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Port claims impact of \$2.12B

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The Port of Greater Cincinnati Development Authority released a report Thursday that pegged its annual impact on the region's economy at \$2.12 billion.

That figure represents the ongoing impact of the port's work since it was created in 2001, according to the report by the University of Cincinnati's Economics Center for Education & Research.

Primarily the port's work has consisted of bond financing and brownfield redevelopment projects like Linden Pointe on the Lateral, a recently constructed office and retail development in Norwood that leveraged a \$750,000 state grant to clean up a former 15-acre General Motors Corp. property.

Of the port's \$2.1 billion annual impact, \$712 million is said to be tied to wages of more than 21,600 new and retained jobs, the report said.

"We are all very proud of what we have been able to accomplish since 2001," said Kim Satzger, the authority's president.

"We collaborate with the city, county, developers and financial institutions to grow our local economy."

Port-financed projects are responsible for about 2,033 jobs per year and \$74.5 million in annual household income to the region, according to the report.

The data are based on so-called multipliers that assume many of the dollars spent on port-related developments stay in the area and change hands repeatedly.

Multipliers aside, the data paint a rosy portrait of the Cincinnati area as the port authority's beneficiary and at an important time for the agency.

Hamilton County Commissioner Todd Portune plans to ask the commission and Cincinnati City Council next week to consider a proposal to restructure the port by scaling back its board from 18 members to eight, and expanding its development powers.

Earlier this month, city council passed legislation that would clear the way to expanding the authority's ability to fund projects.

The new structure is one Portune said would be modeled after the Columbus-Franklin County Port Authority, which received money from community stakeholders, the city of Columbus and Franklin County to build up a \$10 million reserve.

"They're able to leverage those reserves for \$50 (million) to \$100 million in development capacity," Portune said.

Under the Franklin County model, the reserves provide the collateral and security needed in order to issue bonds for large development projects, making the port a "development authority in its own right," Portune said.

"Historically, the role the (Cincinnati) port has played has been that of helping piece development projects together with various sources of funding," he said. "They have not had the ability on their own to go out and develop, because they do not have direct access to the necessary capital."

Officials also are considering whether the restructured port should be called on to purchase, in mass, blighted and abandoned properties for redevelopment.

"A lot of different groups are calling for a solution – some type of entity to act as a land bank," Portune said. "The only question is whether the port is the right vehicle."

In Cuyahoga County, leaders created a community improvement corporation (CIC) to get the job done. While CICs and port authorities have similar powers, ports have the ability to condemn property. Also, any property owned by a port is exempt from all taxes unless that property is leased for more than one year, according to the Ohio Department of Development.

"A solution is needed for some type of entity that can acquire vacant, blighted or tax-delinquent property and convert it into a higher and better use," Portune said, adding that looking to the port to fill that role would not require any legislative actions.

Portune's proposal for a restructured port is expected to come before the commission Wednesday during its regular meeting.

Thursday's report also noted that since 2001 the port has cleaned up 155 acres of contaminated properties – investing \$21.2 million in eight brownfields projects. That money has generated \$272.1 million in direct spending – including \$96.1 million in wages – and \$356.9 million in indirect, or multiplier spending, for a total of \$629 million in economic impact, the report said.