

Hard Rock (again) Dips Toe Into Atlantic City Casino Market

Written by Administrator
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Florida's Seminole Indians are renewing their torturous debate about entering Atlantic City's gambling market.

The tribe, which owns the Hard Rock brand, has long played the role of Hamlet, wrestling for years with the question of whether to be (or not to be) in the city.

The [New Jersey](#) Casino Control Commission will hold a special meeting Thursday to consider preliminary approval for the company to own a casino in Atlantic City. It applied nearly a year ago for a so-called "statement of compliance," which is a preliminary step in becoming licensed to own a casino in New Jersey.

James Allen, Hard Rock's president and CEO, did not respond to a message seeking comment. But in a regulatory filing, Hard Rock said it has had "a long-standing interest" in the Atlantic City market.

Hard Rock said it "remains interested in the Atlantic City casino industry and may, if found qualified, engage in a business or activity that would require the issuance of a casino license. The issuance of a statement of compliance to Hard Rock Atlantic City will enable it to act quickly if an appropriate investment opportunity arises in the Atlantic City casino market."

The filing did not say whether Hard Rock has a specific project or acquisition in mind.

Atlantic City saw four of its 12 casinos close last year; three of the remaining gambling halls are in bankruptcy.

Hard Rock proposed a small "boutique" casino-hotel with a rock 'n' roll theme in 2011, but scrapped the plan soon afterward. It was the only company approved by the state under a pilot program to allow the construction of casinos with as few as 200 hotel rooms instead of the 500-room minimum.

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A musical history museum with rock 'n' roll memorabilia was a key part of Hard Rock's proposal. Its hotel would have started at 208 rooms and eventually expanded to 850. But less than a year later, and without putting a shovel into the ground, Hard Rock scrapped the idea, "due to current market conditions."

In pulling out of the deal, Hard Rock pointedly said it has "not eliminated this location for a future endeavor."

The original law required such projects to be new construction, to spur new investment and economic activity. But New Jersey has since indicated a willingness to drop that requirement, and allow an interested party to convert an existing structure into a casino-hotel at a much lower cost. A bill making that change is pending in the state Legislature.

Hard Rock also kicked the tires on Revel while the casino resort was seeking buyers last summer before shutting down.

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