

Time to fix Atlantic City as NY casinos loom

Written by Administrator
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ATLANTIC CITY, N.J. (AP) — The likelihood of additional casinos opening in New York City concerns Atlantic City's casino bosses, but they feel there is still time to fix the seaside gambling resort's woes before that happens.

Speaking at a forum Friday sponsored by the Greater Atlantic City Chamber, executives from Hard Rock, Resorts, Tropicana and Bally's all said additional New York casinos are inevitable.

New York is entertaining proposals from companies interested in building a casino in Manhattan or other parts of the city, which would join the one city casino currently operating, Resorts World in Queens.

The New Jersey casino executives say Atlantic City still has time to shore up its own business to compete more effectively once that happens.

“New York is coming,” said Joe Lupo, president of Atlantic City's Hard Rock casino, whose parent company is not only bidding for the right to build a New York casino, but also holding onto the option of building another one in northern New Jersey at the Meadowlands Racetrack in East Rutherford if New Jersey voters ever allow that to happen.

“We have some time in Atlantic City to really make an impact,” he said.

The general consensus at Friday's panel was that Atlantic City has at least three or four years before New York joins the casino fray to correct problems like blight, poor infrastructure and potholed streets, and dirty neighborhoods that do not give the appearance of being safe for visitors.

If Atlantic City, its casinos, and state officials can work together to address those concerns, the impact from one or more New York casinos may be much less than it otherwise would, the executives said.

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Jim Allen, Hard Rock's global chairperson, said last month he expects the actual selection process to begin in late summer or early fall, assuming the necessary legislation to authorize as many as three casinos is enacted by then. Many of the major gambling and hospitality companies have also expressed interest in building a New York casino.

The executives said it is essential that Atlantic City carry out a sustained "clean-and-safe" initiative.

"If we could wake up and Atlantic City was this perfect seaside community, we would weather those threats," said Mark Giannantonio, president of Resorts. "Make Atlantic City as great as it can be in the next two or three years. Look at what is right in front of you: cleanliness and safety issues."

Atlantic City Mayor Marty Small made a clean-and-safe initiative a big part of his plans for this year during his state of the city speech last month.

"Clean and safe, clean and safe, clean and safe: That just has to be the mantra," said Paul Juliano, senior vice president of Bally's Corp. "You change perception by reality."

Participants in Friday's panel said Atlantic City has certain advantages that a casino in Manhattan or elsewhere in the city cannot match.

"We have something special here in Atlantic City," said Jacqueline Grace, senior vice president of the Tropicana, speaking of the ocean and the Boardwalk. "It's hard to compete with that. People are still going to want to come down to the shore."

Lupo said specific, concrete plans need to be made to advance some efforts already under way in the city.

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“I get tired of hearing ‘Atlantic City’s going to be great again’ without details,” he said. “We need to see some funding from the state and some real planning from the city. The streets need to be paved. There needs to be more light. There needs to be more police on the streets.”

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