August 2026 Community Relations Update

As summer begins to wind down, attention is quickly turning to what promises to be a busy fall for public policy and community engagement across greater Cape Ann. While our tourism and event season remains in full swing, the Chamber continues to monitor local and state issues that affect our members, advocate on behalf of the business community, and keep members informed of important developments.

We recently concluded our quarterly Division Meetings in Rockport and Essex, continuing to strengthen communication between municipal leaders and local businesses. These meetings provide an important forum for providing updates, discussing local initiatives, infrastructure projects, and issues affecting the business community while ensuring business owners have a direct line of communication with town officials.

The coming months will bring an active legislative season with several contested elections and important local Town Meetings. The September 1 primary will feature a competitive Democratic race for Massachusetts' 6th Congressional District, while at the state level, Sarah Wilkinson will challenge incumbent Representative Dru Tarr for the 5th Essex District seat. The November 3 General Election will determine the outcome of those races, along with the Governor's race and a contested election for the MA House 2nd Essex District, where Daniel Kelly is challenging incumbent Representative Kristin Kassner. Locally, Ipswich will hold a Special Town Meeting on September 8 to revisit additional funding and the location of its proposed Public Safety Facility, followed by Rockport's Fall Town Meeting on September 14.

This month also marked the launch of our new Your Membership at Work series, a monthly member benefit designed to help businesses maximize the value of their Chamber membership. Our first installment focused on optimizing Chamber member profiles to improve search engine visibility, ensure business information remains current, and increase online exposure through the Chamber's trusted websites. Look for this month's edition, which will encourage members to submit events to the Chamber calendar to help expand their reach.

We were also pleased to celebrate three local milestones with Ribbon Cuttings this month. We welcomed the grand opening of Island Stretch & Strength in Gloucester, celebrated the 10th anniversary of Rockport Candle Company, and joined The Tidekeepers Foundation in unveiling the mermaid sculpture Atlantis in its temporary home at Reed Park in Manchester-by-the-Sea.

In Gloucester, the Chamber advocated on behalf of local liquor stores at recent Ordinances & Administration Committee meetings. After speaking alongside store owners and residents alike, City Councilors withdrew their proposal to ban the sale of nip bottles allowing time to work collaboratively with businesses on alternative solutions to address litter concerns.

Housing and economic development also continued to be major topics in Gloucester. The City released its draft Housing Compass Plan for public review and comment through August 29, while also unveiling preliminary plans for the municipally owned 65 Rogers Street property (I4C2). Following recent public engagement, the City expects to issue an Expression of Interest later this fall to explore potential public-private partnership development ideas that comply with Designated Port Area regulations.

Municipal leaders are reviewing local government operations and business services. Essex is evaluating potential governance structure changes to streamline decision-making while also launching a new online Fee Finder, a tool that provides permit fee information along with required application documents and represents the first step in a broader effort to improve permitting transparency and efficiency. The town is also exploring opportunities to expand transient dockage for boaters to boost the economic impact of visitors. In Ipswich, officials confirmed that the recent sale of Noresco, the energy efficient services company, to Opterra will not impact the Town's ongoing municipal projects.

Federal funding uncertainty has become an increasing challenge for local communities. Gloucester's $383,000 FEMA grant for repairs to the Cressy Beach wall and Rockport's $2.76 million FEMA grant for the Long Beach seawall have both been rescinded. At the same time, Rockport was awarded the $320,000 BRIC grant, after it was rescinded last year, to address flooding along Thatcher Road. They are currently evaluating how that funding aligns with a recently awarded $500,000 state Rural Development Fund grant for the same project.

In Manchester-by-the-Sea, town officials continue working to resolve an unauthorized sidewalk installation at 1 School Street while evaluating whether the matter can be settled through an agreement with the property owner or will require legal action.

As always, the Chamber will continue advocating for policies that support our business community, monitoring municipal and state initiatives that affect our members, and providing timely updates as these important issues continue to evolve throughout the busy fall season.

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

Sincerely,

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