

March 5, 2024

March 2024 Community Relations Updates

February has been a busy month around Greater Cape Ann. We had our first 2 quarterly Division Meetings in Essex and Ipswich. These included businesses as well as local town officials and provided a great opportunity to engage and collaborate; thank you to all who participated! Save the dates for Manchester's on March 14th and Rockport's on March 25th. We also hosted listening sessions in Gloucester, Manchester, Rockport, and Ipswich. These "Coffee Sessions" are a chance to meet informally so I can get to know you and your businesses and how we can best work together. If you were unable to attend any of these, don't worry! We will be holding them on a semi-regular basis, so stay tuned for more dates to be announced. If you have a preference on when and where these are held, don't hesitate to reach out; I welcome your feedback and recommendations.

There have been a variety of meetings, presentations, and public forums regarding each community's compliance with the 3A Multi Family Zoning Act. These have been hosted by the municipalities as well as local individuals and organizations. These include the recent Public Hearing sponsored by the Rockport Planning Board in their presentation to residents on the proposed TOVOD. The message from all Planning Boards is that the mandate from the state is not an option, and they are working to strike a balance between compliance and maintaining the character of each community.

Essex is currently working on an updated zoning bylaw in their community and held a public forum on Wednesday February 28 at Town Hall. Their goal is to create additional districts with increased zoning requirements for residential and business use that will replace some of the General Zoning District which currently encompasses roughly 98% of the town land. The Planning and Select Boards are also working on defining business types and special permit zoning in preparation for the upcoming Town Meeting in May. With the town's expressed desire for community input, it's important for individuals to weigh in on their visions and opinions, particularly as it pertains to potential zoning restrictions for businesses.

In The City of Gloucester, the City Council voted unanimously to receive funding from the state's MA Development Finance Agency to study the conditions of the I-4, C-2 lot, including what is underneath and the stability of the sea wall. It will also be working with the MAPC (Metropolitan Area Planning Council) on a local Digital Equity Plan. This effort, in conjunction with the Sawyer Free Library, aims to "overcome historical, institutional, and structural barriers that make it hard for individuals and families to access and use the internet". The City will also be hosting an in-person workshop for its Comprehensive Plan as it enters the next phase. Conducted by the consulting firm, JM Goldson, this public visioning session will enable residents to participate in a hands-on activity to create a long term vision for the city.

GREATER CAPE ANN CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

Serving Essex, Gloucester, Ipswich, Manchester-by-the-Sea, and Rockport

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Some of the common issues affecting our communities are parking and water. Manchester is attempting to address its parking woes by launching a pilot parking program this spring. The town is working with a consulting firm and with input from the police chief, will focus on new signage, meters/kiosks and enforcement. The goal, according to the Select Board, is to increase safety, decrease confusion and allow space for residents and visitors. Ipswich residents and businesses will see significant water rate increases this year after their Select Board voted to approve the measure. With varying commercial, residential and seasonal rates, the town is now among the highest in the region.

Two highly contentious 40B projects are also seeing some recent developments. The proposed Shingle Place Hill condominium complex in Manchester is going before the HAC (state Housing Appeals Committee) in an attempt to override the town's Zoning Board of Appeals denial of the project. The town, however, will likely have to wait some time before the committee renders its final decision. In Ipswich, the long-drawn-out Essex Pastures, or Bruni Project, is back to the town's ZBA after the HAC remanded the application back. After they close the hearing, the board will have to issue its written decision by April 8. It will also have a Letter of Concern to consider, written by the Select Board in regard to the project.

Stay tuned for notifications and announcements of upcoming events and meetings. You can always find them on the Events page on our website.

[Greater Cape Ann Chamber of Commerce Events](#)

As always, please don't hesitate to reach out with any questions, comments, or concerns.

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