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Bowie business center reports full occupancy *by Derek Johnson Staff writer*

Encouraged by news that a Bowie-based business incubator has created 62 new jobs and generated \$2.9 million in corporate revenue, the City Council was asked Monday night to consider additional funding to further promote local business development for women entrepreneurs.

According to Lisa Smith, executive director of the center, there are now nine full-time "tenant" companies and six "affiliate" companies taking up residence at the incubator, a significant jump from the four companies that participated in the program when it was first established in 2012. "We're pleased to see that we're building a community in the business incubation program," said Smith. "We really believe that's yeast for the bread that we're making here."

The center is a partnership between the city and Bowie State University, and Bowie has provided \$125,000 in funding over fiscal 2015 and 2016 to foster economic growth and jump-start local entrepreneurs within the city. The center provides office space for small businesses as well as trainings and workshops around topics like federal contracting and credit and banking.

"I think you're living up to or far exceeding our expectations when we were discussing [this idea] many years ago," said At-Large Councilman Dennis Brady.

Smith said the center has also partnered with and sponsored the Maryland Women's Business Center, which has offices in Prince George's County, Montgomery County and Frederick County. Managing director Kiesha Haughton Smoots asked the council for additional funding to expand program offerings for women business owners. In a phone interview, Smoots said that approximately half of the center's client base resides within Prince George's County and Bowie and that they currently have one part-time employee covering the area. The center is looking for anywhere between \$10,000 and \$20,000 in funding from Bowie to hire the staffer full-time.

"The real crux of what we need at this point is financial support just so that we can continue to operate and provide services to our clients," Smoots said. "If we bring that person on full time we could do much more working with clients: one on one [appointments], counseling, group trainings and so on."

City Councilwoman Diane Polangin (Dist. 2) said she was supportive of the request, citing the difficult economic climate for women business owners.

"Women-owned businesses are the fastest growing businesses in Maryland, but they also don't stay around long. It's hard for them to get capital and hard to get a lot of other things," Polangin said.

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