Community Relations Update: December 3, 2024

As part of our mission to support and advocate for our five communities, the Greater Cape Ann Chamber of Commerce has been actively engaged in fostering collaboration between businesses, local officials, and residents. One such way are the quarterly Division Meetings, inviting businesses and community representatives to foster communication and advance priorities. We had recent meetings in both Manchester and Rockport with one scheduled for Ipswich on December 13. We encourage all businesses to attend these meetings, regardless of Chamber membership.

Manchester brought together local businesses and town officials to discuss initiatives aimed at revitalizing the downtown area. A key focus was addressing vacant storefronts, with creative solutions like pop-up shops and efforts to promote economic development under consideration. We also reviewed upcoming holiday programming, including our new "Shop Local" initiative, Mistletoe Madness. There was discussion around the possibility of re-erecting the skating rink to bring even more holiday cheer to the town or invigorating the slower winter season. Additionally, Manchester residents made their voices heard at the special town meeting, with a 74% vote to approve the state's MBTA zoning mandate, with a focus on increasing the availability of more affordable multi-family housing.

Rockport's Division Meeting highlighted several forward-looking initiatives. Town officials shared an update about the Cultural District, promising more details in the new year outlining the process for organizations to utilize the grant funds. Meanwhile, the Department of Public Works will enhance landscaping efforts around the new building as well as review other options to help beautify the area upon its completion. Christmas in Rockport was a main topic highlighting our new season long shop local campaign, Mistletoe Madness, with an attempt to energize the local economy. Buskers on Bearskin Neck also remain a topic of interest. While Rockport cannot legally restrict street performers due to state court rulings protecting their rights, the Chamber will continue to work with local leaders and area businesses on this topic.

Increased ridership on the MBTA is another promising trend for Rockport and the Greater Cape Ann region as a whole. The Chamber is advocating for the potential of expanded service to support evening events and 2nd shift workers in an effort to boost both local businesses and cultural activities. We are actively collecting data from local venues as well as letters of support from businesses to present to the state.

In Gloucester, the Chamber successfully advocated for maintaining the current tax classification for businesses. Commercial properties already pay a higher percentage, and an added levy would unfairly burden our small business community. We also gathered input from local businesses in response to a city councilor's suggestion to remove a loading zone on Main Street, ensuring their needs are heard and prioritized.

The Chamber played a pivotal role in advocating for Essex businesses by opposing the recent proposed residential zoning changes. At the special town meeting last month, these changes were postponed, allowing for more dialogue and consideration of their potential impact on the local business community.

As we wrap up the year, the Chamber remains committed to fostering communication and collaboration across all five communities. Our efforts to support businesses, promote local events, and advocate for smart development are integral to ensuring that Greater Cape Ann continues to thrive.

Stay tuned for more updates, and don't forget to support your local businesses this holiday season! Together, we can build a brighter future for Greater Cape Ann.

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

Wishing you a wonderful holiday season.

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