Community Relations Update: November 5, 2024

One of the Chamber's goals is to represent the interests of the business community through a variety of events, actions and advocate for policies that ensure a thriving future for Greater Cape Ann. As we advocate for a strong regional economy, we work to stay informed of the issues affecting our area and strive to keep businesses engaged with these community developments.

One key issue that can have a dramatic effect on each of our communities revolves around zoning. Both Essex and Manchester-by-the-Sea have important town meetings on November 18, where critical zoning matters are on the table. Essex residents will vote on new Residential Districts that outline permissible land use throughout town, a matter that has sparked debate in the business community. In response, the Chamber recently organized a Zoning Forum, bringing together local business owners, select board members, and planning board members. Local businesses voiced significant concerns and expressed broad opposition to the proposed residential zoning changes. It will then be Manchester resident's turn to vote on zoning for the MBTA Communities Act. This common denominator for many of our communities has posed significant challenges. In Gloucester, the City Council passed the measure, but a citywide petition is delaying implementation until it can be posted to a vote in next year's election; attorneys for Rockport residents are appealing the dismissal of their lawsuit against the town; and Ipswich residents narrowly voted to indefinitely postpone their decision.

The Chamber, representing business interests, has taken a stance against Ballot Question 5 in today's election, which proposes increasing the tipped minimum wage. Our position reflects the feedback we received from local businesses and their employees. Overwhelmingly, tipped workers feel their wages will be negatively impacted and that businesses will face increased labor costs under the new proposed measure.

In October, the Chamber celebrated National Women's Small Business Month by showcasing and promoting Cape Ann businesses that are fully owned and operated by women. This spotlight served to recognize the valuable contributions of these entrepreneurs, aiming to foster greater visibility and support within the community.

The Chamber's Sustainability Committee, one of our many dedicated committees, has been working hard to champion sustainable business practices in Cape Ann. This month, the committee will host its third Business Sustainability Event at Cake Ann in Gloucester on November 19 from 7:30 to 9:00 a.m. The event will feature Black Earth Compost, presenting the benefits of composting for businesses. This initiative aligns with the Chamber's commitment to supporting environmentally responsible practices that benefit both businesses and the community. This event is free and registration is available via Business Sustainability Speaker Series.

The Chamber recently hosted its biannual Fall Caucus, bringing together state and municipal leaders representing all five of our communities. This important gathering provides a forum for discussing the pressing issues that impact Greater Cape Ann. This month, topics included the implementation of the 3A MBTA Communities Act, escalating town budgets strained by rising healthcare costs, and ongoing labor shortages. Notably, recent outmigration trends indicate that Massachusetts lost over 30,000 residents last year, with affordable housing identified as a leading cause.

The Chamber is also watching and preparing again to address tax classification in the City of Gloucester. As we did last year, we are prepared to advocate for businesses to ensure they receive fair and equitable tax standards. We encourage all members to stay informed and participate as these developments unfold across our communities.

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

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