There was a regular meeting of the above referenced subcommittee held on Tuesday, February 22, 2022 at 6:30 p.m. via Zoom remote meeting.

**Committee Members present were:** Councilor Kenneth McClary, Chair, Deputy Mayor Gregory Davis, Councilors Anthony Harrington, C.F. Politis and Councilor Joseph Merritt

**Also present were:** Stanley D. Hawthorne, Town Manager, Keri Rowley, Finance Director, Nancy Haynes, Risk and Purchasing Manager, Sharon Gentles-Harris, Deputy Finance Director, David Melesko, Director of Leisure Services, Attorney Marc Needelman, Town Attorney and India Rodgers, Clerk of Council

**Guest were:** Bloomfield Board of Education - John Robinson, Director of Human Resources/Information Technology, William Guzman, Chief Financial Officer, Attorney Chris Chinni, Bloomfield Early Learning Center (BELC) - Joseph Suggs, Karen Yorker and Janice Silimon

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

**OLD BUSINESS**

**Discussion and Status Update regarding the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA)**

Mr. Stanley Hawthorne gave a brief status update of the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) planning process for the Town of Bloomfield. Mr. Hawthorne noted that the Town has interviewed two consultants out of five respondents to the Request for Proposal (RFP) process. A consultant was chosen and will be in place beginning in March.

Ms. Rowley noted that there are no pending applications for ARPA funding. The next step is awaiting Council and public input regarding suggestions on how these funds should be utilized.

Councilor Merritt expressed concerns about not spending adequate time to discuss capital improvement projects budget, with possibly collaboration to utilize ARPA funding.

Mr. Hawthorne reassured Councilor Merritt that the Community Investment Plan (CIP) list of past, present and future projects will be outlined in detail at the beginning of the FY 2023 budget process.

Deputy Mayor Davis noted the importance to be transparent and share information with the community regarding the decision making process relative to CIP projects.

**NEW BUSINESS**

**Council Referred Item FY 21/22-51: Consider and Take Action regarding Bloomfield Early Learning Center (BELC) requesting for Termination of Pilot Payment**
Attorney Marc Needelman gave a brief history overview regarding the initial agreement between the Town of Bloomfield and the Community Resources Inc. (CIL). He discussed the sell of the old Blue Hills School, which housed the Early Learning Center. Attorney Needelman noted CIL came to the Town for tax relief in 2012.

In 2013, a written agreement was signed by CIL voluntarily agreeing to remit to the Town an annual payment in lieu of taxes subject to the following:

- The first such PILOT payment shall be due on the 1st day of July immediately following the seventh anniversary of the date of the Town’s conveyance of the Property to CIL and each subsequent PILOT payment shall be due on the 1st day of July annually thereafter until the expiration of the term of CIL’s lease with BELC.

- The amount of a PILOT payment shall be the product of the Town’s established mill rate for the fiscal year beginning on the July 1st PILOT payment due date times seventy percent of the value of Property, which value shall be equal to the fair market value of the Property stated in an appraisal of the Property submitted by CIL to the Town’s Assessor on the 1st day of January immediately preceding the seventh anniversary of the Town’s conveyance of the Property to CIL, however, that if the Town wishes to obtain its own appraisal, the value of the Property for purposes of the calculation of the PILOT payment shall be the average of the respective appraisal value of the Town and CIL.

In addition, Attorney Needelman noted that CIL has not made the last two years of tax payments to the Town. They are currently in default, but not declared. The approximately amount due is $44,000 plus 12% interest. A reminder was sent in July 2020. BELC is now requesting that the agreement signed in 2013 requiring CIL to make payments in Lieu of Taxes (PILOT) to the Town of Bloomfield be terminated.

**BELC Presentation**

Mr. Joseph Suggs, Volunteer with BELC for their Finance and Communication Affairs, Karen Yorker, Program Director and Mrs. Janice Silimon, President of the Board of Directors gave an overview of the current status of BELC financially, enrollment figures, Accreditation status and COVID-19 challenges for the past two years.

Mr. Suggs noted that no funds have been raised to meet the requirements to make annual tax payments. At this time, tax payments will place a financial hardship on the overall program.

It was moved by Councilor Merritt, seconded by Councilor Harrington to terminate the in Lieu of Taxes (PILOT) agreement with CIL and the Town of Bloomfield and forgive past due tax payments and interest owed.

Attorney Needelman suggested a friendly amendment to include, “recommendation to the full Council for approval”. Attorney Needelman also advised the subcommittee to clarify the financial terms relative to the sale of the property, in consideration with part of whole payments.

**VOTE:**

AYE: J. Merritt, A. Harrington
NAY: G. Davis, C.F. Politis
ABSTAIN: None

The motion failed 2-2. Councilor McClary recused himself from the vote, due to the fact that he is a member of the BELC Board of Directors.
There ensued a more detailed discussion of the CIL agreement between the Town of Bloomfield and BELC relative to fundamental fairness to pay being as though CIL is 501c3 non-profit organization. Attorney Needelman noted that there is no property tax exemption for 501c3 non-profit organizations.

Councilor McClary stated that this is a real policy issue to needs to be addressed and identify the position of Council as it relates to non-profit organizations.

In addition, BELC is exploring the option to make a payment arrangement with the Director of Finance. However, this attempt has been postponed until the Council makes a decision on this matter.

Ms. Rowley mentioned that there are other daycares in Town that fall under the same non-profit tax obligation to the Town. She asked if the PILOT payment was built into their last year or current year budget. There was some concern in setting precedence if Council approved to terminate this agreement to make annual tax payments to the Town.

It was moved by Councilor Politis, seconded by Deputy Mayor Davis to table this agenda item and identified that more information is needed for review and possible development of a formal policy moving forward.

**VOTE:**

AYE: G. Davis, C.F. Politis

NAY: J. Merritt, A. Harrington

ABSTAIN: None

The motion failed 2-2. Councilor McClary recused himself from the vote, due to the fact that he is a member of the BELC Board of Directors.

Public Comment

1. **Councilor Rickford Kirton** stated that the Council should be careful in setting a policy that can have tax implications and how decisions should be made.

**Council Referred Item FY 2022-54: Discussion and Possible Action regarding the Bloomfield Board of Education Labor Agreements**

Mr. John Robinson, Director of Human Resources and Information Technology presented a copy of the negotiated contract between the Bloomfield Education Association (BEA) and the Bloomfield Board of Education, approved by the Bloomfield Board of Education. The duration of this three-year agreement is effective July 1, 2022 through June 30, 2025.

The Board of Education’s settlement of the contract required mediation. They agreed to a regular annual increase in premium cost sharing as well as the teachers moving to a lower cost health plan. In all three years, salaries in step movement with 2% general wage increase only to top step. In addition, a 2% general wage increase to stipends and hourly rates. The Health and dental premium costs share will increase to 15% in 2022-23, 16% in 2023-24 and 17% on 2024-2025. The BEA members will move their health and dental coverage to the State Partnership Medical Plan. Brown & Brown, the Town and district benefits consultants project a $169,000 savings. In addition, they also project a $28,000 increase to the Town due to the reduced insured members. This is equivalent of a .92% decrease in contract costs.
Mr. William Guzman, Chief Financial Officer with the Bloomfield Board of Education stated that this contract settlement is in line with others in the region. The contract settlement over three years is 11.62%, while the Hartford County average over three years settlement is 11.2%.

Attorney Chris Chinni representing the Board of Education explained the process noting that Council has two options, take no action or vote to reject the BEA contract settlement. If there is no action taken by Council, the contract settlement agreement would automatically be approved within 30 days based on the contract filing with the Town, February 8, 2022. If the vote is to reject, there is a requirement of 2/3 vote of the Council.

Attorney Chinni also outlined the risk if the Council decided to reject the contract settlement. The Board of Education would go back to binding arbitration and there is no time to re-negotiate. BEA members could seek larger salary increases and lower premium cost shares. In addition, there is a fee for additional arbitration proceedings as well.

**It was moved by Councilor Politis, seconded by Councilor Harrington and voted unanimously to vote in the affirmative with the BEA contract settlement for the three-year agreement and recommend back to the full Council for approval.**

**Discussion regarding Rockwell Park Additional Funding Request**

Mr. David Melesko, Director of Leisure Services gave an overview of the Rockwell Park additional funding request. Mr. Melesko stated that upon receipt of the three quotes received for the Bill Lee Field/Rockwell Park Plan Study, in order to move forward with the planning and design project more funding will need to be allocated in order to proceed.

The current level of funding approved during the FY 21/22 Capital Improvement Project (CIP) budget is $25,000. The Town is in need of an additional $50,000 to move forward. Based on the three quotes received, Mr. Melesko recommended to eliminate the Fuss & O’Neill proposal at $24,500. They did not meeting nor adhere to the minimum requirements set forth in the Town’s release for quotes.

The Rockwell Park Planning Team would like to move forward with interviewing both BSC Group and Weston & Sampson, scheduled for February 23, 2022. Both firms have an excellent understanding of the project, project goals and experience to handle a project of this magnitude.

Mr. Melesko reviewed the status of the CIP budget, as well as other potential funding sources, he suggested the following for a Budget Appropriation Transfer:

- Currently, there is a balance of $21,530 in the Samuel Wheeler Reed guardrail project. This project was completed under the anticipated budgeted amount.

- Of the remaining balance needed, $28,470, the request to reduce the Fund 25 account from the previously identified STEM programming which totaled $100,000. If reduced, the balance in this account would be $71,530 for future use.

**Discussion**

Councilor McClary read comments from Mr. James Biffer, 17 Terry Plains Road stating, how could anyone ask about proceeding with park planning, without asking neighbors and all taxpayers if they even want this park? What could you possibly study without knowing if this park is desired?
Mr. Melesko noted that there is a Rockwell Park Planning Committee in place with a charge from Mayor Wong to conduct a comprehensive review, in addition to seeking public input from the community once the firm is in place to conduct outreach workshops.

Deputy Mayor Davis and Councilor Politis noted that they were no aware that there was an Ad Hoc Committee for the Rockwell Park Plan Study. He noted that the entire Council should be aware of what’s going on as well as knowing what there charge is. Transparency is critical to public engagement on Town projects and affairs.

There ensued a detailed discussion of allocating additional funding for the Rockwell Park Plan Study. It was noted that this study would identify usage of the fields and redesign of the park. In addition, there was also discuss about current CIP projects and prioritization of funding for the entire Town.

Councilor Politis inquired about the funding within the CIP budget for the Complete Master Parks Plan. He expressed some concern to allocate $75,000 for just Rockwell Park and asked about an overall review of other parks and usages.

It was moved by Councilor Merritt, seconded by Councilor Politis and voted unanimously the reallocation of funds for the Rockwell Park Plan Study to the full Council for approval.

Discussion and Brief Status Update of New Presentation of Capital Improvement Plan

Mr. Stanley Hawthorne, Town Manager gave a brief overview of the new Presentation of the Capital Improvement Plan.

Mr. Hawthorne noted that we will be presenting the Town Council with two documents that are entitled FY 2023 Proposed Town Manager Budget and the 2023-2028 Community Investment Plan (CIP). Both documents will contain substantive information that will be both educational, but also serve to assist during Council deliberations, as you make decisions.

The Council should have all information available, and the Town Manager should assist you with tools helping to make decisions because, ultimately, the budget is the domain and decision making of the Town Council.

The Community Investment Plan (CIP) is document developed to propose major capital investments projects to take place over a five year period and is actually required by our Town charter. The first year of capital projects is included in the Town Manager’s Proposed Budget for in this case the upcoming Fiscal Year 2023. It should include a list of all capital improvements and other capital expenditures, which are supposed to be undertaken during the five fiscal years.

Councilor Merritt would like to know about the full array of programs that potentially could make the capital budget or the other $6 million available through ARPA that the Town can spend. So, that the Council has some choice, we don't want to have a pre-determined group of projects from the staff that what they think was it we want to do.

Councilor Merritt request that staff give information on all the potential projects so that we can choose which ones, we want to spend money on behalf of the community.

Deputy Mayor Davis stated for the record, at least, based on his recollection is that the Town Manager has been asking the Council for direction and assistance with the budget priorities, since December 2021.
He noted that the Council has yet to sit down to really go through and do the Council Retreat and other things that were suggested by the Town Manager.

**Public Comments**

1. **Councilor DeBeatham-Brown** expressed her disappointment regarding the reallocation of funding from the STEM Program to the Rockwell Park Plan Study. She did note that there was a pilot STEM Program through the Leisure Services department and was halted due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Councilor DeBeatham-Brown noted the importance for STEM education for Bloomfield youth and listed the endless possibilities and opportunities available in today’s economic climate.

2. **Councilor Kirton** cautioned the Council to be careful through the budget process in appropriating funds for various projects before the whole picture is reviewed. He noted that the STEM funding has been dormant for last two years, which is unacceptable. Councilor Kirton stated that those are tax payer dollars that are on the table and are not executing, is not good and not good optics on the Council’s part.

**Review of the January 2022 Financials**

Mrs. Keri Rowley, Finance Director presented the detailed report on the January 2022 financials.

The Revenues and Expenditures through the month ended January 31, 2022 in the 2022 fiscal year. Total revenue received is at 91.1% of budgeted compared to 94.0% from the same time period a year ago. Expenditures are at 58.5% of the total budget, compared to 56.0% for the same time period in 2021.

**Revenues**

The tax collection rate through January was at 96.2%, which is slightly below the rate of 99.6% for the same period in FY 2021. This is because there have been tax appeal settlements that have resulted in a few large scale refunds which decrease the total collection rate for the year.

To date, the Town is expected to receive all the budgeted education and other state grants reflected in the FY 2022 budget. The Town received the first “tiered” PILOT payment this fiscal year. The new payment replaced revenue that were collected under the PILOT programs for state owned property, colleges and hospitals.

Building/Demolitions Permit revenues brought in 91.0% of budgeted revenue compared to 65.2% year to date in the fiscal year 2021. The Town continues to see steady activity in both commercial and residential permit activity and collected almost $38,000 in January.

The Real Estate Conveyance Tax continues to show strong performance. Approximately, 121.5% of the projected revenue has been realized after just the first seven months of the fiscal year and over $100,000 was recorded in January.

**Expenditures**

Overall, expenditures for the month of January are about 58.5% of the year’s total budget, which is slightly more than January 2021 of 56.0%.
Expenditures include $2.3 million in encumbrances, i.e. purchase orders that have been taken out for various accounts but for which funds have not yet been expended. Discounting the encumbrances, we have only actually expended 56.0% of the budget.

Expenditure projections are left at the amount budgeted. Therefore, as presented, the Town’s fund balance would absorb the variance between budgeted revenue and expenditures, which was anticipated during the budget process to be $2.75 million. Projections will be evaluated as the year continues.

There has been numerous weather related events this winter, and many that have fallen on the weekend. Fortunately, the Public Works overtime budget is still on track to fall within the adopted budget.

With the proposed allocation of $30,000 for the creation of a business development authority plan, there is $87,000 remaining in the Council contingency to date.

There are 6 vacancies in the Police Department, and overtime budgets are trending slightly above where they should be. There are savings in full-time wages that will help offset these overages and as a whole, the Police Department is on track to finish the year within budget.

**OTHER BUSINESS**

There was no other business for discussion.

**Public Comments**

1. **Robert Berman, 8 Hiram Lane**, Chair of the Bloomfield Housing Authority commented on their request for funding as a one-time allocation to acquire additional properties in Town that are vacant, to address the need for more affordable housing in Town.

2. **Ava Biffer, 17 Terry Plains Road**, Chair of the Library Board of Trustees advocated for use of ARPA funding for library programming and services.

**Approval of Minutes**

It was by Councilor Merritt, seconded by Councilor Harrington and voted unanimously to approve the minutes of December 20, 2021.

**Adjournment**

It was moved by Councilor Merritt, seconded by Councilor Harrington and voted unanimously to adjourn the meeting at 8:50 p.m.