

# *Economic Development Commission*

*The County Commissioners of Kent County*

*400 High Street*

*Chestertown, MD 21620*

**April 4, 2018**

Commission Members Present: Rob Thompson, Jim Luff, Trae Hoffner, Aaron Bramble, Cindy Genter, Tracey Williams, and Bob Jacob

Commission Members Absent: Kate Gray and Shreyas Suresh.

Also in Attendance: Mike Thielke, Executive Director, Eastern Shore Entrepreneurship Center; Marian Fry, Owner, Fair Hill Farms; and Commissioner William Short.

At 3:00 p.m. Mr. Luff called the meeting to order. The Commission agreed to approve the minutes from March 7, 2018 meeting via email once completed and reviewed.

Ms. Williams introduced Mr. Thielke. Mr. Thielke informed the Commission that the Eastern Shore Entrepreneurship Center (ESEC) is a private sector, non-profit organization. ESEC is based in Easton and serves all nine counties on the Eastern Shore. ESEC focuses on high growth, innovative, and scalable entrepreneurs and businesses.

ESEC began a conversation about a F3 (Food, Farm, Fish) Tech initiative in late 2015. Kent County was one of the first counties to join the effort. F3 Tech's mission is to create jobs by encouraging and supporting technological advancements in Agritech and Aquatech. Growth in global agricultural output over the last 30 years and estimates for the necessary increases in world food production over the next 30 years displays a growing need for technological advancements to maximize efficiency in production. The US dominates the rest of the world in the investments in agriculture. The ESEC is increasing efforts to support entrepreneurs in this sector by enrolling 10 qualifying entrepreneurs in a six-week pre-accelerator program aimed at enhancing their ideas, business models, brands, fundraising efforts, etc. The first pre-accelerator program, which began April 3, 2018, is currently aiding 11 potential businesses (1 from Kent county). The next step is the accelerator program, beginning in September 2018 and ending in December 2018.

Mr. Thielke explained there are six hotDesks locations and all have been successful. Mr. Thielke announced the first tenant will be occupying an office at the Chestertown location within a month. Mr. Thielke thanked the Commission for its support and looks forward to the continued partnership.

Ms. Williams introduced Ms. Fry. Ms. Fry shared the potential threat that a Chesapeake Bay crossing to Kent County poses to Fair Hill Farm and the entire agricultural industry in Kent County. Ms. Fry shared Fair Hill farms land in Kent, Talbot, and Anne Arundel counties. In Anne Arundel County they are surrounded by suburbia and expressed the challenges of farming in that environment. Explaining it is difficult to farm without farm infrastructure. Ms. Fry shared we must be intentional about how our land produces food. The Maryland Agriculture and Resource-Based Industry Development Corporation FY2017 Annual Report was distributed.

Ms. Fry highlighted key data that demonstrate the importance of the agriculture industry in Maryland, both historically and currently.

There being no further business, a motion was made by Ms. Genther, seconded by Mr. Bramble and carried unanimously to adjourn the meeting at 3:55 p.m. The Commission agreed to meet again on Wednesday, May 2, 2018, at 3:00 p.m. in the Commissioners Hearing Room. The Commission traveled to Fair Hill Farms for a tour.

At Fair Hill Farms, Ms. Fry introduced her son Matt, daughter-in-law Megan, and husband Ed. Matt, a third-generation farmer, guided the tour and shared the many technological advancements used at the organic dairy farm. Fair Hill Farms milks about 600 cows twice a day and tills about 1,700 acres. A large capital investment was recently made to the milking parlor; a 50-stall rotary parlor. Mr. Fry shared a list of many local businesses that provided and continue to provide services and products for the farming operations. Fair Hill Farm has 13 full-time employees and 6 part-time employees. Fair Hill Farms produces high-quality organic milk, by integrating three management systems; cow management, handling animal waste, and organic crop land.

Respectfully Submitted,

Jamie L. Williams  
Coordinator