



Thursday, January 31, 2019

HAVE YOU HEARD?

Have you heard what's been happening in the Northeast Kingdom?

You know, the NEK. Vermont at its most rural and remote. We've got the harsh winters and Yankee resilience; spectacular natural scenery and local characters; tight communities and homesteading traditions. It's a unique place to live and unforgettable once you visit.

Did you know we're working together as a region more than ever before? A year ago the Northeast Kingdom Collaborative expanded its board and its mission. Since then, leaders of key organizations have come together to set a new agenda. We're ready to pull together to make progress for our future.

NEK Day at the Statehouse is a celebration of our special corner of Vermont. We want to highlight some successful ongoing projects and partnerships and showcase our new strategic plan for the region.

OUR PRIORITIES & OUR PLANS

We started by listening to the communities in our region. Where is progress most important? What are the most pressing needs? The answers led us to focus on two priority areas for building a stronger Northeast Kingdom:

NEK REGIONAL PRIORITY AREAS:

- 1. Advancing Economic Development at the Intersection of the Creative, Recreation and Food Sectors**
- 2. Developing the Next Generation of Local Leaders**

Experts and organizations came together throughout 2018 facilitated by the NEK Collaborative. Task Force members agreed on shared goals, then came up with specific projects and programs to get behind. Each will make a real impact and can start soon.

Plans for Action

Intersection of the Creative, Recreation, and Food Sectors Task Force recommendations:

1. **Coordinate and Expand Marketing of the Region** by establishing an NEK Regional Marketing Partnership Advisory Group.
2. **Sustain and Grow High-Quality Place-based Events** through an NEK Event Backbone, a regional event assistance provider for municipalities, chambers of commerce, and nonprofits.
3. **Enhance Economic Growth in Rural Community Hubs** by investing in infrastructure for “Outdoor Recreation Friendly Communities” connecting outdoor recreation assets to other parts of their economy, including the creative and food sector.
4. **Expand Access to Trisector Experiences for Kids** with a new NEK Kids Program Fund to centralize fundraising for local recreational, creative and agricultural/culinary youth programming.
5. **Increase Broadband Connectivity** in the region by building stakeholder consensus around an NEK Broadband Action Plan to improve the quality and speed of the internet available to businesses and residents.

Leadership Development Task Force recommendations:

1. **Empower Emerging Local Leaders** by launching an intensive NEK Leadership Institute and a more informal women’s leadership learning circle.
2. **Offer More Affordable & Accessible Local Professional Development Opportunities** through an ongoing low or no-cost NEK Professional Development Series of classes and an NEK Training Scholarship Fund.
3. **Connect Current and Emerging Leaders** via a new NEK Mentor Network.
4. **Integrate New Community Members** through the “Connect Over Coffee” Project, aimed at welcoming new or returning residents.
5. **Strengthen Organizational & Interpersonal Connections** by holding an Annual NEK Regional Summit for municipal, community, business and youth leaders.
6. **Increase Broadband Connectivity** in the region by building stakeholder consensus around an NEK Broadband Action Plan to improve the quality and speed of the internet available to businesses and residents.

The full reports can be downloaded at NekCollaborative.org/resources

About the Northeast Kingdom



DID YOU KNOW?

The NEK is the least populous and least densely-settled part of Vermont, a state with one of the most rural populations in the country.

The name Northeast

Kingdom (NEK) was coined by former Vermont governor George Aiken in a 1949 speech.

NEK STATS:

- 55 Towns and Gores
- 64,108 Residents
- 2,027 Square Miles



14% of residents live in poverty



1 in 4 children are food insecure



In Essex county, 4 out of 5 workers leave the county for work

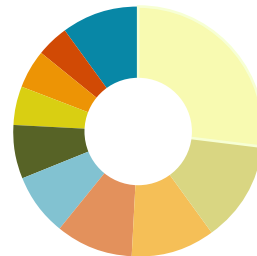


Over the last 10 years, the region has seen its population decline by 2.4%

Compared to the rest of state, the NEK has:

- A lower high school degree attainment
- The lowest labor force participation
- The lowest median household income
- Higher median age

NEK INDUSTRY SECTORS BY JOBS



THE DIGITAL DIVIDE

- Only 46% of addresses in the NEK have access to 25/3 Mbps service or better. This is compared to 73% of addresses statewide with access to 25/3.
- 1 out of 5 addresses in the NEK is not able to purchase even 4/1 Mbps
- 10 of the 20 most underserved towns in Vermont are in Essex County
- Only 6 out of 55 towns in the NEK have at least one building with access to 100/100 Mbps symmetrical service or better.

*Data from the Vermont State Data Center at UVM's Center for Rural Studies & Vermont

About the NEK Collaborative

OUR MISSION

The Northeast Kingdom Collaborative is a nonprofit dedicated to a vibrant Northeast Kingdom of Vermont.

Its mission is to promote economic and community development and improve quality of life for residents in the region.

For more than 20 years, the NEK Collaborative has worked to increase coordination among NEK businesses and nonprofits.

It also assists the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Rural Economic Advancement Program (REAP) in identifying priorities for investment in the region. We aim for systemic change by:

- **Developing strategy** for collective action
- **Building community capacity** to implement programs and projects
- **Incubating and guiding investment** in initiatives that address priorities for the region



NEK COLLABORATIVE BOARD

We represent federal, state, local, private, and nonprofit leaders from the region:

Kathy Austin, President, Community National Bank

Elaine Collins, President, Northern Vermont University

Ben Doyle, Ast. State Director VT/NH, USDA RD

Jon Freeman, President, Northern Community Investment Corp.

Jody Fried, Executive Director, Catamount Arts

Jeanne Gervais, President, Island Pond Chamber of Commerce

Joe Kasprzak, Ast. Town Manager, Town of St. Johnsbury

Jim Kisch, President and CEO, Passumpsic Bank

Julie Laforce, Co-Owner, Built by Newport

Suzanne Legare Belcher, Field Service Director, VT Agency of Human Services

Tom Lovett, Headmaster, St. Johnsbury Academy

Susan Ohlidal, Reverend, Interfaith Partners NEK

Emilye Pelow Corbett, Senior Philanthropic Advisor, VT Community Foundation

David Snedeker, Executive Director, Northeastern Vermont Development Assoc.

Michelle Tarryk, Executive Director, Northeast Kingdom Learning Service

Shawn Tester, CEO, Northern VT Regional Hospital

Tim Tierney, Director of Business Recruitment, VT Agency of Commerce

Steve Wright, President, Jay Peak Resort

Dana Young, Owner, Dana Young Construction

Success Stories

BLUFFSIDE RECREATION CORRIDOR

Newport, VT - Bridging Recreational Resources. An ambitious community-supported project to link disparate recreational paths and resources together to create one 7.5 mile dedicated multi-use waterfront recreation path leading from downtown Newport City to the Canadian border and high use recreation paths in Quebec.

The project is now in the final permitting and design phase, with construction expected to span 2019-2020. Additional recreation path and infrastructure upgrades are being planned by the community in order to take full advantage of the economic development potential of outdoor recreation as Newport “looks to the lake” for its future.

\$209,072 in state funding from the VT Housing and Conservation Board and VT Department of Forests, Parks and Recreation, leveraged over \$1 million in federal and private grants.



WONDERARTS

Greenboro, VT - Increasing Access to the Arts. WonderArts’ mission is to cultivate lifelong learning and exploration to enrich our community, schools, and economy through creativity, conversation, and collaboration. A Vermont Arts Council Head Start Integration grant will expand access to the arts by supporting teaching artist residencies at Hardwick and Albany NEKCA Head Start Sites in 2019. Residencies will include song-writing, movement, visual art, nature exploration, and puppetry.

\$4,000 in state funding from the Vermont Arts Council.

KINGDOM TRAILS

East Burke, Lyndonville, Kirby & East Haven, VT - Recreation Brings Economic Development. Kingdom Trails Association offers an extensive trail network for non-motorized, multi-use recreation activity. Funding support from the Vermont Housing and Conservation Board, Vermont Land Trust and private donations allowed them to acquire and conserve a 133 acre parcel in Lyndonville, VT.

The West Branch Property will be available in perpetuity for year-round, non-motorized, multi-purpose, as well as traditional, recreational purposes. This funding also supported the installation of riparian buffer protections along a branch of the Passumpsic River and resulted in the development of a Conservation and Stewardship Plan for the property.

\$150,000 state funding from the Vermont Housing and Conservation Board, leveraged \$150,000 in public fundraising.



NEW AVENUE APARTMENTS

St. Johnsbury, VT - Bringing new life to the downtown. New Avenue is the transformation of the historic Depot Square, a prominent historic building in downtown St. Johnsbury built in 1897.

The building renovation will result in 38 high quality apartments, and prime commercial space, bringing new life and vitality to the town.

Housing Vermont purchased Depot Square in July 2018 and construction will begin in early 2020.

\$970,000 in state funding from the Vermont Housing and Conservation Board.

WHEELER MOUNTAIN TRAIL

Westmore, VT - Preserving Access to Public Lands. The Wheeler Mountain Trail in Sutton, VT is a popular hiking trail.

To address the challenges of high use, erosion, and occasional vandalism, the Northwoods Stewardship Center Conservation Corps, relocated the trail on Willoughby State Forest land, developed a new trailhead, built a 1.25 mile trail segment to connect the trail to the scenic upper trails on Wheeler Mountain.

This project ensures public access to an important scenic and recreational area in our region and supports the growing recreation-based economy.

\$25,340 state funding from the Vermont Department of Forest, Parks and Recreation



VILLAGE TO VILLAGE PROJECT

Danville, VT - Making Better Connections. A Better Connections grant awarded to the Town of Danville supports a 14-month planning process to connect the Town's activity centers.

The project scope includes a Master Plan for the Danville segment of the Lamoille Valley Rail Trail with recommended infrastructure improvements for safe connections into the Village, wayfinding, an economic development analysis of Danville and architectural sketches of the Town's historic Railroad Station.

This project aims to maximize outdoor recreation opportunities, enhance sense of place and increase economic vitality.

\$63,000 state funding from the VT Agency of Transportation and the VT Agency of Commerce and Community Development, leveraged \$8,500 in additional funding.

YELLOW BARN PROJECT

Hardwick, VT - Growing Businesses in the NEK. The Yellow Barn Business Accelerator Project will provide space for businesses to locate and grow while staying in the Northeast Kingdom. Thirty new jobs are expected to be created within 5 years of project completion.

The Town of Hardwick is acquiring the property, which will be operated in partnership with the Center for an Agricultural Economy and the Northeast Kingdom Development Corporation.

The project is nearing completion of the environmental permitting and design phase, and construction is planned to start October 2019.

\$16,000 state funding from the VT Agency of Commerce and Community Development has leveraged commitments in federal, local, and private lending sources totaling more than \$300,000.



CATAMOUNT ARTS

St. Johnsbury - Building Community through Music. The Levitt AMP St. Johnsbury Music Series at Dog Mountain presented by Catamount Arts was brought to life with the help of seed money received from the Vermont Arts Council.

Dog Mountain, set on 150 acres on a private mountaintop, is the perfect venue for the free summer music series providing patrons with access to numerous hiking trails and an opportunity to gather together outdoors.

The popular family and dog-friendly event is a great example of leveraging grant funding to raise additional working capital.

\$7,350 state funding from the Vermont Arts Council leveraged \$137,000 in private funding.

SWEET ROWEN FARMSTEAD

West Glover, VT - Increasing Food Production. Sweet Rowen Farmstead, a family owned and operated dairy farm in the Northeast Kingdom, received an infrastructure development grant through the VT Agency of Agriculture's Working Land Enterprise Initiative to build an on-farm creamery and community space. In the summer of 2018 they broke ground on the 2000 sq. ft. addition which will be used to expand production of bottled milk and artisan cheese and provide community members with an incubator space for small endeavors. The addition now nearing completion is currently being filled with new equipment to help further optimize cheese production. This project has created additional employment opportunities and has helped this small farm diversify their operation which will lead to long-term sustainability.

\$50,000 state funding from the VT Agency of Agriculture, Food and Markets.



GRAND TRUNK RAILROAD STATION

Brighton, VT - Preserving our Historic Landmarks. The Town of Brighton acquired the deteriorating Grand Trunk Railroad Station in 1991, donated to the town by the railroad. Recognized as a key landmark building in the center of Island Pond Village, over \$500,000 (half of that from a state appropriation) was spent renovating the historic structure to its former glory. Today it is used as an office building, with space rented to a bank, an attorney, an investment counselor, and the local police station. In 2018, with structural repairs needed, a Historic Preservation grant was awarded to the Town of Brighton to help offset the costs of replacing the roof. The building was also brought up to proper energy efficiency standards, received fresh paint and carpentry work was completed around the dormers.

\$20,000 in state funding from the Agency of Commerce and Community Development

WORKFORCE RECRUITMENT PROJECT

Northeast Kingdom, VT - Moving to the Northeast Kingdom. The Northern Community Investment Corporation has embarked on a Workforce Recruitment Initiative for the Northeast Kingdom. In an effort to create a robust workforce, NCIC has launched several activities aimed to attract new workers to the region. The ThinkVT brand and website developed by the Vermont Department of Economic Development aspires to “tell the whole story” of the NEK, while stay to stay weekends are being made available for qualified participants to come experience the NEK and connect with jobs and communities. Relocation specialists will serve businesses to help find “future Vermonters” and onsite activation “hot spots” such as ski areas, mountain bike destinations and festivals are providing opportunities to convert visitors to residents through messaging and marketing campaigns.

\$55,000 in state funding leveraged \$219,213 in federal funding



FUTURE OF HOLLAND SCHOOL

Holland, VT - Repurposing Existing Infrastructure.

After the vote to close the Holland Elementary School, the Planning Commission and the Northeastern Vermont Development Association began working together to identify funding opportunities to help the town explore potential ways of repurposing the school building. A Municipal Planning Grant awarded to the Town by the Agency of Commerce and Community Development will help them take this next step forward. Grant funds will be used to conduct a feasibility study that will generate scenarios and evaluate options for future public, private and combined uses. The Planning Commission is currently seeking bids for this project.

\$15,950 in state funding from the Agency of Commerce and Community Development