September 2025 Community Relations Update

As we welcome the fall season across greater Cape Ann, our communities are moving forward with important projects and preparing for pivotal town meetings and elections. In Ipswich, the long-discussed Market Square, Central, and South Main Street Reconstruction Project was the focus of a public forum on August 13. The $14 million project, proposed for fiscal years 2027/2028 under the State's Transportation Improvement Program (TIP), would be 80% federally funded and 20% by the state. While consultants noted that the plans address drainage issues and bring sidewalks, bike lanes, and ADA accessibility up to federal standards, concerns were raised about the loss of 28 parking spaces, enforcement challenges to existing parking, and the length of time needed for the proposed construction. Many businesses and residents voiced opposition and apprehension over the scope of the project and the need to address other critical infrastructure in town. Meanwhile, the town received news that the final lawsuit against the proposed public safety building was withdrawn, allowing them to move forward once court confirmation is received, though funding challenges remain after ARPA dollars were redirected and construction costs are likely to rise.

Across our region, fall town meetings are being scheduled: Rockport will meet September 8, Gloucester holds its primary election on September 16, Ipswich will meet October 28 with Essex following on November 17, and Manchester-by-the-Sea's date is still to be determined. In Rockport, voters will consider a zoning bylaw amendment to prohibit converting first-floor commercial uses to residential in the Downtown Zoning District without a special permit. Proposed design guidelines would also discourage window coverings and encourage pedestrian-friendly storefronts to keep downtown vibrant and promote economic vitality.

Gloucester residents will have the chance to hear directly from all three mayoral candidates at the Chamber's Mayoral Candidate Forum, scheduled for Thursday, September 11 from 6:00–7:30 PM at Gloucester High School. While other organizations are planning additional forums, this is an important opportunity for residents and businesses to learn more about the candidate's economic plans for the city. The event is free and open to the public. Mayor Verga is also warning of a scam involving fraudulent emails requesting wire transfers for special permits, falsely claiming to be from his office.

Regional advocacy continues to be a key theme this fall with Cape Ann in the spotlight from recent legislative visitors. State Attorney General Andrea Campbell visited downtown Manchester-by-the-Sea to discuss the Culvert project and the threat posed by the elimination of federal BRIC grants. Her office has joined 19 other states in a lawsuit to preserve funding. Meanwhile, Congressman Seth Moulton visited Essex to advocate for FEMA and MEMA emergency preparedness programs, highlighting Essex's $3 million PROTECT grant application currently on hold to address flooding along the Causeway. At the local level, Essex's Fire Chief is requesting to strengthen the volunteer department by hiring a full-time officer this fall and another in the spring, along with updated equipment.

The Chamber continues our Powered by Local campaign encouraging residents and visitors to spend $20 at a business they've never tried before. This initiative is designed to focus on the benefits and importance of shopping local as well as highlighting the many unique small businesses in our communities. With the success of last month's Speak & Connect workshop, we're excited to continue our Small Business Seminar Series this month with Bookkeeping and Taxes Made Simple on September 11th. Seating is limited, so register now to save your spot. You can follow the Chamber's Facebook and Instagram pages to stay up to date on these and other initiatives and events.

As always, the Chamber remains committed to connecting businesses and supporting our communities.

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