May 2025 Community Relations Update

As we step into the busy spring season, the Greater Cape Ann Chamber of Commerce continues to monitor and advocate on the issues that matter most to our local businesses and communities. Two recent issues came to our attention that could have a significant impact. We submitted a Letter of Opposition to State Representative Ann-Margaret Ferrante regarding a proposed cap on charitable contributions in the FY26 state budget. We believe this measure could have damaging effects on our local nonprofits and the business community that supports them. We also submitted a Letter of Support for the proposed upgrades to the Hiltz Transfer Station on Kondelin Road in Gloucester, emphasizing the project's regional economic importance to contractors, tradespeople, and community services.

It's election season in our municipalities and several of our communities have important upcoming races. Elections are an opportunity for residents and businesses alike to stay informed and engaged. The Chamber was proud to partner with The Manchester Cricket and 1623 Studios to organize and present a candidate forum for the Essex Board of Selectmen race. It was an opportunity for the candidates to provide the community with an overview of their views for the important issues affecting the town. The forum was recorded and is available for viewing at Essex 2025 Board of Selectmen Candidate Forum. We encourage the community to be informed on each of these upcoming elections.

- Essex: May 12
- Rockport: May 13
- Ipswich: May 20
- Manchester by the Sea: May 20

At the federal level, FEMA has announced it is rescinding previously approved funding through the Building Resilient Infrastructure and Communities (BRIC) program. This means Massachusetts stands to lose $90 million in grant funds, including $320,000 earmarked for redesigning Rockport's Thacher Road and updating local building codes. Additionally, federal funding for Manchester's long awaited culvert replacement project is also in jeopardy.

On the state front, the Economic Development Incentive Program (EDIP) has been revamped to eliminate the $5 million annual cap on refundable tax credits. This change is expected to expand opportunities for businesses that are committed to job creation and retention in Massachusetts.

Several key updates are unfolding across our Cape Ann communities. In Gloucester, Catherine Schlichte has been named interim Chief Administrative Officer and will step into the role following Jill Cahill's departure on May 12. The City Council recently voted to reduce previously imposed restrictions on Short-Term Rentals, allowing existing registered units to be

grandfathered in. The city's Board of Health will be holding public hearings beginning May 7 for the proposed Hiltz Transfer Station upgrade. The hearing will be continued to May 12 inviting public testimony from the community.

In Rockport, a bylaw amendment passed at Town Meeting now requires all short-term rental property owners to obtain a town license. Meanwhile, the Planning Board is reviewing potential new bylaws aimed at limiting residential conversions in the downtown area. Their goal is to have these bylaws ready for the fall Town Meeting. With several recent conversions on Bearskin Neck, the Chamber fully supports this measure to protect the downtown vitality and culture of the community.

In Essex, the town is awaiting an assessment from the Army Corps of Engineers on the recent dredging project in the Essex River. If the work is deemed insufficient, it could open the door for additional permitting opportunities for the private marinas. In a reversal from recent years, the Select Board also approved ten non-resident boat launch and parking permits for the 2025 season. The permits will be priced at $1,000 each and awarded by a lottery.

Manchester-by-the-Sea has hired a new Town Administrator, Tony Barletta, formerly of Nahant, to replace outgoing administrator Greg Federspiel. The Planning Board is reviewing downtown development plans and is working with consultants from McCabe Enterprises to host a visioning workshop. The goal is to identify priorities and strategies to support a forthcoming application for a state One Stop grant and to inform future zoning bylaw updates supporting mixed-use development in the downtown area.

In Ipswich, Town Manager Stephen Crane has announced his resignation, effective at the end of May. The Select Board is actively seeking an interim replacement and will begin interviewing candidates later this week.

The Chamber remains committed to representing the interests of the Greater Cape Ann business community and keeping you informed on key developments. Please don't hesitate to reach out with questions, concerns, or ideas on how we can continue to advocate for our region.

Sincerely,

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