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Port authority begins work

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HEATH — Members of a new port authority for Newark Air Force Base got their first taste Friday of the challenges ahead of them.

The nine port authority directors, appointed earlier this week, met with the Newark-Heath AFB Reuse Commission at the Heath Municipal Building.

The two groups will work together for the next few months as responsibility for planning the base's future shifts from the Reuse Commission to the port authority.

The port authority will become the landlord at NAFB after it loses its military base status in October 1996.

Local officials want the port authority to lease the base to a private defense contractor. That contractor would continue NAFB's workloads on site and try to bring in additional work from other military branches, the private sector or even foreign countries. That all hinges on the Air Force approving the "privatization-in-place" plan. An Air Force decision is expected this fall.

At stake are about 1,500 civilian jobs and an estimated overall economic impact of nearly \$200 million a year within a 50-mile radius of the base.

"This is perhaps the single most important concern for our community today," said Dan DeLawder, port authority member and Park National Bank president. "So you have to step

up and try to help.

"All these people are interested in anything they can do to help the community and there is a definite need here," added port authority member Charles Manning, general manager at Licking Rural Electrification.

Serving with DeLawder and Manning on the board are Ohio State University professor Robert Klingensmith; Ashland University professors Dan Dupps and Lewis Mollica; Denison University vice president Mary Jane McDonald; Bank One lending officer Jeff Crabill; Newark CPA John Oberfield; and Holophane plant manager Jerry Besanceney. On Friday, they were given an overview of all the events that have taken place since NAFB was put on the Pentagon's base-closing list two years ago.

They also received copies of a NAFB reuse plan that has been developed by the Reuse Commission. It outlines the way the port authority would function.

Some of the key points include:

- \$4.1 million to \$5.9 million in initial funding requirements. That includes port authority planning efforts; bringing NAFB buildings up to code requirements; upgrading buildings for new uses; and a \$2 million sinking fund to replace major pieces of equipment should they break down.

- Seeking state and federal funds to pay for those initial expenses.

- A port authority staff of about 13 persons during the transition period from November 1995 to September 1996. There would be a long-term staff of about 50, including a 17-member fire department.

- The privatization-in-place lease paying for maintaining and insuring the grounds, support facilities and non-PIP buildings; port authority overhead; and the capital equipment sinking fund.

- The privatization contractor paying utilities, real estate taxes, building and equipment insurance and custodial, telephone and communication charges.