**August 2025 Community Relations Update**

As part of our continued effort to keep members and stakeholders informed, here's a summary of recent developments, new initiatives, and key municipal updates across Greater Cape Ann. The Chamber remains actively engaged with our towns, businesses, and community partners to support local economic vitality and quality of life.

This month, we launched two exciting new initiatives. *Powered by Local* is a regional shop local campaign encouraging residents and visitors to spend $20 at a business they've never tried before. Through this initiative, the Chamber will be highlighting a variety of local businesses and reminding the community of the powerful economic and social benefits of shopping local. We've also introduced a new *Small Business Seminar Series*, designed to help local business owners navigate common challenges. The series debuts on August 14 with "Speak & Connect," a workshop focused on public speaking and networking skills. These seminars are free for Chamber members, $10 for non-members, and available both in person and via Zoom with registration required.

Meanwhile, the Republic Services strike has entered its sixth week with no end in sight. This ongoing disruption has significantly impacted several communities, including local businesses that rely on regular waste removal. Many have had to independently seek out alternative options, often facing delays as Republic prioritizes municipal contracts. The Chamber will continue to monitor the situation and advocate for clear communication and fair treatment for impacted businesses.

At our recent Essex Division meeting, the primary topic was the Army Corps of Engineers' dredging project on the Essex River. Federal, state, and local officials recently convened with the USACE to address concerns that the latest dredging project left the river in worse condition than before. Although they acknowledged the issues, they indicated that only limited remediation at critical chokepoints may be considered, and not until next winter. This delay leaves private marina owners, who had already secured permits and were hoping to coordinate with the federal effort, in a difficult position. The conversation has also sparked renewed discussion about potential dredging of the Ipswich River along with possible negative impacts such work could have on nearby clam flats that are already facing significant closure.

Across our communities, several important municipal updates have taken place. In Gloucester, the City Council has formally adopted the city's Comprehensive Plan, and an Implementation Committee has been appointed to move the plan forward. The city has also posted a job opening for an Economic Development Coordinator, a position that has been vacant for well over a year. The much-anticipated reopening of the Sawyer Free Library is expected later this month with a ribbon-cutting ceremony on September 5. Finally, the Chamber's Health & Wellness Committee has launched *Thrive Gloucester*, a community-wide initiative focused on overall wellbeing. This pilot program is designed to help people rethink and simplify their wellness goals. The committee is tabling at the Backyard Growcery Farmers Markets to help spread the word. Stop by Burnham's Field on Wednesdays between 2:30-6:30pm to learn more and visit the other organizations and vendors at the market.

In Rockport, the Planning Board is proposing zoning changes for the fall town meeting to restrict first-floor residential conversions in the downtown district. These amendments are intended to support the economic vitality and character of the downtown area. The Chamber attended both public hearings on this issue and encourages residents to support the local business community and voice their perspective by voting at the upcoming town meeting. At the same time, the Chamber has distributed updated Rockport Bag Stuffers to highlight events throughout the year and promote return visits during the off-season. In Manchester-by-the-Sea, town officials estimate that $3 million is needed to build the new planned senior center. Fundraising is expected to begin this winter, with hopes of breaking ground next summer. Manchester's Planning Board is also reviewing its Downtown Visioning Project, including revitalization goals and committee roles. The Chamber will continue to partner with the Downtown Improvement Committee as well as other boards to offer support for this project.

Ipswich is hosting a public forum on August 13 to review MassDOT's proposals for the Market Square reconstruction project ahead of a planned public hearing anticipated to be later this month. Businesses are especially encouraged to participate and share their input and perspective on the project's potential ramifications. On September 15, the town will also hold a listening session with local shellfish industry stakeholders to address concerns and gather feedback on the effects of closures of several flats in the Ipswich River.

As always, the Chamber remains committed to connecting businesses, supporting our communities, and advocating for the issues that matter most across Greater Cape Ann. Thank you for your continued involvement and partnership.

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

Sincerely,

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