May 2026 Community Relations Update

As the pace of spring picks up, so does the Chamber's work to support local businesses and strengthen the regional economy. May is an active month on multiple fronts—from business education and tourism promotion to civic engagement and community partnerships—all reinforcing our role as a connector and advocate across greater Cape Ann.

Our Small Business University Series continues to gain momentum, offering practical, relevant tools for local business owners. We're hosting an AI Hackathon on May 7, designed to help businesses explore real-world applications of emerging technology, followed by a Financial Planning seminar on May 13 focused on long-term sustainability and smart decision-making. These sessions reflect our ongoing commitment to equipping businesses with the knowledge and resources they need to adapt and grow in a changing landscape.

Spring also marks an important time for civic engagement across our communities. Annual town meetings and elections are underway, with key decisions and leadership roles shaping the future of our local economies. In Essex, discussions include two Proposition 2½ override proposals and a contested Select Board race. Ipswich voters will weigh articles related to major infrastructure investments, including wastewater improvements and a new public safety building. In Manchester, recent town meeting actions included approval of zoning changes to allow mixed-use development downtown, along with new zoning to allow senior housing and funding for the design of a new senior center—important steps in addressing long-term community needs. Rockport also recently completed its annual town meeting, with elections scheduled this month. The Chamber continues to monitor these developments and ensure the business community stays informed and represented.

Tourism remains a major economic driver for the region, and we are actively collaborating with local and regional partners to position greater Cape Ann for a strong summer season. With major events like the MA 250 celebrations, Sail Boston, and FIFA-related travel expected to draw visitors to Massachusetts, we are working to capture that momentum locally. We are also bringing back many of the region's beloved community events this year, helping to drive visitation while supporting local businesses and nonprofits that rely on a strong seasonal economy. Recent data from the Massachusetts Office of Travel and Tourism highlights the strength of the Arts & Culture sector in Essex County, reinforcing the importance of continued investment and promotion in this space.

Supporting new and growing businesses remains a priority. We recently celebrated ribbon cuttings for Gloucester Music Works and Silver Bear Emporium, with another planned for Apothecary Suil Crow on May 13 as they mark their move to Gloucester. These moments not only welcome new enterprises but also highlight the vibrancy and resilience of our local business community. Join us in welcoming them to the community.

GREATER CAPE ANN CHAMBER OF COMMERCE
Serving Essex, Gloucester, Ipswich, Manchester-by-the-Sea, and Rockport

24 Harbor Loop, Gloucester, MA 01930 ~ 978-283-1601 ~ 978-283-4740 (fax)
capeannchamber.com ~ capeannvacations.com ~ rockportusa.com

Across the region, municipalities are navigating a range of financial pressures and infrastructure needs that have direct implications for businesses and residents alike. With many costs rising exponentially, city and town officials are navigating a delicate balancing act to move forward with certain projects and maintain level services. Gloucester is facing a budget crunch as the school committee's annual fiscal proposal faces a $1.5 Million shortfall and a long overdue mandated upgrade to the secondary wastewater treatment plant threatens significant increases in water rates for both residents and businesses. In Ipswich, investments in infrastructure and climate resilience—such as federal funding to elevate Jeffrey's Neck Road—highlight both the opportunities and costs associated with long-term planning. At the same time, communities continue to show their strength and support for one another, as seen in the outpouring of assistance for Three Sisters Farm following a recent act of vandalism. Policy discussions around outdoor dining in both Rockport and Ipswich have arisen with officials weighing concerns around parking and public safety with the clear economic benefits these programs continue to provide local businesses.

Through it all, the Chamber remains actively engaged—working to bring together stakeholders, amplify the voice of the business community, and ensuring that economic considerations are part of the conversation. Whether through education, advocacy, or partnership, our focus remains the same: supporting a strong, sustainable local economy for all of greater Cape Ann.

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