There was a special meeting of the Bloomfield Town Council held at 6:00 p.m. Thursday, April 6, 2020 via Zoom Webinar virtual meeting platform.

Present were: Mayor Suzette DeBeatham-Brown, Deputy Mayor David Mann, Councilors Rickford Kirton, Kevin Gough, Joseph Merritt, Patrick DeLorenzo, Danielle Wong, Stephanie Calhoun and C.F. Politis

Also present were: Robert E. Smith, Town Manager, Sharron Howe, Assistant to the Town Manager, Keri Rowley, Finance Director, Attorney Marc Needelman, Scott Sharlow, Director of Information Technology (Tech Support) and India Rodgers, Clerk of Council

The meeting was called to order at 6:00 p.m.

Discussion regarding an Update of the COVID-19 Pandemic

Mayor DeBeatham-Brown gave a brief status report and update regarding the COVID-19 pandemic.

The West Hartford Bloomfield Health District is monitoring COVID-19 positive cases. There are a total of 84 in both towns, in which Bloomfield has 41 cases.

The Health District is in contact and surveying all senior living facilities, grocery stores, restaurants regarding social distancing guidelines. They are also providing Incident Command updates twice a week updates with the Incident Command time. The Town Manager has been working on staggering schedules with staffing, Memorandum of Understanding with Labor/Benefit policies and equipment for working remotely from home.

Mayor DeBeatham-Brown also thanked all first responders for doing an excellent job. She also thanked Chief Hammick and all residents for practicing social distancing.

Consider and Take Possible Action Concerning Town FY 2020/2021 Budget Meetings

Mayor DeBeatham-Brown thanked Ms. Keri Rowley for creating an e-mail address so that residents can communicate their questions and inquiries about the FY 2020/2021 budget.

Mayor suggested to the Town Manager to amend the draft FY 2020/2021 budget. Due to the recent changes with the COVID-19 pandemic, the town is experiencing a very different financial landscape.

There ensued a detailed discussion regarding plans in moving forward with the FY 2020/2021 Budget Meeting process.

Councilors inquired about the following areas regarding the FY 2020/2021 Budget Meeting process:
FY 2020/2021 – Budget Guidance

- Budget Scenarios – Addressing the current financial status of the Town due to the COVID-19 pandemic
- Budget revision of the Town Manager’s Proposed FY 2020/2021 Budget (review expenditures, COLA raises, union negotiations and new hires)
- Suggestions in keeping expenses and mill rate flat, keeping taxes the same is different than leaving the mill rate the same
- Consider additional revenue from some taxes, look at options to utilize reserves, need some flexibility to be creative in developing a fiscally responsible budget
- Revisit Capital Improvement Projects and readiness for completion
- Begin with a “bare bones” budget and attempt to work within the current budget as an outline for the FY 2020/2021 budget, establish a budget baseline
- MDC has adopted their budget and it has increases, as does solid waste and the school district
- Create a number that council is looking for, resolve the departmental issues and identify cuts and adds
- Federal government indicate eligibility for funding, pass through from the state? Need details about that?
- Invest and increase funding for the Information Technology department. The town was not prepared to go fully launch virtual meeting applications and work remotely from home
- Consult with all departments about upcoming changes and submit a status update to include effects of COVID-19 on town operations and services, need time to compile data

Councilor Kirton strongly suggested the importance of a high level budget overview department by department, so that the Town Council can document each department reductions. For example, there may be challenges with the Registrar of Voters regarding upcoming primary and presidential election costs

Board of Education

- Revisit discussions with the Board of Education – Possible consideration to reduce the 9% increase they have requested
- What can the Board of Education operate on? Identify priorities regarding staff safety, pay scale, not raising taxes, keeping flat to provide financial relief for residents
- Be cautious about major reductions to the Board of Education budget. Adhere to no harm for students and teachers. Most likely, students will be out of school till fall, identifying resources to accommodate distance learning. The Board stated that they will report deficits and shortfalls. Is there any savings or do they need additional funding?
- The Governor’s Executive Order mandated school districts to continue paying teachers through the pandemic.

Councilor Gough noted important thing is to have TM and BOE go back and look again...and come up with something that's workable...cuts/adds based on current budget....not the proposed budget.

Councilor Kirton noted the importance of investing in the schools and providing appropriate funding for additional resources and consider reductions in Administration/Central Office. He also suggested no increases in salaries or new hires at this time.
Scheduling

- New Budget Meeting Schedules – Initial schedule presented by Finance is too aggressive
- Adopted budget deadline and timeframes
- The legal requirement to schedule a public hearing on the FY 2020/2021 budget. Attorney Needelman noted that the Town Charter identifies the timeframe for scheduling the Public Hearing. Usually, it is 1-2 weeks before adoption period. If the Public Hearing is 15 days after Town Manager’s initial presentation, does that mean it carries forward from that date? Attorney Needelman indicated that compliance with charter already. Thereafter, the budget is open to revisions, so the Town has met requirement.
- Councilor Gough suggested Town staff to set a schedule, beginning on April 23rd to begin Council review. He also suggested a date of May 26th for the virtual Annual Town Meeting and any considerations for printing.

It was moved by Councilor Gough, seconded by Councilor Merritt and voted unanimously to instruct the Town Manager and Finance Director to submit a revised FY 2020/2021 budget, set a new budget meeting schedule to discuss revisions that considers production dates. In addition, it was recommended that the next budget meeting be scheduled for April 23, 2020. The suggested date of May 26, 2020 was recommended for the virtual Annual Town Meeting based on the budget adoption extension per Governor’s Executive Order.

Consider and Take Possible Action regarding Council Subcommittee Meetings and Schedules

Committee on Committees

Councilor Calhoun mentioned that Committee on Committees will need to meet due the 60-day statutory requirement to fill the Democratic vacancy on the Board of Education.

Councilor Calhoun noted that Ms. Marguerite Phillips, Town Clerk has notified chair of the Democratic Town Committee of the vacancy and 60-day requirement.

Golf Subcommittee

Councilor DeLorenzo mentioned the resignation of Rosemary Gunning on the Golf Subcommittee.

Administration/Education & Finance Subcommittees

Councilor Kirton suggested following the regular meeting schedules for Council Subcommittees for the months of May and June 2020.
Community Services Subcommittee

Councilor Wong has a regularly scheduled meeting for this subcommittee on April 14, 2020. However, with staff being very busy during this time, she will cancel this meeting and request written departmental status reports. She suggested keeping the regular meeting schedule.

Councilor Kirton and Wong mentioned additional funding for the Bloomfield Food Bank. What can the Council do to support the Food Bank? The Town is working with Social & Youth Services to identify community needs.

Land Use & Economic Development Subcommittee

Deputy Mayor Mann gave a brief status update on the progress and timeline of discussions regarding the Tax Increment Financing project with Goman & York. He would like to schedule a meeting and move forward on these plans.

Discussion and Possible Action regarding Town Boards and Commission Meetings and Schedules

Mr. Robert Smith, Town Manager stated that the Town can give Zoom meeting access to the various town boards and commissions.

Councilor Gough inquired about the separate BOE Information Technology department.

It was noted that the Town Clerk will notify board and commission Chairs about resuming meetings.

There was some brief discussion regarding the need to record and stream Live for all meeting. It is appropriate to record and upload on the town’s website. However, considering the State of Connecticut – Freedom of Information guidelines, Attorney Needelman recommended to err on the side of caution and do it all.

It was also asked if the Town needed a special email address for general questions/comments. The Q & A tab featured with Zoom will allow input and ask questions.

It was moved by Councilor Kirton, seconded Councilor Gough and voted unanimously to resume meeting schedules as necessary for all town boards and commissions.

Council Comments

Councilor Calhoun thanked Mr. Scott Sharlow, IT Director and personnel for their dedicated efforts in providing technical support for town employees and Council. She noted the importance and need to provide additional funding for staffing this department.

Councilor Kirton also thanked Mr. Sharlow, Mrs. Rowley and everyone in Town for their hard work during this time of transition. He also asked the Town Manager for a status update regarding nursing homes.
Mr. Smith reported that the State of Connecticut – Department of Public Health will begin opening nursing homes that were closed prior to the pandemic. They are currently identifying nursing homes to identify isolation areas. Some homes did get Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) last week. The Home depot donated N95 masks and Charter Oak Health Care Services donated PPE items.

Mayor DeBeatham-Brown noted that the Town of Bloomfield is amazing. She thanked Mrs. Sharron Howe and Abigail Croteau for being there to answer phones and working so hard during this time of crisis. Mayor DeBeatham-Brown reminded all that we are in new uncharted territory with the introduction COVID-19 to our global society. The Town will be facing the challenges and identifying solutions on what is best for the Town moving forward.

Councilor DeLorenzo reminded all to support your local restaurants and businesses. The Bloomfield Chamber of Commerce has launched a program entitled, “Eat Local”. Most restaurants are open for takeout and delivery. This new initiative started on April 6, 2020. Residents can participate in the contest for a $25.00 gift card to your favorite local restaurant.

Deputy Mayor Mann thanked the Town Manager for all of his efforts and due diligence in providing valid information during this pandemic.

Adjournment

It was moved by Councilor Merritt, seconded by Councilor Kirton and voted unanimously to adjourn the meeting at 7:30 p.m.