April 2026 Community Relations Update

With spring on our doorstep, there's a surge of local activity around Greater Cape Ann for our business community and civic life. March was a particularly busy time for the Chamber as we hosted several events focused on advocating for and elevating the voice of local businesses. On March 19, we held our annual Economic Outlook Breakfast, From Data to Decisions, where panelists explored consumer trends and how those insights translate into real-world decision making for businesses navigating the year ahead. We also convened our bi-annual Cape Ann Caucus, bringing together local and state officials to share updates and discuss issues affecting our municipalities. In addition, we hosted Division Meetings in Rockport, Manchester-by-the-Sea, and Ipswich, inviting local businesses and town officials to share updates and concerns to foster collaboration at the community level.

We are also continuing our Small Business University series, designed to provide small businesses with essential tools and resources to navigate the complexities of ownership. Following the success of our recent *AI for Small Business* seminar, our next workshop, *Wearing All the Hats: Moving from Reactive to Strategic Small Business Leadership,* will take place on April 9. This foundational session will offer practical strategies to help business owners better manage daily demands while thinking more strategically about growth. Registration is free for members and open at capeannchamber.com.

Spring is also an important time for civic engagement across our region. While the City of Gloucester operates on a different cycle, the other four Cape Ann communities will soon hold their annual town meetings and local elections to fill important positions such as Select Board, Planning Board, School Committee, and other municipal roles that shape local governance. Key dates include Rockport Town Meeting on April 11, Manchester-by-the-Sea Town Meeting on April 27, Essex Town Meeting on May 4, and Ipswich Town Meeting on May 12, with town elections following shortly after in each community.

Across the region, several broader issues are also taking shape. Vacant storefronts remain a challenge for many downtowns, and we have been working with the City of Gloucester to assess the status of vacancies along Main Street through site visits and outreach. In collaboration with the city's arts and culture community, we are also exploring a potential initiative to activate vacant storefronts with public art installations that would help beautify these spaces while they await new tenants. We also participated in the recent Housing Compass Forum in Gloucester as part of the city's Housing Production Plan assessment, helping gather public input on housing needs and future development.

At the municipal level, several communities are navigating leadership transitions, with Gloucester searching for a new police chief, Rockport and Essex both seeking new leaders for their Public Works Departments, Ipswich narrowing their search for a new Town Manager, and Manchester-by-the-Sea currently seeking a new Assessor while also looking ahead for a new police chief and harbormaster.

Election season is also underway. On March 20, the Chamber hosted a Candidate Forum for the Massachusetts House 5th Essex District special election, providing an opportunity for residents and businesses to hear directly from the three candidates about their vision for the region. Local municipal elections are also approaching, including a notable contested Select Board race in Essex.

Fiscal and infrastructure challenges continue to shape discussions across the region as well. Essex will consider its first Proposition 2½ override to address both educational and municipal funding needs since 2005 at the upcoming town meeting. Dredging remains another shared concern for coastal communities. Essex is seeking additional federal support following last year's Essex River dredging challenges, Rockport is pursuing grant funding to dredge its harbor, and Ipswich is exploring dredging the river as a possible solution to some clam flat closures.

As always, the Chamber remains committed to serving as a connector between businesses, municipalities, and the broader community. By convening conversations, sharing information, and advocating for policies that support a strong local economy, we aim to ensure that the voices of our business community remain an integral part of the decisions shaping Cape Ann's future.

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

Sincerely,

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