April 2025 Community Relations Update

As spring arrives, so does a busy season for civic activity across Greater Cape Ann. From annual Town Meetings to key leadership transitions and economic development updates, there's a lot happening in our communities—and the Greater Cape Ann Chamber of Commerce strives to help keep you informed. Mark your calendars for upcoming Annual Town Meetings. These meetings will cover a range of important topics, with Fiscal Year 2026 budgets taking center stage. Other key issues will include funding for water and sewer upgrades to address aging infrastructure and school funding, including a proposed Proposition 2½ override in Essex. Local Planning Boards are presenting updates on bylaws related to Accessory Dwelling Units (ADUs) and Flood Districts, ensuring compliance with new federal and state regulations. Rockport will also address Short-term rental regulations, by proposing requirements for renters to obtain licenses beginning January 1, 2026. Full warrants can be found for each applicable community on their respective websites.

- Rockport – Friday, April 5
- Manchester-by-the-Sea – Monday, April 28
- Essex – Monday, May 5
- Ipswich – Monday, May 13

Manchester-by-the-Sea has made some progress in addressing a longstanding issue—the lack of public restrooms downtown. Thanks to a new agreement, the local Dunkin' Donuts will now allow public access to its restrooms, with the town compensating a portion of the business's water and sewer costs. In addition, Town Hall will display signage on its front door indicating restroom availability for visitors.

Essex is welcoming new developments downtown. The former Periwinkles space will soon reopen as The Shipyard Tavern, and the old Wine Exchange location will become an extension of Marshview Farm, with a general store offering local goods, provisions and beer and wine. These additions represent a welcomed renewal in Essex's small business community.

Gloucester voters will soon head to the polls on April 24 for a Special Election to decide whether to adopt the city's proposed Multi-Family Overlay District (MFOD) in accordance with the MBTA Communities Act. The Chamber is also launching a three-part informational series to help voters in Gloucester and Ipswich better understand this legislation, its implications, and the effects on our communities.

In staffing news, Gloucester has hired a new IT Director, filling a critical vacancy. However, the city will soon begin a new leadership search, as Chief Administrative Officer Jill Cahill has been named the next Town Manager of Danvers. We thank Jill for her service and wish her well in her new role. Other communities will soon be voting on their local representation at upcoming town elections in various roles including seats on Select Boards, Planning Boards and School Committees.

In Ipswich, discussions are underway with longtime community partner EBSCO, which recently announced plans to downsize and divest some of its downtown properties. The Chamber will continue

to monitor this development and work with the town in support of the small business community through this transition.

The Chamber has been on the ground in every community this season, holding Division Meetings and Listening Sessions with local officials and business owners. These sessions have sparked productive dialogue and reinforced the importance of collaboration. We'll wrap up this first round with a final session in Essex on Wednesday, April 9.

On March 6, the Chamber hosted its Annual Economic Outlook Breakfast, with a focus on Downtown Economic Vitality. Panelists shared insights on the role of strong municipal leadership in long-term planning and communicating the value of vibrant downtowns. State grant programs were highlighted that fund Business Improvement Districts, Wayfinding projects, Design planning, and a Vacant Storefront Program. The importance of housing within downtown areas was also discussed to support local businesses and further economic growth. If you were unable to attend and would like information on available resources that were discussed, please feel free to reach out.

As your regional Chamber, we remain committed to strengthening the ties between our communities, businesses, and local leaders. We encourage all residents and business owners to engage in these important conversations, attend your town meetings, and stay informed on the changes shaping our region.

Let's continue building a stronger, more connected Greater Cape Ann—together.

If you have any questions or want to get involved, please don't hesitate to reach out.

Sincerely,

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