neither was interested in further steps being taken that would adversely affect the boys involved or impact Thomas at the time.

While Thomas endured bullying and harassment from peers about the video, documents said she freely admits that she never told district officials that she was being harassed or bullied and her family — including her father, her mother, and her aunt, who are all professional educators — never reported any such concerns to the school.

Thomas's mental health disorder and the acts of which Thomas now complains "have no nexus to the district, nor is there any evidence that district officials were aware of facts or circumstances that would have necessitated district action."

Details of the settlement have been sealed. Kassie Swenson, chief of communications and strategy for the district, said "litigation was amicably resolved without admission of liability of wrongdoing by Mr. Collins or the District in this matter."

Joan Mell, attorney of III Branches Law representing Thomas, could not offer further comment.

A second former Federal Way High School student, Gwen Gabert, came forward with her story after Thomas's went public in 2018. Gabert previously told the Mirror another suspect, also a former FWHS student-athlete, allegedly filmed Gabert while she performed a sex act with him in Jan. 2016.

Thomas was a star athlete at Federal Way; she won a state title for wrestling in 2017 and earned a softball scholarship to play for Stanford University. Gabert went on to play soccer for Tacoma Community College.

Both women said the feeling of worthlessness due to the embarrassment and shame from having their intimate moments circulated incited them to engage in self-harming behavior for the remainder of high school and into college.

This isn't the first time the embattled coach has been accused of misconduct. Students also accused Collins of sexual misconduct in the 1990s.

A Federal Way School District investigation that was launched after two former students accused him of sexual harassment in 1994 was inconclusive in establishing that sexual harassment occurred, according to a letter from Thomas Murphy, then-assistant superintendent, to Collins. However, the investigation found instances of Collins' poor judgment.

"This poor judgment has been displayed in slapping female students on the buttocks and inappropriate joking with female students," according to the letter. "The inappropriate joking refers to the necklace incident of which you are familiar and also inappropriate remarks whispered to a third student. You are hereby formally reprimanded for this conduct. A copy of this reprimand will be placed in your personnel file. You should understand that any further incidents of this nature will lead to more severe disciplinary action. The maintenance of proper boundaries of behavior between teachers and students is extremely important to teacher and student alike."

In addition, the district instructed him to obtain training for this incident by June 1995 to help him "more clearly establish proper boundaries for your relationships and interactions with female students."

A student filed a complaint against the coach in 1999 that stated he "constantly asked her to kiss him, said he wanted to see her naked, rubbed her stomach and kissed her," according to a previous Seattle Times article.

Collins was the Federal Way boys basketball coach for more than 30 years, bringing home three state championships during his time. He was also inducted into the Federal Way Public Schools Hall of Fame in 2016.

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