June 2026 Community Relations Update

As greater Cape Ann enters the busy summer season, communities across the region are preparing for an active calendar filled with festivals, concerts, waterfront events, tourism initiatives, and other activities that help drive economic vitality and showcase the unique character of our five communities. Throughout the Commonwealth, local governments are balancing the opportunities that come with increased visitation and economic activity alongside ongoing challenges related to municipal finances, infrastructure, and public services. Locally, a number of important policy discussions, leadership transitions, and development projects continue to shape the business climate across the region.

Municipal elections concluded last month with relatively few contested races, although Essex voters elected Dexter Lee-Viator in a decisive Select Board victory and subsequently saw the board reorganize with Annie Cameron selected as Chair. The Chamber will continue its quarterly meetings with Essex town officials to discuss business community priorities and is collaborating with the town on plans for a Downtown Economic Vitality Forum this fall. The goal is to gather input from residents, businesses, and other stakeholders to assess the current state of downtown and formulate potential action plans to improve its vibrancy. Meanwhile, one issue drawing attention across all communities is the rapidly rising cost of municipal trash collection. Following last year's prolonged waste management strike, Gloucester, Ipswich, and Manchester-by-the-Sea are seeking new bids and evaluating proposals that would require the move to automated collection systems. Additional costs would be incurred to acquire the necessary compatible barrels. Similar discussions are occurring throughout the region and beyond, with both municipalities and businesses facing significant cost increases. As Beverly Mayor Mike Cahill recently remarked during a public discussion on the issue, communities are increasingly confronted with the reality of having to "pay more, get less."

At the state level, business groups continue monitoring Governor Healey's proposal to reduce LLC filing fees, which has generated opposition from the Secretary of State's office due to concerns over the loss of a significant revenue source. Meanwhile, the Senate's FY27 budget proposal includes a $53 million increase in municipal aid, with negotiations between House and Senate budget conferees expected to begin soon to reconcile differences between the two spending plans.

In Gloucester, the chamber partnered with the city to deploy new instructional signage at all parking kiosks to assist visitors navigating the systems. Providing information like parking fees and enforcement times that weren't previously outlined will hopefully help reduce some of the questions and uncertainty many users face. City leaders are also debating approaches to reducing litter associated with small liquor bottles or nips. Proposals range from retailer-sponsored return incentives to anti-litter campaigns, a preferred approach for local business owners. At the same time, Gloucester is launching "Imagining Gloucester's Future," a creative placemaking initiative that will pair local artists with businesses and property owners to create temporary window murals aimed at beautifying downtown storefronts.

In Essex, the Essex Shipbuilding Museum continues discussions with town officials regarding expanded programming opportunities and improvements to waterfront access along the Essex River. The museum has also expressed interest in continuing its leadership role for the Essex Cultural District, an effort that has helped secure thousands of dollars annually for events, programming, and cultural activities that contribute significantly to the town's economic vitality and community character.

Ipswich welcomed a major leadership transition with Brendan Sweeney officially beginning his tenure as Town Manager on May 26 after a lengthy search process. The Chamber looks forward to working with the new administration on issues important to the local business community. Meanwhile, despite voter approval of a debt exclusion at the town election, plans for a new public safety building fell just eight votes short of the two-thirds majority required at Town Meeting. Town officials are now considering whether to bring the measure back before voters at a future special Town Meeting.

In Rockport, local officials paused a little-known policy that assesses fees for vehicles associated with funeral services at local churches after concerns were raised by residents. The policy, which specifically references contractor vehicles, dumpsters, and construction equipment, generated significant public discussion, and the Select Board has indicated it will revisit the matter for further review.

Manchester-by-the-Sea experienced notable developments this month. Lieutenant Mark McCoy was named the new Chief of Police upon the retirement of Chief Todd Fitzgerald. Voters approved all tax override questions presented at town election, affirming financial support for municipal priorities. In a unique election result, former State Representative candidate Christina Delisio secured a seat on the Housing Authority with five write-in votes. Economic development activity also continues, with the long-vacant Cargo building on Union Street under demolition with construction expected to begin this month on a new mixed-use building featuring a retail space and 3 residential units.

As communities balance budget pressures, infrastructure needs, and economic development initiatives, the Chamber remains actively engaged with municipal leaders throughout Greater Cape Ann to ensure the voice of the business community remains part of these important conversations. We encourage members to stay informed, participate in local civic discussions, and continue sharing feedback as we work together to support a strong and vibrant regional economy.

As always feel free to reach out with any questions or concerns.

Sincerely,

Colleen Murdock
Director of Community Relations
Greater Cape Ann Chamber of Commerce
colleen@capeannchamber.com