

Summer Update from the Greater East Grand Region Economic Council

Since April 2019, a citizen-led planning group has been working on how to best approach economic development in the Greater East Grand Region. Just as the pandemic got underway in early 2020, the planning group prepared a preliminary report to use as a backdrop for more in-depth conversations with residents across the region. This report is available at www.eastgrandregion.org Since then, several priorities have moved forward that are critical to the region's future.

- 1. The GEGR Broadband Project** – building better high-speed internet across the region is essential to achieve any of the other goals in the plan. Since June 2020, with \$30,000 in grant funds, the Broadband Task Force began building awareness across the region, soliciting participation by the towns, and learning how to best approach this very big project. This July, we received a second round of state funding, and contributions from Danforth, Weston and Reed Plantation, to complete the next phase of feasibility planning. Mission Broadband, from Bangor, is the broadband consulting firm that is leading the RFP process that will provide the task force with specific infrastructure plans for the region and towns. The goal is to have the requests out to the providers by the end of August, hear back from them in early October, and then meet as a region to decide the best model to use to expand broadband services. We have scheduled a regional community and leadership meeting to begin talking about all of this on **WEDNESDAY, AUGUST 18th at 6:30 at the Danforth Town Hall. Please join us!**
- 2. The Young Adult & Youth Entrepreneurship Project** – Supporting the region's youth and young adults' career aspirations is a cornerstone of the economic development plan. An expanded career prep program at East Grand School in 2021-2022 is one way students will be supported to learn workforce readiness skills and about the opportunities with local employers. Aly Cropley from Brookton is leading this project in collaboration with Peggy White, East Grand teachers, and Rural Aspirations. Funding is from Maine Community Foundation's Innovation Fund, Baskahegan Company, and the Snow Family.
- 3. The Confluence Project** – Continuing to enhance recreational infrastructure is another priority in the economic development plan to support regional tourism. The Confluence Project is located a short distance upstream from the intersection of the Baskahegan River with the Mattawamkeag. The Project involves an outdoor interpretative display of the history of the Baskahegan River Valley as recorded by Roger Milliken Jr. in his introduction of "Forest for the Trees". https://issuu.com/millikenoffice/docs/baskahegan_forest_for_thetrees The Project will also preserve a strategically important canoe/kayak hand carry launch site on the Mattawamkeag River, and a foot trail for bank fishing at the actual confluence. A scenic overlook of Beans Falls is proposed in the future at the north end of the Baskahegan Company owned property. This is a volunteer-led project.

Finally, **the Greater East Grand Economic Council** is now an official, incorporated non-profit organization with its first board of directors. The board members are: Wayne Smith, Ardis Brown, Dwayne Young, Felicia Cowger and Kelsey Daoust. A **GEGR Advisory Group** to the board is planned and will be launched early this fall. The board will be expanded to nine people by the end of the year. To learn more please contact **Wayne Smith, Board President, at 207-448-3000.**