February 2025 Community Relations Update

At the Greater Cape Ann Chamber of Commerce, we remain committed to keeping our business community informed about key developments impacting our five communities, from infrastructure projects and regulatory changes to economic and transportation updates. We continually seek and welcome business feedback as well as outreach to our community leaders through a variety of forums. One such important upcoming event is our Economic Outlook Breakfast. This annual breakfast invites our business, government, and community partners on Cape Ann, Ipswich, and surrounding communities to convene around significant topics affecting our region. This year, we have chosen to focus on Downtown Economic Vitality, welcoming key representatives from state and local organizations to discuss the importance and strategies for creating and maintaining a vibrant downtown. We hope you will consider joining us for this event. Registration is available online here.

This past month we hosted an important Listening Session focused on the Essex Causeway. Business owners impacted by increased flooding along this main thoroughfare had the opportunity to voice their concerns to town officials and the Boston Region Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO). The discussion focused on the effects of flooding, potential solutions, and future mitigation strategies, emphasizing the importance of long-term resilience planning for Essex's Downtown District. This was followed by a public forum inviting the greater community to see results of the report and weigh in on the issue. The town will next focus on submitting a federal **PROTECT grant application** in conjunction with MassDOT utilizing findings from the MPO. If awarded, this grant could provide significant funding to analyze critical infrastructure improvements. The Chamber was pleased to offer a letter of support for this grant application.

The Northeast Coastal Coalition regularly brings together key stakeholders representing all our regional communities to discuss vital coastal and marine issues. At last month's meeting, an update was provided on the Essex River dredging project. Although the main project has been completed, project delays will prevent private marinas from conducting their own dredging due to the permitted timeline, which could impact local boating access and marine businesses. A main focus of discussion was on the Ipswich River. Per criteria released by the National Shellfish Sanitation Program (NSSP), the Division of Marine Fisheries collaborated with UMass to remodel the river's shellfish beds due to their proximity to the Wastewater Treatment Plant. The study revealed a lack of dilution in the water and the proposed reclassification could result in the closure of several shellfish harvesting areas, significantly affecting commercial shellfish businesses. Additionally, the state is reconsidering the regulation to increase the minimum lobster catch size, which was set to take effect on July 1, 2025. With Maine reversing its stance, Massachusetts is revisiting the issue, a critical development for our local lobster industry.

The MBTA Communities Act remains at the forefront for both Gloucester and Ipswich. The state's EOHLC (Executive Office of Housing and Livable Communities) issued emergency regulations after the SJC ruling, requiring communities that are not in compliance to submit an action plan by February 13 and a district compliance application by July 14. Gloucester's City Council voted unanimously to proceed

with a special election on April 24 to seek voter approval for the proposed Multi-Family Overlay District, at an estimated price tag of $36,000. Meanwhile the Ipswich Select Board is working on a 3A Action Plan following the fall town meeting vote to indefinitely postpone the decision.

In other community updates, Gloucester's City Council is reviewing amendments to the recently passed Short Term Rental Ordinance as several businesses have expressed concern about the impact of the extensive regulations. Additionally, they are moving forward with a Wayfinding project and plans to expand street sweeping in downtown areas to address the signage and cleanliness of streets. The council also recently voted to redesignate a loading zone on Main Street to allow visitor parking after 5pm and before 8am. The town of Rockport has voted to raise fees for several permits and licenses, including those for common victuallers and innholders. Business owners should check with the town for updated rates and renewal procedures. Finally, Manchester by the Sea has voted to join the Cape Ann Transportation Authority (CATA), a move aimed at expanding transportation services in the area and improving regional connectivity for residents and businesses.

As we embark on a new year, we encourage your engagement to assist us in our advocacy for local business. Please consider joining us for some upcoming meetings with more information to follow for other communities.

- **Ipswich Listening Session** – Wednesday February 12 from 4-5pm at Bank Gloucester Ipswich
- **Manchester Division Meeting**- Tuesday February 25 from 8:30-9:30am at the Manchester American Legion

Stay tuned for future updates as we continue working to strengthen the economic and business environment across Greater Cape Ann. If you have concerns or feedback on any of these issues, please feel free to reach out to me directly.

Sincerely,

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