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## Community and Economic Development in North Carolina and Beyond Blog: A Necessary Investment

By CED Program Interns & Students

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North Carolina's Northeast Commission is comprised of 16 counties, of which 12 are Tier 1. Generally, this means many of these counties are limited in the types of resources and opportunities afforded to them. Several of the counties in this region have limited or no signs of community or economic development in place. With limited staffing and expertise to find the essential funding sources for basic infrastructure needs, state and federal funding goes untouched and these counties remain in these conditions.

With many obstacles to stimulating community and economic development, Gates County is like many other small rural counties in the northeastern part of the state. Most of the citizens in Gates County work in Virginia and spend a lot of their time outside of residential life in the Commonwealth. This trend presents a problem for generating any future growth in the county. Without the investment of residents in the county, there have been no signs of community or economic development.

However, County Manager Toby Chappell has been able, with help from the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), to secure funding for the building of a new main county library in hopes of reversing the misfortune that has plagued the town for some time now. The idea of investing public funds in a new library has been met with apprehension. Some believe that with many other "eye sores" in town, public funds should be focused more on reinvestment in existing public and private buildings in the area. However, the investment in a new library may be just what the doctor ordered in terms of community development for Gates County. Small towns value community and their people. A new library in Gates County would be an added resource in the community for all people and ages. The new library would also enhance the quality of life for the residents in the community.

Through the CERC program, Gates County has been able to utilize the program's resources to begin the initial stages of development for the new library. Tasks to be performed include writing a request for qualified architects and engineers to do work on the project, interviewing key members of the library staff and local officials in the community, and creating a feasibility study, which will look at the potential impacts of the new library as well as an exit strategy for the existing facility.

Together, it is our hope that the construction of a new library will be just the spark Gates County and surrounding communities need to improve their quality of life and jump start future community development. This project would serve as a model for other counties searching for ways to bring investment to their community.