October 2025 Community Relations Update

As autumn settles across Cape Ann, our communities are transitioning from the summer season and we are gearing up for our signature fall events, Rockport Harvest Fest and Essex Clam Fest. We're also continuing our ongoing initiatives to benefit our small business community. An important topic many businesses struggle with is health insurance. Join us on Tuesday October 21 for our next seminar geared to help small businesses make smart choices and navigate the complexities of the insurance industry. These events are free to members but registration is required. Our shop local campaign, Powered By Local, continues with a focus this month on women owned businesses in honor of National Women's Small Business Month. Follow the chamber's Facebook and Instagram pages for these highlights and support our local small businesses.

Local municipalities are preparing for their respective Fall Town Meetings and upcoming elections. Ipswich will hold its Town Meeting on October 28, followed by the Gloucester City Election on November 4, and Essex's Fall Town Meeting on November 17. Rockport recently held their town meeting where voters overwhelmingly approved an amendment to their zoning bylaws limiting the residential conversion of first-floor commercial spaces within the downtown district — a measure aimed at preserving the town's vibrant business core and retail sector.

In Gloucester, the Chamber hosted a Mayoral Candidate Forum on September 11 ahead of the city's primary election. Although the race has now been narrowed to the two candidates, incumbent Mayor Greg Verga and Paul Lundberg, residents and businesses can still view the live recording on the 1623 Studios YouTube page. Written responses to the Chamber's Government Affairs Council's candidate questionnaire remain available on our website. Looking ahead to the November 4 general election, the Chamber will also invite City Council candidates to share their views through a similar questionnaire. Meanwhile, within the school district, Assistant Superintendent Amy Pasquarello is being considered to succeed Superintendent Ben Lummis, who plans to retire at the end of the school year.

Ipswich continues to navigate several complex municipal issues. The Attorney General's Office notified the town of procedural defects in the posting of last year's Planning Board hearing notices related to Section 3A zoning compliance. Their office has paused review of the articles until October 15 to allow time for public comment with the authority to waive the defects if no complaints are filed. The Select Board recently voted to reject the Downtown Reconstruction Project, forfeiting approximately $14 million in state and federal infrastructure funding in a close vote. Board members expressed concern over the loss of parking spaces and bike lane safety proposed in the plan. The DPW Director has requested permission to reexamine alternative upgrades to the downtown infrastructure within the previously approved $175,000 planning budget. Additionally, the Select Board approved $30,000 to refine the Public Safety Building design, adjusting its appearance to better reflect community aesthetics.

Inflation and project delays have increased anticipated costs, which may prompt a supplemental borrowing request of up to $12 million at the 2026 Town Meeting.

In Manchester-by-the-Sea, the Planning Board and Select Board jointly decided to postpone the Fall Special Town Meeting to allow for further review and community engagement around proposed zoning changes intended to support downtown revitalization and expanded senior housing options.

In Essex, town leadership is seeking candidates to replace the outgoing Public Works Superintendent, while the Harbormaster Department faces scrutiny following the discovery of $67,000 in missing waterway funds. The Massachusetts Office of Campaign and Political Finance recently cited Manchester Essex Regional School District (MERSD) for the use of staff resources to support a Proposition 2½ override during the May 12 town election. On a more positive note, Congressman Seth Moulton's recent advocacy helped secure a federal amendment increasing the Army Corps of Engineers budget, which could allow long-awaited completion of the Essex River dredging project.

Finally, several Cape Ann communities are breathing a sigh of relief following the end of the 82-day Republic Services strike. Ipswich, Gloucester, and Manchester-by-the-Sea all faced significant challenges maintaining trash and recycling operations, with local DPW teams stepping in to assist. Many area businesses were forced to make independent arrangements to sustain essential waste services during the prolonged labor dispute.

As we move deeper into the fall season, the Chamber remains committed to monitoring these developments, supporting transparent local governance, and ensuring the voice of the business community is represented in decisions that shape the future of Greater Cape Ann.

Feel free to reach out with any questions or concerns.

Sincerely,

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