

Hotel Owner: I'll Open Small Atlantic City Casino

Written by Administrator
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Someone is interested in opening a new casino in Atlantic City after all.

The owner of the city's Chelsea hotel said Thursday he wants to open a small casino there under a bill being considered by New Jersey lawmakers.

Curtis Bashaw says his 330-room hotel would be a perfect spot for one of the two new so-called "boutique casinos" envisioned by a plan making its way through the state legislature.

The new casino would be the first to open in Atlantic City since the ill-fated Revel debuted in April 2012, only to close less than two years later. A bankruptcy court hearing aimed at finding a buyer for Revel is scheduled for Friday.

The bill would ease standards in a 2011 law authorizing two casino hotels with as few as 200 hotel rooms. It was approved by a state Senate committee Thursday, one of several measures state lawmakers are considering to help Atlantic City and its struggling casino industry.

The bill removes a requirement that one of the new smaller hotels eventually expands to 500 rooms, and would now allow a casino to be located in an existing building, as opposed to all new construction. A previous requirement that the smaller new hotels be new construction prevented Bashaw from opening one three years ago, despite his strong interest in the development.

"We have always been interested in the idea of adding a gaming amenity to The Chelsea," Bashaw told The Associated Press. "It's a boutique hotel; we don't have room for a big casino. But the bill that passed prevented us from taking advantage."

No one has built a new casino under the 2011 law since Gov. [Chris Christie](#) signed the measure. Florida's Seminole Indians, through their Hard Rock International franchise, proposed one, but soon backed out.

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The bill, sponsored by state Senate President Steve Sweeney and Sen. James Whelan, a former Atlantic City mayor, is designed to make it easier to open the smaller hotels, particularly amid the crumbling of the city's traditional casino market. Four of the city's 12 casinos have gone out of business so far this year, and a fifth, the Trump Taj Mahal, is scheduled to join them Dec. 20.

Bashaw views his proposed casino as a new product that would attract new customers. He envisions hotel guests playing at 25 or 30 tables scattered around the hotel's fifth floor, possibly with instructional sessions on how to play.

"It would be a very intimate experience," he said. "The casino would be a desirable place to go and learn to play and hang out with your friends."

Priority at the tables would be given to hotel guests, and the hotel would only be able to accommodate several hundred people under its fire code rating, adding to the exclusive feel of the gambling space, he said.

"I think there is too much capacity of the one-size-fits-all gaming floor that dominates Atlantic City," he said. "We don't want to compete with the mega-gaming halls. We want to give the customer an opportunity to broaden the experience; people are always looking for different experiences."

The bill now goes before the full Senate for consideration.

Also Thursday, three lawmakers introduced a separate bill to help address Atlantic City's financial crisis brought on partly by successful tax appeals from the casinos. State Sens. Whelan and Robert Singer and Assemblyman Mazzeo proposed the legislation, which creates the Atlantic City Growth Tax Credit Program.

The bill is designed to more evenly divide the property tax burden. It would encourage construction of new owner-occupied homes in Atlantic City, where three-quarters of the residents are renters.

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Wayne Parry can be reached at <http://twitter.com/WayneParryAC>

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