



Northeast Kingdom Collaborative
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NORTHEAST KINGDOM COLLABORATIVE

USDA GREAT REGIONS REPORT NORTHEAST KINGDOM COLLABORATIVE JUNE 20, 2013

The members of the Northeast Kingdom (NEK) Collaborative are pleased to provide this Great Regions Report. Since the Great Region Meeting held on December 7, 2010 there has been continued progress in a number of the strategic initiatives, as described in the information that follows.

The Northeast Kingdom is fortunate to have dedicated and talented USDA staff servicing our region. David Robinson is always available for consultation on business related issues; Susan Poland rapidly turns around requests for information related to USDA programs and services; Karen Lynch is the go-to person in the State for Community Facility grants/loan information; Rhonda Shippe has worked diligently to assist NEK communities in finding the appropriate match of state and federal resources for municipal infrastructure projects; Cheryl Ducharme is a wealth of information about the Rural Energy Assistance Program; Michael Bard maintains regular communication with the NEK Collaborative and is a primary contributor to our regional discussions; Suzanne Smith staffs the St. Johnsbury Office and provides support for any drawdown/processing questions and Donna Montgomery immediately responds to requests for information and assistance. Our region is well-served by our dedicated USDA professionals.

NEK Collaborative Board of Directors – Michael Bard, USDA, provides staff assistance and guidance for the monthly meetings of the Board. Directors include representatives from Housing, Low Income Advocacy, Education (High School & College), Economic Development, Tourism, Human Services, and Regional Planning. Board members have been assigned to provide regular updates to the Collaborative for each of the areas targeted in the Strategic Action Plan. These areas include: Arts & Culture, Community Leadership, Economic Development, Education, Energy & Weatherization, Health & Wellness, Housing, Human Services, Telecommunications, Tourism, and Water & Wastewater Infrastructure.

NEK Development Projects – Bill Stenger, Jay Peak Resort, has announced a series of development projects in the NEK. The total investment (primarily through the EB5 program) is estimated at approximately \$600 million. Projects include: Newport – ANC Bio & Campus, Menck Window Manufacturing, Downtown Hotel/Conference Center/Marina, Renaissance Block Office Space/Housing Downtown, Coventry Airport Upgrades – Runway, Hanger Space, Flight School, Manufacturing; Jay Peak Resort – New Trails, Lifts, Hotel; Burke Mountain Ski Area – Indoor Tennis/Mountain Biking, Hotel and Ski Mountain Amenities. These investments will provide employment opportunities for the region. The development offers both opportunities and challenges.

NEK Tasting Center – Eleanor Leger, Eden Ice Cider, has led the initiative to create a NEK Tasting Center that will provide a modern location to feature locally produced meat, cheese, wines, vegetables, and maple syrup. Preliminary planning for the Center was supported through the USDA. The Center is now under construction in downtown Newport, with plans to open in July 2013.

Vermont Food Venture Center (VFVC) – Northeastern Vermont Development Authority (NVDA) assumed the monumental task of completing an EDA funded, and USDA supported, Vermont Food Venture Center in Hardwick, VT. Construction of the Center is complete. Food experts and a small business development consultant are on staff and available to assist emerging food entrepreneurs in the safe development of their products. Anchor tenants secure a regular income stream. The operation of the



VFVC is managed by the Center for an Agricultural Economy (CAE). Northern Community Investment Corporation (NCIC) supported the VFVC with USDA RBEG Technical Assistance for website development. New small businesses have received technical assistance funded through the USDA RBEG awarded to NCIC.

Local BizWiz – NCIC has launched Local BizWiz funded through a USDA RBOG. This is an on-line business resource, referral, informational and educational system. Direct links provided to on-line training, assessment tool for businesses to make determinations about areas of weakness, and a direct link to a “live” person centered at White Mountains Community College (WMMC) in NH and at Lyndon State College (LSC) in Vermont.

Catamount Arts & Film Center – A regional ticketing and marketing program for arts and cultural institutions has been developed, and is maintained, by Catamount Arts. This regional initiative has been supported in part through the USDA.

Northeast Kingdom Travel & Tourism Association (NEKTTA) – NEKTTA has utilized resources from the USDA, Northern Border Regional Commission, and other sources to focus on Brand Development for the NEK. A regional brand and logo will be rolled out this summer. The intent of this initiative is to utilize the new image across all sectors of the economy, not just the Tourism sector, in order to positively imprint the NEK brand.

Cultural Host Initiative – NEKTTA is coordinating efforts to stimulate an appreciation and better understanding of the French Canadian culture. Canadian businesses represents a unique opportunity for the NEK given our proximity to the Canadian Border. On-Line courses are being developed for use by residents and businesses in the NEK.

Leadership Lyndon Development – The Lyndon Chamber of Commerce has developed a multi-week Leadership training course targeting young professionals in the region. “Leadership Lyndon” has attracted young professionals with a desire to learn more about their individual communities, and how to have a greater community impact throughout their personal and professional careers.

Newport City Renaissance Corporation (NCRC) – NCRC has received ongoing USDA support to develop their “Genuine by Nature” Brand, and is currently focusing efforts on the “Fresh by Nature” Campaign. Fresh by Nature links area farms and producers to local restaurants. The program provides educational information about the products that are available locally, and the benefits of purchasing locally.

Green Mountain Farm to School and Green Mountain Farm Direct – Continues to increase their outreach to the regions schools and institutions. One of the most recent additions includes a Mobile Farmers Market.

The Center for Rural Entrepreneurship – At Lyndon State College includes the Incubator Without Walls (IWOW) program. IWOW has been a RBEG supported project. IWOW links LSC professors and students with small businesses for specific projects. These can include: accounting, website development, graphic design, marketing, product research and planning.

NEK Manufacturing Training Program - A partnership of LSC, NCIC, NVDA, VT Department of Labor, Lyndon Institute and St. Johnsbury Academy. WMCC assisted in the developed of beginning and advanced CNC training. A total of 43 individuals have graduated from the program. Eight local



manufacturers participate. There is room to continue to grow and improve this important regional training program.

EDA USDA/RCDI Job Accelerator – A partnership of NCIC, WMCC, Northern Forest Center (NFC), and the Vermont Sustainable Jobs Fund. This three year program will focus on job development in the Farm and Forestry sector throughout Northern NH, VT, and Western Maine. Funds are included through the USDA RCDI to support business Technical Assistance within these industries. Specific targets include – reduction in energy costs, increased production, value-added production, improved distribution, and processing.

Northern Forest Center – Has initiated an effort to identify a Model Neighborhood in the NEK to introduce highly efficient wood pellet-fired boilers to residential and multi-family units. NFC has been successful with a similar program in Berlin, NH and plans to use those experiences to encourage utilization of these energy conserving, efficient boilers into a region in the NEK. Installation of the initial units may be partially subsidized in order to generate sufficient interest to encourage use purchase residential use. Data will be captured relative to boiler efficiency and cost recovery.

Northern Forest Canoe Trail – Has worked to improve the Canoe Trail in the NEK. A new portage trail has been completed between Island Pond and the Nulhegan River.

Enhanced Technology – Fiber Installation – NCIC has worked cooperatively with the Vermont Telecommunications Authority (VTA) to develop a strategy for constructing a redundant fiber optic system through the NEK. Funding has been provided through the VTA, EDA, NBRC and others to develop a system that will connect Northern New Hampshire, Vermont, and Canada. Final design plans are underway with construction to be completed within the next year. This will generate the “backbone” there will still be a need to attract providers to install last mile access.

Foreign Trade Zone (FTZ) – NVDA led the effort to have the NEK designated as a FTZ. This important achievement will have significant value as an incentive to new business, and may allow existing businesses to reduce costs.

NEEDS OF THE NORTHEAST KINGDOM:

Increased development will require that the region have the ability to attract skilled workers for the jobs that will be offered.

Workforce Training - The NEK has some of the highest % of residents over the age of 65 in the State of VT (which is one of the highest in the nation). 19% of Essex County residents are over 65. There is a need for ongoing creative workforce development and training across all economic sectors.

Job Creation – The NEK Development will provide a significant number of jobs for some regions of the NEK. Each county is very different. Essex County still has not recovered from the loss of over 500 jobs with the scale-back of production at the Ethan Allen plant in Beecher Falls, and the closure of the Ethan Allen plant in Island Pond. There is a need to follow-up with the next steps of USDA studies that have been completed for this region of the state – and to attract new manufacturing jobs to Essex County. The Natural Gas transmission line, located in Beecher Falls, VT, may be one of the assets that could help attract manufacturers to the region.



REAP ZONE Continuation – The REAP Zone designation has brought significant, and much needed resources to the NEK. The extension of this program will allow continued improvement, in diverse economic areas, throughout the NEK.

Housing – Quality, Affordable, Safe Housing will continue to be a need for the NEK, particularly as the new development projects come on line, and there is a need for additional employee housing.

Regional Marketing – Marketing of our region, for tourism, residents, employees, new businesses and entrepreneurs is essential. There are always limited funds available to market the region – and a well-developed, and well-financed marketing strategy is required.

Business Attraction & Development – Canadian businesses looking to do business in the US continue to look across the border for expansion. The NEK is in a unique position to take advantage of this interest. The region will need to be able to maintain a business development and attraction program that can provide potential investors with the information that they need to make relocation decisions.

Innovative, Talented Entrepreneurs and Creative Thinkers – We need to continue to attract creative people to the NEK. Many people seek out this region for a variety of reasons – we need to keep them coming, and to make sure they have all of the technology assets available that they require.

Technology – Although improvements have been made. There is no access to cell phone coverage, and there is no access to high speed internet in some areas of the NEK. In order to be competitive with the rest of the world – we need to have the same access to technology that the more populated areas of the State enjoy.

Coordination of Resources (Federal, State, and Local) – There have been significant strides made to improve coordination at all levels. There is still much that can be done. Increased collaboration will enable us to continue to do more with less, by taking advantages of organizational strengths.

Small Business Technical Assistance – In order to continue to grow this vital component of our regional economy - there is a need to continue to financial support that has been available to provide small businesses with the skill s that they need. The most frequent small business needs include: accounting, financial management, business planning, website development/maintenance , and marketing.

Emerging Local Food Hubs – We are seeing local food hubs sprout up around the Kingdom. As these hubs become more formalized, there is a need for financial and technical assistance to maximize potential for increasing the benefits of these local initiatives.

Infrastructure – In addition to technology infrastructure, there is an ongoing need for investment in the traditional state and municipal infrastructure – highways, bridges, water lines, sewer lines, water treatment plants, wastewater treatment plants, combined sewer overflow systems (CSO), and municipal buildings (fire, police, town offices, libraries, performance spaces).

Prepared by: Mike Welch - Northern Community Investment Corporation
51 Depot Square, Suite #2
St. Johnsbury, VT 05819
Tel: 802-748-5101, ext. 2025
e-mail: mwelch@ncic.org