

Written by Administrator
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Governor Christie and state Senate President Stephen Sweeney have a bipartisan deal that gives Atlantic City five years as a monopoly before either will consider expanding casino gaming beyond the city limits.

Of course, it's an informal agreement, so there doesn't seem to be an exact expiration date:

Christie said late last July that there will be no expansion for "four ... or three-plus years now."

He told me in Little Ferry Wednesday that the monopoly has another "two and a half years" to go.

Either way, we may be looking at late 2015 – just in time for an election day that would include state Assemblymen but not Governors or state Senators.

Of course, if Christie decided to run for President in 2016, he'd already have one foot out the door by the time of this deadline.

Sweeney, like Christie, is up for re-election this November. Sweeney isn't the lock that Christie looks like at this point, but he'll be a favorite for sure. But if Christie rang up a large enough election win, there's an outside chance that the state Senate could tip Republican as well. That would make Sweeney far less relevant, of course.

State Sen. Paul Sarlo, D-Wood-Ridge, attended the Christie press conference in his district Wednesday. He reiterated what has been his decade-long wish that the Atlantic City casino owners form a consortium, operate a Meadowlands casino, and share in the profits.

But that still doesn't appear to be in the cards, so Sarlo added, interestingly: "Then again, maybe [Meadowlands Racetrack operator] Jeff Gural should be given the first opportunity – the

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casinos were given their opportunity already.”

The state Senator added: “I don’t see Atlantic City turning around in the next two years.”

Regarding the pending Revel casino bankruptcy, Sarlo didn’t match Christie’s optimism.

“Clearly Revel’s bankruptcy is not helpful to the Atlantic City casino industry,” Sarlo said. “We have to be careful – if we wait too long to put a casino in the Meadowlands, we may lose Atlantic City in its entirety.”

Sarlo also pictures a mechanism for directing Meadowlands casino funds back to South Jersey to help ease employment losses and so forth in that region. But he also is realistic about his goals right now.

“My South Jersey colleagues have said they’re not going to support this,” Sarlo said of a Meadowlands casino. “I get it. I understand. I can count. The votes are not there for me right now.”

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