

# County port authority considers broad vision

## Met Tuesday morning to plan agency's future

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**HAMILTON** — About a year since its birth, the Butler County Port Authority spent Tuesday morning taking its first steps toward planning what it wants to be when it gets older.

"We need to first figure out what we are and what we want to be before we come out to the community and say, 'This who we are. Does that fit what you want?'" said authority Secretary John Fonner, also director of the Butler County Transportation Improvement District.

For nearly four hours the port authority board members hammered out its mission, goals and the types of economic development projects it would take on.

However, the board members concluded it was best to develop

a broad rather than specific vision for the port authority's future to avoid limiting the powers it possesses under Ohio law or duplicating the duties of other governmental agencies like the TID.

"You don't want to paint yourself into a corner," board member Joe Magdich said.

Port authorities — more than 40 are authorized by Ohio law — have broad economic development powers. They may finance projects, issue general obligation and revenue bonds, put tax levies before voters, collect financing fees, make investments, acquire land by eminent domain, buy property and charge rent.

Port authority Chairman Dick Slagle said the mission should be supportive of the local communities and involve them early, especially to rid fears that the entity's powers could be overbearing — a concern West Chester Township Trustee Catherine Stoker has expressed.

"Even if it isn't, make them think it's their project," Slagle said.

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## Port authority considers future

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The board arrived at a draft mission to use its powers to "support the economic health of the county and the communities within it," as well as "validate and react to new opportunities."

How does that statement translate into action? Fonner said it could mean addressing unmet needs for the community — such as freight rail improvement or the development of a public transportation system.

"(Freight rail) is one that falls through the cracks everywhere else," Magdich said.

The authority has already sounded the train's whistle since it received a \$100,000 grant from the Ohio-Kentucky-Indiana Regional Council of Governments on Sept. 8 for a freight rail planning study.

With much of the existing railroad running through low-to-moderate income areas in the county, Fonner said the project could be eligible for federal incentives and meet the authority's goals to reduce poverty, increase wages and retain businesses.

Other gaps board members said the Port Authority could fill may be to support "brownfield" redevelopment where contamination presents challenges or to construct a convention center.

The board members also set a goal by 2009 for the port authority to have 90 percent of its budget generated from earned income that would sustain a director and small staff.

To reach that goal, the authority would likely need to measure its success by capital investment realized from its projects. Viable projects would likely need to be above \$3 million in investment, Magdich said.

The board currently has two potential projects on the table. Each involves more than \$30 million in investment.

A refined mission and goals will be presented for further discussion and a possible vote at the port authority's next meeting at 8:30 a.m. Oct. 18 on the fourth floor of the Government Services Center.

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