Minutes not yet approved.
Approval and any edits to be made in succeeding minutes.

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TOWN CLERK'S OFFICE
BLOOMFIELD, CT

BLOOMFIELD TOWN COUNCIL

There was a regular meeting of the Bloomfield Town Council held on Tuesday, October 13, 2026, at 7:00 p.m. in a hybrid meeting style. The in-person meeting location was Bloomfield Town Hall Council Chambers, 800 Bloomfield Avenue, Bloomfield, CT, and the virtual location was via Zoom.

Councilors present: ***In-Person:*** Mayor Harrington, Councilor(s) Waterhouse, Merritt, Oliver, ***via Zoom:*** Councilor(s) Deputy Mayor Lloyd, Mahon, DeBeatham-Brown

Councilors absent: Councilor(s) Goodwin & Cooper

Also present were: ***In-Person***—Latonia Tabb, Clerk of Council; Jon Colman, Director Building and Land Use; Elizabeth Lane, Library Director; Warren Plummer, Director of IT; ***via Zoom:*** Alvin D. Schwpp, Jr., Town Manager; Andrea DiStephan, Town Clerk; Annatouchur Kingland, Senior Administrative Assistant; Town Attorney Andrew Crumbie, Crumbie Law

The meeting was called to order at 7:02 p.m.

Mayor Harrington discussed October being Breast Cancer Awareness Month and asked for the rules to be suspended to allow the resolution to be read. It was moved by Councilor Merritt, seconded by Councilor Merritt and voted unanimously to suspend the rules to allow a resolution recognizing October 2026 as Breast Cancer Awareness Month.

Mayor Harrington read the following resolution:

Resolution recognizing October 2026 as Breast Cancer Awareness Month.

Whereas October is nationally recognized as Breast Cancer Awareness Month, a time to promote early detection honor survivors, remember those lost, and support individuals and families affected by breast cancer.

And ***whereas*** breast cancer continues to affect countless families, early detection, education, and access to quality healthcare are essential to improving outcomes and saving lives.

And ***whereas*** disparities in access and screening, diagnosis, and treatment remind us of the importance of advancing health equity and ensuring that all residents have opportunities to receive preventive care.

And ***whereas*** the town of Bloomfield recognizes the courage of those living with breast cancer, the strength of survivors, the dedication of caregivers and healthcare professionals, and the memory of those whose lives have been lost.

Now, therefore be it resolved that the Bloomfield Town Council hereby recognizes October 2026 as Breast Cancer Awareness Month in the town of Bloomfield, and be it further resolved that the Town Council encourages residents, healthcare providers, community organizations, and local institutions to promote awareness, support early detection, and work together to reduce barriers to breast cancer screening and treatment.

Be it finally resolved that the Town of Bloomfield, and Bloomfield Town Council stands in solidarity with all individuals and families affected by breast cancer and reaffirms its commitment to a healthier, more informed and compassionate community.

Adopted by the Bloomfield Town Council, this date October 13th, 2026.

Announcements and Presentations

Mrs. Andrea DiStephan, Town Clerk, provided an overview of Connecticut's Freedom of Information Act (FIOA) requirements, which grant the public access to government records and meetings. Bloomfield received 202 FOIA requests in 2026, compared with 134 in 2025 and 31 in 2024. Of the requests reported, 130 were closed and 72 remained open and in progress.

Town Clerk DiStephan explained that requests range from routine document retrieval to complex requests involving multiple departments, extensive records, sensitive information, and redactions. She highlighted a six-page request concerning surveillance technology, including automated license plate readers, enforcement cameras, drones, contracts, policies, audit logs, and communications dating back to 2018, emphasizing the significant staff time and coordination required to respond to complex requests.

She further explained that FOIA requests require coordination among departments, IT, and legal counsel to locate, review, redact, and produce records. The Town is developing a Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) with the Town Manager to transition from a Clerk-managed process to an agency-managed response, consistent with FOI Commission recommendations. Under the proposed process, departments would acknowledge requests, conduct searches, communicate directly with requesters, release records, and document and close requests. The Town Clerk would continue providing weekly reports on outstanding requests.

During Council discussion, members questioned whether the Town could charge fees for extensive requests and whether request volume could be limited. Town Clerk DiStephan explained that fees are generally limited to allowable charges for paper copies and certain media or data-conversion services. Councilors also raised concerns about the growing workload and its impact on the Town's budget. In response to a question from Councilor Oliver about using artificial intelligence or other technology to streamline the process, Town Clerk DiStephan identified GoldFynch as a potential tool for eliminating duplicate records and narrowing search results. She noted that further research would be needed to assess its cost and effectiveness.

Town Manager Schwapp thanked Town Clerk DiStephan for her presentation and described the significant operational burden created by the increase in FOIA requests. He noted that requests have risen sharply and expressed concern that some may be generated using AI to overwhelm Town resources, requiring extensive staff research, legal review, and redaction. Town Manager

Schwapp emphasized that staff must respond to every request carefully and that the Town is holding weekly status meetings to monitor outstanding requests. In response to Mayor Harrington's question about previously acquired software, Town Manager Schwapp indicated that the software was a valuable purchase but would be made available to the public once the Town's Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) is finalized.

Councilor Merritt highlighted the impact of outstanding FOIA requests on other municipal responsibilities, noting that the Finance Department reportedly had approximately 40 requests pending and lacked the capacity to research potential state laws that could help address significant property tax increases following revaluation.

Councilor Mahon cautioned against portraying residents' requests for information as malicious or an attack on the Town. He noted that residents and Council members have increasingly been directed to use the FOIA process for information that previously may have been provided through routine inquiries. He emphasized that increased public engagement and residents' interest in municipal government should be recognized rather than characterized negatively.

In response, Town Manager Schwapp clarified that FOIA requests do not require a specific form and may be submitted verbally, in writing, or by telephone. He reiterated the Town's responsibility to respond to public information requests while acknowledging the operational challenges involved. Mayor Harrington thanked Town Clerk DiStephan for the presentation.

Citizens' Statements and Petitions

Statements by members of the public may be oral or written and shall start with the speaker's name and address and shall continue to for no longer than three (3) minutes, unless permitted by the mayor of councilor presiding.

1. Shelby Young, 31 Alexander Rd., owner of Cottage Grove Business Park at 112–116 Cottage Grove Road, reported that the team is completing the HEDCO Cottage Grove HomeRoots Initiative Planning Grant for the Community Investment Fund. She noted the Town's positive response to the initiative and announced plans to apply for the second phase, the construction grant, opening October 26. Ms. Young requested a new letter of support from the Town Council for the upcoming application.

2. Suzette DeBeatham-Brown, 25 Fairfield Ln., provided an update on changes to SNAP and Medicaid (HUSKY Health), including new SNAP work requirements that may be met through employment, training, education, or volunteer service. She encouraged residents to use the Connecticut Department of Social Services (DSS) online pre-screener to determine potential eligibility concerns and noted that information would be shared with the Town's Social Services Department. She also announced a health fair at First Cathedral on November 7, with DSS and Access Health participating, and reminded residents that the energy assistance application portal is open. Mrs. DeBeatham-Brown urged residents, including older adults, to stay informed about eligibility changes and encouraged breast cancer screening and genetic testing, sharing a personal message about her family's experience as breast cancer survivors.

3. Rickford Kirton, 7 Hickory Lane criticized the Town Manager's comments during the FOIA discussion, alleging that the Town Manager had previously been fined $1,500 by the FOI Commission for withholding information and misleading the Commission. Mr. Kirton then raised concerns about the Town Council's oversight of the Town Manager-appointed Blue-Ribbon Committee, arguing that Council members were delegating their responsibilities rather than exercising appropriate oversight. He questioned the committee's selection process and cited potential conflicts of interest involving four organizations he identified in correspondence submitted to the Council.

4. Erin Barringer, 28 Kenmore Rd., addressed concerns about the committee's legitimacy and encouraged respectful dialogue, emphasizing that residents can disagree without personal attacks. She stated that her committee membership would not prevent her from continuing to ask questions, offer criticism, and participate in public discussions. Mrs. Barringer also commented on the Town's Civic Plus Next Request FOIA software, noting that her May request had been logged into the system but that the portal's functionality remained in testing four months later. She expressed hope that the system would become operational soon so residents could benefit from improved public records access.

Report from Council Subcommittees

A. Governance, Policy & Economic Development

Mayor Harrington reported that the subcommittee's next meeting is scheduled for November 2. He provided updates on several development projects, including the Cottage Grove Road project involving four new businesses, which is progressing toward completion, and the Popeyes development, which is nearing its final stages. He noted that Geisler's had agreed to repave the entire parking lot in conjunction with the Popeyes project. Mayor Harrington also reported that the Plan of Conservation and Development (POCD) is nearing completion and is expected to be submitted to the Council of Governments (COG) soon for review.

B. Finance, Budget, Audit & Bonding

Deputy Mayor Lloyd announced that the Finance Committee meeting is scheduled for Monday, October 19, at 6:00 PM.

C. Public Health, Safety & Environment

Deputy Mayor Lloyd reported in the absence of Councilor Cooper reported that the Governance, Policy & Economic Development Subcommittee will meet on Wednesday, October 14, at 6:00 P.M.

D. Education, Workforce, Youth Development & Community Services

Councilor Oliver announced that Social and Youth Services' annual Season of Giving program is accepting registrations for Thanksgiving baskets and holiday items, with a deadline of October

30. Residents may contact Paola Vargas at Social and Youth Services for information. Oliver also reported attending the Youth Adult Council meeting, where members discussed allocating approximately $3,000 toward community needs, including graduation gifts. The next Youth Adult Council meeting is scheduled for November 10.

E. Committee on Committees

Mayor Harrington read (on behalf of Councilor Darrell Goodwin) subcommittee report noting that the Committee on Committees met the previous week to support community participation and leadership across Bloomfield's boards and commissions. The committee welcomed Yvonne Davis for a presentation on the YWCA 50-50 Campaign and interviewed new applicants and reappointment candidates for the Bloomfield Beautification Committee and Commission on Aging. The committee reaffirmed its commitment to broad community participation and ensuring that boards and commissions reflect the diversity, experience, and talents of Bloomfield residents. The next meeting is scheduled for November 12, 2026, at 7:00 PM in the Wintonbury Room at Town Hall.

Council Business

Consent Agenda:

A. Approval of Minutes

- September 28, 2026

B. Consider and Take Action Regarding Tax Refunds

C. Appointment of the Professional School Representative on the Youth Diversion Team

It was moved by Councilor DeBeatham-Brown, seconded by Councilor Waterhouse and voted unanimously to approve the consent agenda.

NEW BUSINESS

2027-07: Discussion and Possible Action Regarding Explore Repurposing and Issue a Request for Proposals of 44 Griffin Road South (former GEMS Building)

It was moved by Councilor DeBeatham-Brown, seconded by Councilor Oliver and voted unanimously to open the floor for discussion.

Director Colman reported that the Board of Education had vacated the GEMS building and returned it to the Town for future use. The Board of Education agreed to fund building maintenance through June 30. He requested Council authorization for the Town Manager to retain a qualified consultant to explore options for repurposing the property through sale or lease. He also proposed allowing direct discussions with interested municipal agencies, while requiring non-municipal entities to participate through the Town's standard Request for Proposals (RFP)

process. The Town Manager will return to the Council with recommendations for its final decision.

Councilors discussed the GEMS building reuse and disposition. Councilor Merritt supported selling the GEMS building to generate revenue for the upcoming budget year and potentially reduce the need for a tax increase. Councilor DeBeatham-Brown agreed, stating that the Town should not become a landlord and should sell the property.

Councilor Mahon supported considering a commercial lease to generate ongoing revenue, while Councilor Oliver requested estimates of potential rental income and clarification regarding damage to the building. Mayor Harrington noted that repairs may be needed before the property can be sold or leased. Director Colman explained that rental estimates and comparative financial information would be included in the Town's analysis.

Town Manager Schwapp favored evaluating the property's long-term revenue potential, including approximately $50,000 in potential annual tax revenue from commercial use. He also clarified that the building's condition reflected normal wear and tear from equipment removal and that the Board of Education had not neglected the property. The Council discussed evaluating both sale and lease options before making a final decision.

It was moved by Councilor DeBeatham-Brown, seconded by Councilor Oliver and voted unanimously to authorize the Town Manager to explore the repurposing of the town-owned property located at 44 griffin Road South, the former GEMS school building, and to prepare and issue a Request for Proposals for the reuse of the property, with any proposal selected through this process to be returned to the Town Council for review and approval prior to any sale, lease, or other disposition of the property.

Councilor DeBeatham-Brown proposed a friendly amendment, seconded by Councilor Oliver after the original motion had already been approved. The friendly amendment failed.

2027-08: Discussion and Possible Action Regarding the Collective Bargaining Contract of the United Public Service Employees Union Local 424- Unit 8

It was moved by Councilor DeBeatham-Brown, seconded by Councilor Oliver and voted unanimously to table this item.

2027-09: Discussion and Possible Action Regarding the Collective Bargaining Contract of the Teamsters Local 671

It was moved by Councilor DeBeatham-Brown, seconded by Councilor Oliver and voted unanimously to table this item.

Report from Town Manager

Town Manager Schwapp reported that the employee transition plan was completed, recognizing eight employees who retired by October 2, 2026, with a combined 190 years of service. He announced the appointments of Malcolm Archibald, Ulrich Bryce, and Catania Huey to the Economic Development Commission/Development Authority. He reported that the Town had provided more than $4,200 in oil assistance to eight households since July and anticipated spending three to four times more on oil assistance this fiscal year due to rising costs. He noted that additional funding of $5,000, $7,500, or $10,000 could help support more households through the Crisis Fund. Community updates included the upcoming Trunk or Treat event, the library's Purple Thursday domestic violence awareness initiative with Interval House, and notices regarding Town office closures.

Town Manager Schwapp also reported that the State Elections Enforcement Commission (SEEC) found the allegations concerning the 2025 charter question were unsupported by the evidence and law, stating that the resulting investigation cost Bloomfield taxpayers approximately $5,000. He concluded by reaffirming his and Town staff's commitment to serving the community.

Council Comments

A. Harrington

Mayor Harrington expressed support for the candidates recommended by the Committee on Committees and acknowledged the challenges of the appointment process. He emphasized the importance of economic development to expand the Town's tax base and help ease residents' tax burden. He thanked those involved in reopening the mall and reported that the Town, in coordination with the Department of Economic and Community Development (DECD) and other organizations, was working to connect affected businesses with assistance for lost food, damaged equipment, and lost wages. He also noted that Niagara Bottling planned to recognize the Town during its upcoming 10th anniversary celebration. Mayor Harrington encouraged residents to support local businesses and urged businesses to connect with the Bloomfield Chamber of Commerce for additional support.

S. DeBeatham-Brown

Councilor DeBeatham-Brown noted that she also needed to submit a formal information request and suggested that when FOIA requests involve the Council, members should be informed and given an opportunity to provide input. She expressed concern that the full Council had not provided clear direction to the Town Manager regarding the budget process and urged Council members to work together to establish priorities and guidance for the Town Manager's advisory committee. She also recognized the recently departed Town employees, describing them as family and thanking them for their years of service. Finally, she thanked Councilor Goodwin for bringing forward the proclamation recognizing Breast Cancer Awareness Month.

S. Mahon

Councilor Mahon apologized for attending remotely due to not feeling well and encouraged others to stay healthy. He acknowledged Breast Cancer Awareness Month and recognized survivors and those affected by the disease. Regarding FOIA requests, he noted that his concerns were based on experiences with multiple past and acting Town Managers. He emphasized the importance of the Council's upcoming responsibilities, particularly the budget process and Town Manager evaluation. He also thanked residents who continued to meet with him and Councilor DeBeatham-Brown to discuss community concerns and potential solutions.

M. Oliver

Councilor Oliver expressed enthusiasm about attending the Town's Halloween event on Friday with his daughter and thanked everyone for attending and participating in the evening's presentations.

J. Merritt

Councilor Merritt discussed his efforts to explore legal options to reduce the impact of property tax increases resulting from the recent revaluation. He apologized if his prior comments offended anyone and clarified that he did not intend to criticize the Board of Assessment Appeals or the Finance Department. He explained that he had explored whether assessment adjustments could provide relief to residents experiencing significant tax increases but decided not to pursue the effort further after determining that it was unlikely to produce results.

E. Waterhouse

Councilor Waterhouse thanked everyone for coming out.

C. Lloyd

Deputy Mayor Lloyd encouraged continued efforts to identify ways to mitigate property tax increases for Bloomfield residents. She noted that she had previously shared information with former Director Hill regarding the Homestead Act and other state programs that may provide assistance to seniors, veterans, and residents with disabilities. She emphasized the importance of reviewing all available options to help residents and stated that she would continue working with Councilor Merritt to explore potential tax relief measures.

Mayor Harrington encouraged residents to support local businesses as the holiday season approaches, particularly those at Wintonbury Mall that experienced a two-week disruption in service. He noted that affected businesses and employees experienced lost wages, food, personal items, and business contracts. He specifically encouraged residents to patronize the Thai restaurant, JXC, Carbone's, and local hair establishments as they work to recover and rebuild their customer base.

EXECUTIVE SESSION

At 8:38 P.M., it was moved by Mayor Harrington, seconded by Councilor DeBeatham-Brown and voted unanimously to move into Executive Session with the Town Councilors.

At 9:00 P.M., Councilor DeBeatham-Brown exited the executive session and returned at 9:01 P.M.

At 9:05 P.M., the motion was moved by Councilor Waterhouse, seconded by Councilor Oliver to exit executive session.

ADJOURNMENT

It was moved by Councilor DeBeatham-Brown, seconded by Councilor Waterhouse and voted unanimously to adjourn the regular meeting at 9:07 P.M.