BLOOMFIELD TOWN COUNCIL

PUBLIC SAFETY SUBCOMMITTEE

There was a special meeting for the above-referenced subcommittee held at 6:30 p.m. on Monday, March 9, 2020 in Council Chambers, Bloomfield Town Hall, 800 Bloomfield Avenue, Bloomfield, CT.

Present were: Councilor Kevin Gough, Chair, Deputy Mayor David Mann, Councilors Joseph Merritt, Stephanie Calhoun and Danielle Wong

Also present were: Police Captain Stephen Hajdasz, Chief William Riley – Bloomfield Center Fire, Chief Willie Jones – Blue Hills Fire, Pat Braun - EMS Committee, Councilors C.F. Politis, Rickford Kirton, Mayor Suzette DeBeatham-Brown and India Rodgers, Clerk of Council

The meeting was called to order at 6:30 p.m.

The subcommittee received the following updates and status reports from:

POLICE

The police department’s FY 2019/2020 budget is on track with no unexpected expenditures to date in each division.

Personnel Updates

The department has a total of 61 employees, budgeted for 49 sworn officers and currently at 48.

Officer Courtney Benitez resigned from her position. The department current have one opening at the rank of Officer.

Officer Beecham recently came off field training on January 6, 2020. Police Officer Gabriel Catania is at P.O.S.T.C. Academy and doing well. Officer Kara Klimasvewski is awaiting an Academy assignment, Hartford, New Britain, or P.O.S.T.C.

The department has entered in the second re-accreditation cycle, finishing up the 1st year of the 4 year cycle.

Crime

Captain Hajdasz reported crime increased 39% during the month of February, a slight decrease from last year to date statistics. It was reported that there were 50 crimes, 42 larcenies, mostly shoplifting in the Copaco Shopping Center.

There was a decrease in calls dispatched for the month, approximately 2,628 calls for service, compared to last year at 3,103 calls. It was noted that officer initiated calls have decreased 15% year to date.
Traffic Concerns

- Phoenix Crossing – Property checks are continuing to be conducted. The Department of Public Works has installed new “No Parking Signs” near Trader Joes, which will allow for enforcement action to be taken moving forward.

- Maple Avenue – Speeding complaint during rush hour times is being addressed. The Speed Shield sign has been deployed on Maple Avenue to record data for a few weeks.

- Brown Street – Speeding concerns during morning rush hours, planned increase Motor Vehicle enforcement in this area between the hours of 7:45 a.m. – 9:00 a.m.

- Woodland Avenue – Ongoing speeding complaints from citizens during rush hour in the area of 76 and 90 Woodland Avenue. There were 8 Motor Vehicle details conducted in February. More motor vehicle details assigned between 7:45 a.m. – 9:00 a.m. hours to adequately address the citizens concern.

  In addition, there were 42 motor vehicle accidents, 224 motor vehicle stops and 3 DUI arrests.

Professional Standards

Citizen Complaint – There was one citizen complaint, in which no officer was named. The complaint was unfounded this reporting period.

Internal Affairs

There was one open internal affairs case. The internal employee was issued an EAP referral.

Radio Project

This project was on schedule with an anticipated practical usage cutover in late April 2020.

Citizen Police Academy

The academy began early March 2020 and is scheduled for 11 weeks with 30 participants. Sessions are held on Monday nights at 6:00 p.m.

Update on Copaco Shooting Incident

The department arrested Jorge Rodriguez-Dones on March 9, 2020 in East Hartford. Mr. Rodriguez-Dones was charged with Criminal Attempt to Commit Murder, Criminal Use of Weapon, Illegal Discharge of Firearm and Reckless Endangerment 1st degree. He is being held on a $750,000 bond.

Update on February 22, 2020 Homicide at Elizabeth’s

The department issued an Arrest Warrant for Russell Smith. Mr. Smith is charged with two counts of Murder and a $5 million bond.
One of the suspect vehicles was located in Hartford and seized, however no evidence recovered.

Detectives have been working with the local, state, neighboring jurisdictions and Federal authorities actively attempting to locate suspect.

**Update on Unlicensed Kennel/Animal Cruelty Case**

The department relocated 14 dogs to Beacon Ridge animal shelter in East Granby per the direction of the court. The Town was reimbursed by the animals’ owner for expenses incurred during the seizure.

**Discussion**

Councilor Gough mentioned past history of incidents noted in the Hartford Courant relative to the Double Homicide at Elizabeth’s. Apparently, there was a carjacking of the suspect by the two victims that occurred 10 years ago. It was noted that this new detail lead to the assistance in identifying the suspect to search for.

Councilor Calhoun asked about the timeframe to accept reports from local businesses. Captain Hajdasz stated that at the time of the incident, officers will attempt to identify a suspect and execute an arrest.

Councilor Wong commented on social media posts regarding several Animal Control Officer Complaints. She inquired about Town officer activities compared to other municipalities.

In addition, Councilor Wong asked about the department response regarding Credit card fraud and Identity theft. The Community Service officer will give information to the victim on what to do and how to file a claim.

Deputy Mayor Mann asked about any discussion with Trader Joe’s about parking issues and concerns with truckers. Trader Joe’s installed a billboard with messaging of “No Parking” zone. They also hired a clean-up crew to pick up litter and handed out flyers to all trucking companies.

Deputy Mayor Mann suggested locating an alternative space in Town for truckers to park as a rest/waiting station. In addition, he also referenced safety concerns with crosswalks at intersections for walkers in the northern section of Blue Hills Avenue. He requested an updated report on the collaborative effort and with the Engineering department to resolve this issue.

Councilor Merritt asked about the department’s response from local dispatch when receiving calls from individuals that identify having the Coronavirus. The department will triage calls where to be directed and would follow normal procedures as with any medical call.

Councilor Gough asked if there were any additional steps or actions that the town should be doing in addition to current procedures in place to handle COVID-19.

**Discussion and Possible Action on Resolution Supporting Legalization of Adult Usage of Cannabis and Pardon of Criminal Charge for “Prior” Offenders (Councilor Wong)**

Councilor Wong introduced the Resolution of support to legalize the adult usage of cannabis. She would like the Town of Bloomfield to recommend the support of this bill and other cannabis legalization. In addition, this
bill is also recommending to pardon criminal charges for “prior” offenders and identify social injustice concerns that discriminate against “black and brown” people.

Captain Hajdasz stated that the department does not have a position either way and will enforce the laws accordingly per State regulations.

Councilor Calhoun stated that she would like to see more in depth investigation of the “addictive” issues and concerns at the state level.

**It was moved by Councilor Merritt, seconded by Councilor Wong voted unanimously to recommend to the full Council support of the Resolution Supporting Legalization of Adult Usage of Cannabis (SB 16) as well as scheduling a public forum for citizen input.**

Deputy Mayor Mann expressed concerns about testing under the influence and traffic infractions with impaired or distracted driving. It was noted that body and cruiser cameras are in place to visually document these incidents.

Councilor Wong noted for the record that public transparency is very important and will be scheduled as appropriate.

Councilor Calhoun inquired on how the department will differentiate between medicinal, street sales and other issue of concern with cannabis legalization.

**Public Comment**

1. **Councilor Kirton, 7 Hickory Lane** commended Councilor Wong on bringing this issue to the forefront. He also commented on “War on Drugs” and his lack of support to legalize cannabis as a parent of small children. Councilor Kirton suggested support to find a way for injustice concerns of arrestees.

2. **Paula Jones, 5 Bear Ridge Drive** – thanked Councilor Wong for bringing the Cannabis discussion to Council. She noted that the State have a variety of controls in place. There will always be an issue with street sales. Impairment is just an issue across the board with multiple causes, unless cannabis is legalized in will continue to affect “black and brown” individuals.

3. **Mayor Suzette DeBeatham-Brown, 25 Fairfield Lane** mentioned that drugs has definitely affected the minority community. She read a statement of issues concerning legalization. The Mayor made a recommendation to schedule a special meeting of this subcommittee and a public hearing before the referral to the full Council.

Councilor Gough would like Council to have vigorous debate and discussion prior to voting. He made the recommendation to schedule a public forum on Cannabis Legalization with the full Council.

Councilor Kirton noted that discussion should be in committee before being referred to Council.
Deputy Mayor Mann recommended to refer this issue to Council and hold a presentation about this to discuss with the Public.

**FIRE**

*Center Fire District*

Chief William Riley reported 41 calls for service statistics through end of February 2020. Most of the calls were from auto accidents and Smoke & Carbon Monoxide detectors.

Chief Riley asked for a status update regarding the Tax Abatement increase proposal. The policy is under review with the Town Attorney.

*Blue Hills Fire District*

Chief Willie Jones reported 34 calls for service through end of February 2020. There were no major incidents during the reporting period. The district responded to several false alarms, 8 service calls – evacuated smoke. Calls have significantly decreased from last year.

**EMS Report**

The next meeting of the EMS Committee will be held on March 16, 2020.

Deputy Mayor Mann asked about revenues down in this year’s budget proposal? Mr. Braun will follow up and report back at the next scheduled subcommittee meeting.

**OTHER PUBLIC SAFETY CONCERNS**

There were no additional public safety concerns discussed.

**APPROVAL OF MINUTES**

It was moved by Councilor Merritt, seconded by Deputy Mayor Mann to approve the minutes from February 10, 2020.

**ADJOURNMENT**

It was moved by Councilor Merritt, seconded by Councilor Wong to adjourn the meeting at 7:25 p.m.
WHEREAS, during the 1920s and 1930s, when it was first penalized in various states, cannabis use was portrayed as a cultural vice of Hispanic immigrants to the United States, and racist and xenophobic politicians and government officials used cannabis prohibition explicitly to target and criminalize Black and Hispanic culture and incarcerate Black and Hispanic people and, therefore, the prohibition of cannabis is fundamentally rooted in discrimination against Black, and Hispanics; and,

WHEREAS, existing cannabis laws for adults represent vast government over-reach into the personal lives of American citizens and violate principles of personal liberty and choice; and,

WHEREAS, adult usage of plants should not be illegal; and,

WHEREAS, cannabis is less harmful than alcohol and tobacco; and,

WHEREAS, cannabis is in fact not toxic, cannot cause death by overdose and, in fact, has shown health benefits; and,

WHEREAS, the DEA admits that cannabis use has resulted in no overdose deaths, as compared to excessive alcohol consumption, which the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) approximates to have resulted in at least 88 thousand deaths over the five-year period from 2006-2010; and,

WHEREAS, the so-called War on Drugs has been an abject failure in reducing crime and addiction; and,

WHEREAS, the so-called War on Drugs has been called cited as a cause of violent crime in our neighborhoods; and,

WHEREAS, over $10 billion of taxpayer money is used to fund the enforcement of anti-cannabis laws nationwide; and,

WHEREAS, in New England, Massachusetts, Maine, and Vermont have legalized cannabis, and it has been legalized in a total eight states across the country and as well as DC; and

WHEREAS, SB 16: An Act Concerning The Adult Use Of Cannabis, has been introduced to the General Assembly and would allow adults 21 and older to possess and purchase up to one and a half ounces of cannabis from licensed retailers; and,

WHEREAS, there is a projected State revenue of $100 Million dollars if legalization were to pass at a time when our state is in a financial deficit and additional revenue sources are needed; and

WHEREAS, despite decriminalization of small amounts of cannabis, citations remains racially disproportionate;

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, that the Town of Bloomfield hereby states its support for the legalization of adult usage of cannabis; and
BE IT RESOLVED, that The Town of Bloomfield supports SB 16 currently before the state legislature; and

BE IT RESOLVED, that the Town of Bloomfield advocates justice via pardon for all persons jailed or with a criminal record for violating laws criminalizing adult cannabis usage; and

BE IT RESOLVED, that the Town of Bloomfield insists on measures to ensure racial justice and equity in ownership and employment of new cannabis-related businesses resulting from cannabis legalization.