

# Port Authority ready for action

## Official says economic development projects will shape agency's mission

By Chris Dumond  
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**HAMILTON** — With a bylaws committee formed and tentative funding support, members of the newly formed Butler County Port Authority aren't wasting time getting to work. The Authority board, appointed by the county commissioners in August as a new economic development body, began to organize Tuesday evening. Although much of the meeting was

spent learning about Authority powers, director John Romner said the board should be ready to act soon.

"I would encourage others in jurisdictions around the county to look in your portfolio at pending projects," Romner said.

After bylaws are settled, potential public and private economic development projects will be important in shaping the Authority's mission, he said. By the November meeting, he expects the board

will be comfortable with bylaws and should be ready to move.

"Anyone with a hot project should get it to John's office tomorrow morning," Port Authority member Joe Magdich said.

Magdich and fellow Authority member Richard Slagle were selected to head the bylaws committee. They also were given approval to solicit preliminary funding to pay for legal counsel to help them draft the board rules.

How the Authority will be funded in the long term has yet to be answered, but the cities of Hamilton and Middletown have

committed start-up funding.

"On behalf of city of Hamilton, I'd like to thank the board for accepting their positions," Hamilton Mayor Don Ryan said at the meeting. "We are strongly supportive of the Port Authority."

Hamilton Councilman Ed Shelton said the city should have no problem financing some of the start-up costs of the Authority.

Shelton said he was excited about the potential of the Authority and said the council already has been approached by finance companies looking to work with the new board.

Port Authorities, authorized by

the state General Assembly, have broad economic development powers. It may finance projects, issue general obligation and revenue bonds, put tax levies before voters, collect financing fees, invest in securities and charge rent for properties it owns.

Long-term financing for authorities can be self-generating through those charges, investments or bond issues, but some authorities, like the one in Cincinnati, have relied on funding from local government.

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Commissioners' attorney Gary Sheets said the Authority may also apply for grants.

Romner, as well as Sheets, who provided an overview of Authority powers, said the ability to acquire land through eminent domain has already become controversial.

Magdich said he believed eminent domain should only be used as a last resort.

Romner said eminent domain, like other powers given to the board, should be used carefully. If not, that authority could be taken away. In previous discussions about the future of the Authority, he has consistently mentioned

that the board is appointed by the county commissioners, who also have the power to dissolve the Authority.

Port Authorities in Dayton and Cincinnati have had their powers of eminent domain and the ability to place tax levies on ballots restricted.

The only restriction placed on the Butler County Authority above those in the state code is that it may not create a police force, Sheets said.

After reviewing other powers, such as the ability to contract with municipalities and to work across jurisdictions outside the county and even outside the state, the board agreed that its first priority rests in the creation of operating rules.

Magdich and Slagle are expected to have working material by the Authority's next meeting, scheduled for Oct. 19 at 8 a.m. Romner said he believed the

Authority would be ready at that meeting to elect officers and consider some strategic planning goals. The Authority is also expected to hear presentations from other port authorities in Ohio about their structure and projects.

Authority members include Magdich, recently retired from public finance underwriter Seasingood & Mayer; Slagle, a former Aranco executive and a partner in Middletown's Ultimate Concepts; Ron Watson, owner of Watson Gravel; Steve Posey, McDonald's franchise owner and developer; James F. Fitton, director of the Colonial Foundation; John Gillespie, marketing director for UC Physicians and Miller Brewing Co. Manager Denise Quinn.

Quinn did not attend Tuesday night's meeting.

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