December 2025 Community Relations Update

As the holiday season fills our communities with light, celebration, and a welcome boost of local activity, the Chamber is working closely with our five Cape Ann towns to support businesses, strengthen partnerships, and keep our region vibrant through this important time of year. December brings festive programming, key municipal updates, and continued regional collaboration—all essential to a thriving Greater Cape Ann.

Holiday programming is now well underway, and we encourage everyone to take part in the many festive events happening across our region. Details for many events can be found on the Chamber's Events Calendar. We will also be partnering with the Cape Ann Kids Holiday Fund and the North Shore Holiday Toy Drive to collect donations for local children at each of our Chamber holiday parties. All are welcome and encouraged to join us:

- Wednesday December 3 at Rockport Brewing Co in Rockport
- Thursday December 4 at 35 Beach in Manchester
- Tuesday December 9 at The James Pub and Provisions in Essex
- Thursday December 11 at Ipswich Ale in Ipswich
- Thursday December 18 at the Chamber office in Gloucester

The Chamber held its Fall Cape Ann Caucus last month—an important biannual gathering of local officials and state legislative representatives from all five communities. This meeting remains a cornerstone of regional collaboration, allowing municipalities and legislators to share updates, identify shared challenges, and work together toward solutions that support residents and businesses across Cape Ann.

Gloucester welcomed a 36% voter turnout in the November 4 city elections and will begin the new year with Mayor-Elect Paul Lundberg and two new At-Large City Councilors, Hannah Kimberly and Patti Ann Page. MassDOT will host a virtual meeting on December 2 at 6 PM regarding the Blyman Bridge construction project, a $125M investment planned for 2028. The Chamber also advocated at the City Council tax classification hearing for maintaining parity between residential and commercial tax rates. We are pleased to report that the Council voted to keep the current 1.03 CIP tax shift.

In Manchester-by-the-Sea, the Town's Culvert Project, primarily funded by a BRIC grant, continues to face challenges due to the April 2026 grant expiration. With permitting unlikely to conclude in time, the Town has requested an extension and is exploring alternate funding opportunities. The project remains critical, as the culvert carries one of two feeder electrical lines that supply Cape Ann from Beverly. The Planning Board is also continuing its work and outreach for new zoning to strengthen downtown economic vitality, holding its next public hearing on Thursday December 4th.

In Essex, the Chamber is collaborating with the Town to plan a Downtown Visioning Forum for early spring. This event will engage the business community in discussions on revitalizing the downtown area and identifying strategies to support local businesses and economic growth.

In Rockport, the Town did not receive BRIC grant funding for the Thacher Road elevation project but was awarded support through the state's Rural Aid Program. Rockport is also undertaking a review of its sign bylaws to clarify enforcement and maintain consistency in the permitting process for businesses.
In Ipswich, a Shellfish Listening Session was recently held with local and state legislators and the Department of Marine Fisheries to address concerns related to recent flat closures. A task force subcommittee was formed and will be working with local, state and federal officials to review options and ensure the concerns of the local shellfish community are heard. The Town is also shifting focus to downtown revitalization—examining parking needs, the future of the EBSCO properties, and the broader challenges faced by small businesses in town.

As we move through this festive and economically important season, the Chamber remains committed to advocating for our members, supporting local businesses, and fostering strong municipal partnerships. We look forward to a joyful and productive month ahead and encourage everyone to shop local, celebrate local, and take part in the many holiday traditions that make Greater Cape Ann so special.

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

Sincerely,

Colleen Murdock
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