

Bristol County Chamber and SouthCoast Chamber announce integration

At separate meetings held on June 27, the Boards of Directors of the Bristol County Chamber and the SouthCoast Chamber agreed to integrate under a single corporate umbrella, effective January 1, 2020. With these votes, the two chambers have declared a goal of establishing a (yet unnamed) non-profit corporate entity with both existing chambers as affiliates.

The chambers have engaged in a six-month process through Board appointed representatives of each chamber and professional facilitation. The Integration Task Force was charged with making due diligence recommendations including the following: whether to integrate, the governance model, financial viability, and the leadership model. Their recommendations formed the basis of the due diligence documents and the final Board resolutions on which the two Boards voted.



The Boards of the two founding organizations provided the Integration Task Force with several non-negotiables to help

frame their recommendations that included: maintaining two corporate offices, building an inclusive governance model, and building efficiencies without loss of staff positions. Kim Perry, Chair of the SouthCoast Chamber Board, said, "This integration has always been about impacts, not efficiencies. While we knew that efficiencies would emerge, the staff and leadership of each organization are its most important assets. Each organization has a long and storied history supporting the communities each serves, and in building this new model, we needed staff and volunteer leadership to know that their continued service was necessary to the organization's success. All companies represented on the Board will continue that service."

With combined memberships of nearly 1,600 businesses, representing tens of thousands of employees in the South Coast region, the new chamber will become the second largest in the Commonwealth in number of member companies. Once brought together, the new chamber will serve the entire South Coast region – from Wareham to eastern Rhode Island. The new chamber will maintain existing offices and staff, but new efficiencies will emerge along with a series of superior value propositions for all sized businesses, especially the small and micro-businesses that make up the vast majority of every chamber's membership base.

Brian LeComte, Chair of the Bristol County Chamber Board, said "These two healthy organizations, once combined, will present new and exciting opportunities for our business members that only scale can provide. Whether it is a single, unified voice on Beacon Hill and in Washington or small business opportunities for growth through larger and more targeted programs for business growth, this new chamber will build on the successes of the past and reach for new heights in supporting our region's business base."

The new organization will operate with a Co-CEO model, retaining Mike O'Sullivan, the current CEO of the Bristol

County Chamber, and Rick Kidder, the current CEO of the SouthCoast Chamber, and with current technology no necessity to relocate staff. Mike O'Sullivan said, "Rick and I have worked out with the Task Force a delineation of responsibilities that will allow members and staff absolute clarity regarding whom to contact and how office operations will take place in order to maximize efficiency and productivity."



Rick Kidder added, "With this vote, there is much work Mike and I need to accomplish prior to the January 1, 2020 launch. We will be back at work with the Task Force establishing a name and corporate identity for the parent company, filing all appropriate paperwork at the state and federal level, refining bylaws and building a final budget and scope of work for the new Board of Directors to approve in September. Our sole goal is the best possible member experience."

In a joint statement to both memberships, Kim Perry and Brian LeComte stated, "A new day has begun, one where the South Coast region has a single business voice and an everyday commitment to the success of businesses of all sizes. We are grateful for the hard work of the Integration Task Force and the deep commitment of our staff leaders without whom this integration would not have been possible. Every member will

benefit from this coming together of two great chambers.”

The mission of the Bristol County Chamber of Commerce is to be the primary business and community information resource for its members and the public; to provide networking opportunities for its members; and serve as an advocate on behalf of its members at the local, state, and federal government levels. The Chamber has served nearly 700 members in all sectors of business since 1911.

The New Bedford Area Chamber of Commerce d/b/a SouthCoast Chamber is a private, non-profit business association based in the City of New Bedford, Massachusetts. Chartered in 1885, the Chamber serves nearly 1000 member businesses of all sizes from virtually all industries in the ten communities of New Bedford, Acushnet, Dartmouth, Fairhaven, Freetown, Mattapoisett, Marion, Rochester, Wareham, and Westport. The Chamber supports and promotes the local business community through leadership in public advocacy, education, networking, information, and community development.