

## **Community Relations Update: August 6, 2024**

A sizzling summer it has been! As we enter the final stretch of summer getting in all the beach and vacation activities we can before schools resume and the leaves start to fall from the trees, the city and towns have been looking ahead at various initiatives and projects throughout Greater Cape Ann. Summer is also a busy time of year at the state level, where lawmakers have been working to finalize the fiscal budget. These decisions can have a significant impact on all our communities with the potential for considerable funding to be directed to each of the municipalities. The most notable being the Housing Bond Bill; currently on the Governor's desk awaiting her anticipated signature. The new budget also includes over \$800K directed to support various projects in our communities as well as additional funding for our schools through Chapter 70 and an increase in unrestricted aid. It's unclear at this point, however, how some of that increased funding will be distributed.

Some of our communities are still hard at work reviewing compliancy options for the MBTA Communities Act. The Planning Boards in both Ipswich and Gloucester have been preparing proposals for districts that meet the requirements set forth by the state. Ipswich will be holding hearings this month to review changes in advance of a special town meeting scheduled for October. Gloucester has authorized consultants to prepare the draft zoning amendment they have agreed upon and will hold a public forum on August 21<sup>st</sup>.

Essex Planning Board has been working on their Residential Zoning Districts Project. They extended a community survey through August 7<sup>th</sup> inviting all residents AND businesses to provide input and feedback on where in town certain types of businesses should be allowed. I encourage any of you who have not submitted a response to participate in this process in order to have your perspectives and opinions documented in this outreach. The board has also been hosting weekly workshops inviting feedback on potential residential districts throughout town. At a business focused workshop in July, some attendees provided suggestions on the potential boundaries and encouraged the board to have the district maps uploaded to the website as soon as possible to allow individuals to review the information ahead of time. The next workshop is scheduled for Tuesday August 6<sup>th</sup>. You can visit the Planning Board's website for additional information, including upcoming workshops and a link to the survey. [Planning Board Residential Zoning District](#)

Town officials in Essex are also hopeful that meetings with the Boston Metropolitan Area Planning Organization (MPO) and their Central Transportation Planning staff will lead to a study on the flooding concerns for the Causeway. Although the current Department of Transportation's "Beyond Mobility" Plan lacks any specific attention for the area, the involvement and potential data to be gained with work from MPO, could lead to a future study concerning potential solutions or at least access to Municipal Vulnerability Grants to address the situation. Amongst these other initiatives, Essex is also reviewing their potential annual responsibility for the upgrade to Gloucester's wastewater treatment plant as well

as actively searching for a new town clerk with the position due to be vacated earlier than expected, within the week.

In other communities, Manchester by the Sea is reviewing their flag policy after receiving a public petition calling for the limitation of only the American and POW flags to be flown on the town pole. After several years of allowing other flags, particularly the Pride Flag, to be flown in honor of other commemorations, the Select Board is considering the possibility of a second flagpole on the town green to allow for these additional ceremonies. The town's Planning Board has also been reviewing proposed expansions to the Reed and Morss Floating Docks. The board received letters of support from several local businesses and fishermen to proceed with this project which the Harbormaster has secured significant funding for to cover the majority of the expenses.

The season has seen an unexpected shift in some notable appointments throughout our communities. Rockport's Select Board voted not to reappoint Laura Kozacheck, Chair of the Conservation Commission, and Ipswich's Helen Weatherall's application to be reappointed to the Planning Board was denied. Gloucester has also selected a new Harbormaster, Christopher Lucido, to fill that position after controversial issues surrounded the office last spring. In other shifts, Rockport residents and businesses could be facing significant increases in their water and sewer rates after consultants recommended an increase of up to 15% to cover operational and conservation costs.

Gloucester's City Council is yet again reviewing a Short-Term Rental Ordinance. Councilor Gross filed the proposal, which is now before the Ordinances and Administration Subcommittee, with few changes from its last attempt. The Mayor and CFO, Conor MacCorkle, recently offered a presentation to the Council providing a breakdown of how the City used ARPA funds. This analysis of expenditures can be reviewed on a special town website <https://arpa.gloucester-ma.gov/>. In more disturbing news, Gloucester has seen two recent acts of racial graffiti downtown. The first on Dale Avenue and the second on a private garage near Burnhams Field. The DPW moved quickly to remove the slurs, and the Mayor and City Officials have all publicly denounced these offensive acts.

Wishing you a wonderful rest of your summer.

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

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