March 2025 Community Relations Update

At the Greater Cape Ann Chamber of Commerce, we are committed to fostering strong relationships between our business community, and local officials across our 5 communities. Through these meetings, listening sessions, and advocacy efforts, we work to ensure that businesses have a voice in shaping the policies and decisions that impact our region.

We host a bi-annual Cape Ann Caucus convening our local and state officials to review important issues pertaining to our region. We also continue to host Quarterly Division Meetings that bring together local businesses and town officials to discuss key issues as well as upcoming projects and events. We recently met in Manchester on February 25th and welcomed a wide range of topics. An update was provided on the long-awaited Central Street Culvert Project that is scheduled to begin this fall. It is likely to last approximately 6-9 months and businesses and residents should prepare for one-way traffic patterns and occasional road closures that will be forced to divert traffic. The town announced that The **Manchester Community Center** has been leased to a private company, limiting its availability for community use despite hopes of the town leasing it. Additionally, budget updates reported that rising **health insurance costs** are putting a significant strain on the town, with rates increasing **16% for municipal employees** and **27% for school** staff. Stay tuned for upcoming division meetings in other communities.

- Ipswich Division Meeting – Thursday March 20, 8:00-9:00am at Ipswich Town Hall
- Rockport Division Meeting – Monday March 31, 5:30-6:30pm at Rockport Town Hall

We've been holding Listening Sessions to connect directly with our members and gain insights on how we can better support the business community. We held our first Listening Session of 2025 in Ipswich on January 22. We shared updates on local businesses and feedback on ways we can further engage the community. We met in Rockport on February 28 with discussions focusing on the economic impacts of residential conversions and short-term rentals, along with upcoming community events like Motif No.1 Day scheduled for May 17. The next session is being held in Gloucester on March 4, welcoming businesses to voice their needs and concerns.

The Greater Cape Ann Chamber convenes a variety of committees that work to make a significant impact across Greater Cape Ann. Our Health & Wellness Committee recently hosted Living Well Together: A Greater Cape Ann Community Wellness Fair on February 26 at the Cape Ann YMCA. It featured 20 vendors showcasing wellness related resources across our region ranging from massage therapy to nutrition and aging-in-place solutions. For information on our other committees and their initiatives or events, please visit capeannchamber.com.

One important upcoming event is our Annual Economic Outlook Breakfast on March 6. It will explore the vital role of downtowns and main streets in driving our local economy. An expert panel will discuss the challenges and opportunities in maintaining thriving business districts. Seating is limited and registration for the event is required. Please visit Economic Outlook Breakfast for more information.

The Town of Ipswich is facing significant economic impact from environmental issues. The Ipswich River shellfish beds faced an **abrupt closure on February 24** due to reclassification under the **National Shellfish Sanitation Program (NSSP),** which assesses water quality near wastewater treatment plants. The **Massachusetts Division of Marine Fisheries** was able to apply a **minimum dilution ratio standard**, allowing for some areas to be **reopened as "conditionally approved" on February 26**. While this situation remains a serious concern for local harvesters, the Chamber continues to monitor the issue and the related impacts.

As we move into spring, we remain dedicated to fostering open communication, providing valuable resources, and advocating for a **stronger, more resilient business community**. We encourage all members to participate in upcoming meetings and events—your input shapes the future of Greater Cape Ann.

If you have any questions or want to get involved, please don't hesitate to reach out.

Sincerely,

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