



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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(GREENVILLE, NC) – The NCEast Alliance announced today it has been approved for a \$151,045 grant from the US Department of Agriculture to support its economic development activities in rural, eastern North Carolina. The Enterprise grant will support technical assistance to serve local economic development organizations in small towns and rural areas as well as entrepreneurial retirees and companies interested in locating or expanding in these rural communities.

“We are glad to partner with the Alliance,” stated Kenny Flowers, Assistant Secretary for Rural Economic Development at the North Carolina Department of Commerce. “This effort will complement our Main Street and Rural Planning program that offers a variety of services to small towns,” he continued.

The Alliance will coordinate activities with NC Commerce staff, especially those involved in conducting community assessments and working with community leaders to develop strategic economic development plans. For example, data on retail sales leakage will be used to identify what business opportunities exist for early retirees that want to open a business in eastern North Carolina.

One of the primary goals of NCEast Alliance is to recruit and assist company executives that have expressed an interest or have made the decision to locate or expand in small eastern North Carolina towns and cities. “Our focus on economic clusters relevant to coastal North Carolina is yielding positive results and targeting entrepreneurial people and small, high-growth companies appeals to all of our communities,” stated Mark Hamblin, Board Chair of the NCEast Alliance. In 2017, the Alliance facilitated the location of three entrepreneurial companies in the region, two from South Africa (automotive components and food processing) and one from Australia (auto components). Current active prospects also include several involved in advanced manufacturing as well as life science, aerospace/defense and marine trades sector companies.

One example is MegaPulse from the Brisbane area of Australia. “NCEast has, through its extensive network of connections both at government and industry level, been able to make crucial introductions for our company which has allowed us to expose our technology and gain a solid foothold in the US market,” said MegaPulse USA LLC CEO Ross Naddei. MegaPulse is a small technology-based company that recently established a new corporate entity in the US to market and distribute a patented device that extends the life of lead-acid battery. The product reduces user costs and provides a marketing benefit for the environmentally conscious company. NCEast Alliance staff assisted the company in setting up agreements with area companies to market, warehouse and distribute its products in the US and North American markets.

The USDA grant will allow the Alliance to more actively promote the reuse of vacant industrial facilities and historic commercial properties for redevelopment while supporting entrepreneurs in Inner Banks (IBX), Outer Banks (OBX) and Eastern North Carolina (ENC) communities. The Alliance has been successful in identifying and attracting entrepreneurs and companies to the region. The great majority of these are small to medium-sized, privately held companies and roughly 40% are foreign-based individuals or firms. Approximately 75% seek existing, vacant industrial buildings and roughly 90% are manufacturers.

In addition to its corporate recruitment efforts, the USDA grant will allow the Alliance to establish an on-line, searchable, building database of available commercial properties less than 10,000 square feet in small cities and towns that are available for sale or lease. The database, along with a listing of services available to entrepreneurs, will be coupled with a targeting of young military, civilian and corporate retirees that may be interested in starting a business in the region, many of whom already work in or repeatedly visit the region for vacations. This combination of activities fills a void in the offerings of the State's Economic Development Partnership of NC.

“We now have a full pipeline of active projects considering eastern North Carolina. This grant will allow us to continue as well as expand our efforts to assist our communities in preparing for investors and to serve companies and entrepreneurs that have expressed an interest in locating in the region,” stated Alliance CEO John D. Chaffee. “We greatly appreciate the assistance of USDA staff and others in preparing a winning grant proposal,” continued Chaffee. The Alliance had submitted a similar proposal last year that was not funded.

The NCEast Alliance is a non-traditional, regional economic development agency serving 28 counties in eastern North Carolina and is supported through contributions of public and private entities as well as individuals. Its service area is generally defined as the area that stretches northeast of the I-40 corridor from Onslow County (Jacksonville) northwestward to Wayne County (Goldsboro), then up the I-795 and I-95 corridors to the Virginia state line. Specific counties for which the Alliance provides economic development services include: Beaufort, Bertie, Camden, Carteret, Chowan, Currituck, Dare, Edgecombe, Gates, Greene, Halifax, Hertford, Hyde, Jones, Martin, Onslow, Pasquotank, Perquimans, Pitt, Northampton, Tyrrell, Washington, Wayne, and Wilson. All are eligible for USDA grants and loans. Visit www.nceast.org for more information about the Alliance and eastern North Carolina.