



## GREATER EAST GRAND ECONOMIC COUNCIL

Engage. Collaborate. Invest.



Photo by Daniel Daggett

Greetings to all our neighbors in the Greater East Grand Region — We are pleased to bring you this update from the Greater East Grand Economic Council (GEGEC) as 2024 gets underway in our communities. But

first, some background about the purpose of the organization and what its aspirations are for the region's future.

GEGEC was founded as a local non-profit in 2021 after a two year economic planning project supported by local citizens. The geography and name of the region was citizen-designated and determined by history, natural resources, and the local economic, education, health care, and community activity surrounding Danforth.

The council's purpose is to help advance the economic well-being of the people living in the region by providing economic development assistance to twelve widely distributed communities, situated in an underserved and remote area of Eastern Maine. The communities are Amity, Orient, Weston, Bancroft, Haynesville, Glenwood Plantation, Reed Plantation, Drew Plantation, Brookton, Forest, Forest City and Danforth.

Most importantly, we believe that engaged residents inspired by a collaborative and coordinated economic development plan can turn the regional assets into opportunities. Projects led by committed organizations and individuals are demonstrating that this belief holds true.

Thank you for all you do to help the Greater East Grand Region become an economically stable, well-served, and welcoming group of communities that work together to attract and retain people of all ages to live, work, visit and play.

### **The Regional Broadband Network**

Construction will begin in early spring 2024. Consolidated Communications (Fidium) and the Maine Connectivity Authority (MCA) signed their agreement in December to release \$8.1 million in state funding to build the network. By this time next year, at the latest, residents and businesses across the region will have a high-speed fiber broadband service available.

**Winter Tourism** - It is too early to know but if last year was any indication winter tourism via snowmobile enthusiasts will continue to grow in the region. The volunteer snowmobile clubs are to be thanked for bringing new winter activity to local businesses. Everyone looks forward to it continuing.

**Downtown Danforth** continues to move its revitalization projects forward with new grants for an expanded library, the pavilion building, fish passage, and land use planning.

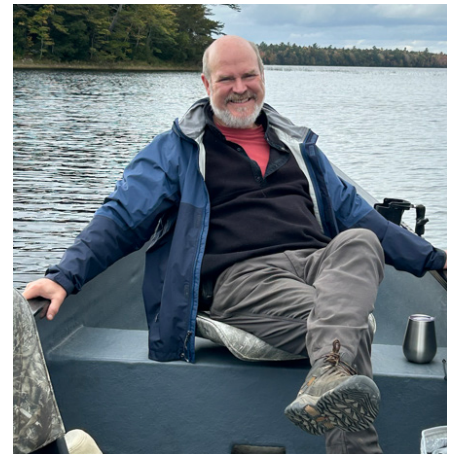
### **East Grand School's Campus Additions**

The Extended Learning Opportunities (ELO) program is in its second year and continues to offer apprenticeships, work experiences and career planning activities to middle and high school students – helping to unleash their aspirations and build the region's future workforce. Early in 2024, the new office for the ELO & Career Prep programs opens on campus. GEGEC is excited to have its new office in the building to better serve the region.

## WELCOME CHRISTOPHER!

Christopher Hinshaw, a Vanceboro resident, is the new permanent director for the Greater East Grand Economic Council. Since his first day on the job in September, Chris has been on the road meeting with people across the region to listen to their concerns, hopes and aspirations for their community. His concerns about remote rural sustainability, poverty's impact on children and families, and community resilience, led him to explore this job opportunity and say "yes" to the board's offer to lead the organization forward.

Chris and his wife, Alaine, started their Vanceboro homestead in 2016 after Alaine's father's property passed on to her. Chris and Alaine have lived throughout the US and Central America in both urban and rural communities.



Chris is an educator with thirty years teaching experience in American history, government, politics, global studies and educational administration including being head of school/principal of 2 schools. Earlier in his career he worked for two community development organizations, one in rural Kansas and the other in Commerce City, Colorado. His past fundraising and strategic planning experience will be very beneficial for the GEGEC and the region.

Hiring Chris as director is an important next phase for the region and the economic council. In order to achieve this milestone, the council secured three years of operations funding from two foundations based on the demonstrated accomplishments and commitment by volunteers, town leaders, local organizations, and the council over the past ten years. We are grateful to CF Adams Charitable Trust, and Elmina B. Sewall Foundation for their confidence in our collective ability to move the region's priorities forward under Chris' leadership.

Please reach out to Chris at [chinshaw@sunrisecounty.org](mailto:chinshaw@sunrisecounty.org)

## "DID YOU SAY HIGH-SPEED BROADBAND?"



In January 2023 we learned that Consolidated Communications (Fidium) \$8.1 million proposal to build a high speed fiber broadband network in the Greater East Grand region was approved by the Maine Connectivity Authority (MCA). The local volunteer task force led by the economic council recommended this solution to the communities and received unanimous support. The question on everyone's mind since then has been "so when will that broadband project actually begin?"

As this community letter goes to press, the final agreement between MCA, Consolidated and the GEGEC is complete. On the ground, pre-engineering work has already begun. The final engineering work and building design will be completed this winter. Actual infrastructure buildout will begin in March or April 2024 - once the snow clears. As a preview of what is to come next summer, please explore this website – [www.Fidiumfiber.com](http://www.Fidiumfiber.com) – and learn more about the

services coming to the region. In the meantime, you can send questions about the broadband project to Sarah Strickland at [sbs4940@gmail.com](mailto:sbs4940@gmail.com). She continues to serve as our project advisor to ensure continuity until the project is completed in 2024.

*At a recent local gathering, Christopher was challenged by a few participants to talk about what difference the economic council could actually make given the challenges in the region – poverty, drug trafficking and use, affordable housing, and limited job opportunities. It's an important question to ask. Part of the answer is to look at the track record for the region over the past ten years. We know from the past ten years of progress, that improvements do happen, but they take dedicated local people and organizations working together to secure non-taxpayer funds to start projects and lots of volunteer time to keep them moving forward. And you know what? This is proving to be the region's "superpower!"*

## WHAT DIFFERENCE CAN ANYONE REALLY MAKE IN THE REGION?

- An estimated \$1.5 million has been invested in the region since 2010.
- The hundreds of local volunteer hours to provide services, support local organizations and events, and care for residents.
- In 2023, \$8.1 million investment to complete the high-speed broadband buildout in 2024.
- In 2023, raised \$4,000 in individual and business donations for GEGEC's annual fund.
- Growth of the Danforth Farmer's Market over the past five years and the anticipated completion of the new community pavilion and outdoor space.
- Opening and expanding services of the Danforth Community Living Center.
- Downtown Danforth established "safe zones" with increased patrols by the county sheriff's team to combat drug trafficking in the area.
- Completion and ongoing maintenance of The Harlow Trail and The Confluence Trail for hiking and cross-country skiing.
- Snowmobile trail expansion and maintenance surrounding Danforth to increase winter recreational tourism.
- Successful ownership transfer of First Settlers Lodge, the Danforth Hardware Store, and Knight's Thrift Way.
- East Grand School's expanding Extended Learning Opportunities program to help students connect with local apprenticeships, internships and other career education opportunities.

### Regional Investors: 2011-2023

Baskahegan Company  
C.F. Adams Charitable Trust  
Citizens Organization for Rural Education  
Community Development Building Grant  
ConnectMaine Authority  
David and Lynette Snow  
Davis Conservation Fund  
Elmina B. Sewall Foundation  
East Grand Chamber of Commerce  
East Grand Health Center  
East Grand School  
Grassroots Foundation  
Lakeville Shores  
Machias Savings Bank  
Maine Broadband Coalition  
Maine Community Foundation  
Maine Connectivity Authority  
Maine Department of Education/  
Maine Office of Innovation  
Northern Border Regional Commission  
Northern Maine Development Corporation  
Reed Plantation  
Roger and Margo Milliken  
Rural Aspirations  
Strategic Wisdom Partners  
Senator Collins Congressional  
Designated Funds  
Stetson Mountain Fund/  
Forest Society of Maine  
Sunrise County Economic Council  
The Conservation Fund  
Town of Danforth  
Town of Weston  
Washington County TIF for UT communities  
Woodie Wheaton Land Trust

## LOOKING AHEAD TO 2024-2025

Back in 2019, a group of local volunteers launched an economic planning project to create a “roadmap” on how to reclaim the region’s heritage and increase opportunities so life would stabilize, and families could flourish. Over time our hope is that our work together will continue to find solutions to challenges that we all experience and our shared aspirations will continue to inspire residents to help turn the regional assets into opportunities for all.



### Community Well-Being & Pride

- Reduce drug trafficking
- Regional history center
- Danforth downtown revitalization
- Community project priorities in all towns
- Support East Grand School programs for student career development



### Regional Infrastructure

- Future housing and commercial development
- Regional Connectivity Hub for workforce development, remote working, telehealth, and training



### Support for Businesses & Tourism

- Snowmobile and ATV maintenance building
- Succession planning and transitions
- New opportunities for farming and food production
- New opportunities for forestry products
- New business startups



### Natural Resource Sustainability & Development

- Weston Waterfront Access Park
- Coldspring Hill Trail

#### 2024 GEGEC Board of Directors

Daniel Daggett, Board President - President, Daggett Enterprises USA, LLC (Brookton)

Ardis Brown, Vice-President - Danforth Town Manager (Danforth)

Dwayne Young, Secretary - Weston Town Clerk and Treasurer (Weston)

Felicia Cowger, Treasurer - Staff Accountant, Chester Kearney (Danforth)

Scott Hanington, Hanington Timberlands (Reed Plt)

Charlie McAlpin, Eastern Maine Electric Company (Calais)

Angela Cowger, East Grand School ELO Coordinator (Brookton)

Wayne Smith, Retired community member (Pennsylvania, formerly from Weston)

#### GEGEC Staff

Christopher Hinshaw, Director (Vanceboro)  
chinshaw@sunrisecounty.org | 207-952-4648

#### GEGEC Advisors

Peter Chase, President, Buildings Etcetera, Inc (Houlton)

Elbridge Cleaves, President, Citizens Organization for Rural Education, (Weston)

Steve Hanington, President, Hanington Brothers (Macwahoc Plt)

John Manganello, CEO and President, Baskahegan Company (Falmouth)

Jackie Morse, Vice-President, Machias Savings Bank (Danforth)

Peggy White, Superintendent, East Grand School (Danforth)

Charles Rudelitch, Executive Director, Sunrise County Economic Council (Machias)

#### GEGEC Consultants

Sarah Strickland, Strategic Wisdom Partners, Broadband Project (Robbinston) | sbs4940@gmail.com

**Sunrise County Economic Council**  
is the fiscal sponsor for the **Greater East Grand Economic Council**

