January 2025 Community Relations Update

As we say farewell to 2024 and embark on a new year, the Greater Cape Ann Chamber of Commerce reaffirms its commitment to advocating for our members and the broader business community. Through community engagement, listening sessions, division meetings, and vigilant monitoring of state and municipal agendas, we strive to relay critical information and gather feedback to support businesses and influence decisions that directly affect them.

Last month greater Cape Ann celebrated another festive holiday season throughout our region. The Chamber's new shop local initiative, Mistletoe Madness, launched in Manchester-by-the-Sea and Rockport, proved a great success! This season-long program emphasized the importance of supporting local businesses and tracked an impressive $264,000 spent in Rockport alone at participating businesses. We're thrilled by the community's response and look forward to growing this initiative in future holiday seasons.

Housing continues to be a priority into the new year. Rockport is working with consultants to finalize an Affordable Housing Bylaw. A public information session on Inclusionary Zoning will be held on January 23 at 5:00 PM at the Rockport Public Library. This is an excellent opportunity for community members to learn about proposed changes and provide input on housing affordability initiatives. The new legislation for Accessory Dwelling Units, aimed at increasing housing options, looms with an effective date of February 2, 2025; municipalities across our region are updating their bylaws to be in compliance with this new law.

The increased need for affordable housing and the implications of the new ADU law has prompted conversations around short term rentals. Gloucester recently passed a city ordinance outlining restrictions on the amount as well as how many months per year they can be rented. The effective date, however, has been postponed until April 1st to allow the city time to implement the registration process. Rockport has discussed the issue amongst their Planning Board and Select Board members and Manchester is reviewing their Short-Term Rental Bylaw by forming a task force to discuss potential revisions.

The Chamber is collaborating with the Town of Essex and the Boston Region Metropolitan Planning Organization to schedule a listening session on January 22 at 5 PM at The James. The purpose is to gather business feedback regarding a study that will conduct a full alternative analysis of potential solutions to the flooding problems on the Essex Causeway. A follow-up public forum will be held on January 29. We encourage all stakeholders to participate and share their insights.

A major infrastructure project is also planned for Ipswich. The Massachusetts Department of Transportation (MassDOT) will hold a virtual public hearing on January 14 at 6:30 PM, to provide details and gather feedback on the Reconstruction Project of Central Street and South Main Street. We encourage local businesses and residents to attend to hear details and contribute their perspectives.

The Chamber also actively participates in the Northeast Coastal Coalition where a large group of committed officials and representatives of several organizations review and collaborate on issues affecting our vulnerable coastlines. One such issue that has been discussed is the prevalence of ghost fishing gear; lost or abandoned gear that remains in the marine environment posing hazardous conditions for marine life and navigation. We are pleased to relay that the Ghost Fishing Gear bill has been signed into state law. This legislation allows for the removal of abandoned fishing gear, which was previously deemed protected as private property. This is a significant step forward in protecting our marine ecosystems and supporting the fishing industry's sustainability.

We remain committed to keeping our members informed and engaged on issues that impact our communities. Your participation and feedback are invaluable as we work together to foster a thriving business environment in greater Cape Ann. For more information on any of these updates or to get involved, please feel free to reach out to me directly.

Wishing you a safe, happy, and healthy New Year.

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