

Written by Administrator  
Thursday, 06 January 2011 18:00 -

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Lawmakers in the Assembly have again amended a pair of bills designed to remake Atlantic City with casino deregulation and more state involvement -- but backtracked on tough decisions about key provisions of both bills.

The state plans to set up a tourism district around the resort's major visitor attractions.

But Democrat authors of the

legislation, who had said Monday they would be open to drawing the district boundaries block-by-block, had changed their minds Thursday, and backed away from including that geographic detail.

Likewise, they amended a bill that would move the job of casino regulation from the Casino Control Commission to the Division of Gaming Enforcement.

While sponsors of the bill argue they would create financial savings by reducing the role of the commission, they moved Thursday to restore the right of the commission to have in-house attorneys.

Both changes apply to the Senate versions of the bills which have already been passed, and the Assembly versions which are pending a full vote Monday.

The two Republican assemblymen from Atlantic County who had expected to review the geography of the district for the first time Thursday stood on the Assembly floor, leafing through the amendments in surprise.

"Where's the map?" exclaimed one, Assemblyman John Amodeo, R-Atlantic. "We were promised clear, delineated borders of the district today."

Assemblyman John Burzichelli, D-Salem, Gloucester, Cumberland, said Monday his fellow

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Democrats were working on including the boundaries in the wording of the bill. But today he suggested that opposition by residents from Atlantic City may be to blame for the further delay.

"There has been some thought that leaving the borders to be decided later allows for input of local stakeholders, because that could be done after public hearings," Burzichelli said.

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