

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT SERVICES REPORT



Prepared for the Washington County Government
Submitted by Sunrise County Economic Council

March 20, 2020

SCEC's mission is to create jobs and prosperity in Washington County. County government provides essential support to SCEC through a general contract for economic development work throughout the county, a specialized contract for business development work in the unorganized territories, and through its past contribution to SCEC's endowment.

The following is a summary of our major projects:

NATURAL RESOURCES

Having completed its 2020-2025 strategic planning, the Downeast Fisheries Partnership is moving forward to implement several priority projects. This year, important progress has been made by our partners in supporting the region's clam committees, restoring alewives and other river herring, helping our school age children experience hands-on science education, and in working with NOAA and Maine's Department of Marine Resources to support policy changes that have allowed three new alewife fisheries within the county. We have also recently received funding that will support a 3-year Washington County mussel farming trial and economic assessment that will be launched this year. These and other programs designed to strengthen the economies and communities of Washington county will be carried out by our partnership's organizations, which include SCEC, Downeast Institute, Washington County Council of Governments, Maine Center for Coastal Fisheries, College of the Atlantic, Maine Coast Heritage Trust, Mahomet, and the Downeast Salmon Federation.

BUSINESS TRAINING

Business training ensures that owners and managers have more of the tools they need to operate and grow their businesses. Workforce development ensures individuals have the skills to compete for better-paying jobs in Washington County. SCEC has redoubled its efforts to provide training in the past year, directly and indirectly, through collaboration and partnerships. Including the OTI workshops, 108 people have participated in 232 hours of free training. Topics include: Instagram, Expanding Reach on Your Business Facebook, Business Websites 101, Building Your Brand, Basic Recordkeeping, and more.

WCLI

The reimagined Washington County Leadership Institute graduated its 22nd class in May 2019. Thanks to support from the Boston Foundation, program sponsors and hosts (listed online at www.washingtoncountyleadership.org), ten participants from across Washington County built leadership skills, developed professional networks and increased knowledge of Washington County.

FAMILY FUTURES DOWNEAST

Family Futures Downeast continue to find success in both education and workforce development. In addition to 14 FFD students making the University of Maine at Machias Dean's List and 1 earning President's List honors at Washington County Community College, FFD parents have completed many additional certifications and licenses to gain employment. These include: C.N.A. licenses, Dental Assisting, real estate license exam and national welding certification. Others will complete Pharmacy Tech, Medical Coding and culinary programs this Spring. FFD is now recruiting for a new cohort of students that is scheduled to begin in July. FFD children in early education programs at the St. Croix and Flaherty Center's evening programs, continue to show gains, especially in Language and Literacy and Social/Emotional Development, which will help them thrive in K-12 schools. The biggest barriers for families continue to be having adequate transportation supports. SCEC serves as the fiscal agent, providing leadership, managing the contract for services with the State of Maine Office of Family Independence, and hiring and overseeing the FFD Director, the 3 family coaches and an enrollment assistant. FFD's collaborative partners are SCEC, UMM, WCCC, Axiom Education & Training Center and the Community Caring Collaborative.

LOANS AND GRANTS

\$30,000 in Economic Development Planning Grants consisting of \$10,000 to study the feasibility of establishing a remote camp site for wilderness-focused camping for older youth, \$10,000 to conduct research and analysis on the status and impact of the dams throughout the St. Croix watershed, and \$10,000 to develop a written economic feasibility report with specific project recommendations for the Greater East Grand Economic Planning Region. These funds were made available on behalf of Washington County Government as part of the Washington County Tax Increment Financing District and helped to leverage an additional \$45,000 investment in Washington County.

SCEC originated \$120,800 in loans to eight small businesses using its internal loan funds. These funds helped to retain five full-time and six part-time jobs, as well as leverage an additional \$14,888 of investment in Washington County.

Through the Slow Money Maine donor network, SCEC was able to assist a Washington County farm with a \$10,000 grant to assist with delivery truck repairs, the purchase of grown chickens for market, and working capital, and \$25,000 for working capital.

PTAC

Since April 1, 2019, the PTAC program at SCEC currently has 83 active clients in Washington County. In this time the PTAC counselor has provided these businesses with 446 hours of one on one counseling. Over the last 12 months clients have reported \$2,892,870.33 in government contracts brought to Washington County.

ENTREPRENEURSHIP CENTER

Since December of 2019, planning for Machias Valley Center for Entrepreneurship has gained significant traction. SCEC continues to collaborate with Machias Savings Bank, local business owners and learning institutions as well as technical assistance providers and partners, with the focus being to create member-based coworking space and provide high-speed broadband, shared office equipment/video conferencing capability, trainings and programming that will be most beneficial to the development and/or expansion of small and emerging businesses in the rural community of Machias. Most recently, SCEC also been working with an architect and the Entrepreneurship Building Committee to firm up the layout of the center and building plans. SCEC expects construction to begin in late 2020 with an opening in 2021.

BUSINESS RESOURCE CENTER

SCEC's Business Resource Center continued to provide free and confidential business resources from our partners including CEI's Women's Business Center (WBC), the Maine Small Business Development Center, Maine Small Business Administration and SCORE (Service Corp of Retired Executives). Ruth Feldman, WBC counselor, started on March 4, 2019. SCEC has reconvened the Washington County Technical Assistance Providers Network with participation from Axiom Education & Training Center, Maine PTAC, UMM, SBDC, New Ventures Maine, Four Directions Development Corp., Island Institute, CareerCenter, Farm Service Agency, EMDC, DART & the Washington County Council of Governments, WCCC, EMDC, and the IRS.

SCHOLARSHIPS

With support from an anonymous donor and The Boston Foundation, SCEC approved 43 scholarships, totaling \$15,225, for working age adults during 2019 to help pay for training they need to make them employable or help them advance in their careers. SCEC is also referring scholarship applicants in need of additional assistance to the EMDC workforce development specialists. Title I WIOA funds can help to cover tuition costs above SCEC's \$500 scholarship limit as well as other costs associated with training for eligible participants. SCEC surveyed scholarship recipients from the last five years to determine the benefit of the assistance provided, and that report is available upon request.

ORGANIZATIONS AND INITIATIVES

SCEC is able to undertake its work in collaboration with the following current active partners: Axiom Education and Training Center, the Northeastern Workforce Development Board, Eastern Maine Development Corporation (EMDC), Coastal Enterprises Inc. (CEI), the Maine Woods Consortium, Downeast Community Partners, the Community Caring Collaborative, the Downeast Fisheries Partnership, Mano en Mano, Downeast Acadia Regional Tourism, Washington County Council of Governments, Calais and Machias CareerCenters, Downeast Public Health Council, University of Maine at Machias, Washington County Community College, Maine Community Foundation, Economic Development Council of Maine, Maine Community Development Association, Machias Savings Bank, the Downeast Nonprofits Network, Wabanaki Aspirations, Maine Development Foundation, and Washington County Government.

The above activities are a broad representation of economic development services provided by SCEC on the County's behalf over the past year. It is not representative of all on-going projects, programs, and initiatives previously reported on. This report does not include confidential and/or proprietary information related to work with specific businesses or development projects. SCEC is available to discuss specifics in Executive Session at the discretion of the County Commissioners.



**Respectfully
Submitted by:
Charles J. Rudelitch,
Esq. Executive
Director**

NATIONAL HERITAGE AREA

SCEC is leading a feasibility study to determine if the region could support designation as a National Heritage Area (NHA). This effort was initiated by small businesses in the wild blueberry industry and received positive responses during preliminary community discussions. National Heritage Area designation is meant to unite communities in maintaining and conserving their valued cultural and natural resources and promoting both local pride and economic development through infrastructure development and regional promotion to visitors.

The feasibility study will identify resources in this landscape, past and present, that helped shape the nation, and will determine if the region meets the standards for NHA designation, which must be approved by Congress. With assistance from foundations and private donors, SCEC recently hired Crystal Hitchings to coordinate this effort. Extensive community outreach and support is critical to this effort, and SCEC will offer diverse opportunities for community members to engage.

OWNERSHIP TRANSITION

In an effort to keep businesses from closing with the accompanying job and community economic benefit loss, SCEC has continued working with the Cooperative Development Institute, Eastern Maine Development Corporation, Axiom Education & Training Center, and Husson University's Center for Family Business in supporting Washington County businesses with succession planning. The Ownership Transition Initiative (OTI) is providing training and technical assistance to business owners that are considering selling their business to employees, passing it down to their children/grandchildren, or selling it on the open market. The initiative hosted "coffee hour" opportunities and has coordinated four additional workshops for businesses: Estate Planning, Planning for Tomorrow, and Intergenerational Communications, and Separating the Personal from the Business.

WCDA ASSISTANCE

SCEC provided technical assistance and staff support to the Washington County Development Authority to help redevelop the commercial side of the former Cutler Navy Base.