Atlantic City could see major changes in 2011 that could help the nation's second-largest gambling market come back to life

after stalling and struggling for four years.

By the end of the year, construction could be under way on two new casinos, gamblers could be allowed to place bets online and voters will have weighed in on whether they want New Jersey to offer legalized sports betting.

A new state-run tourism district is expected to be up and running, taking responsibility for making the area around the casinos and boardwalk safer, cleaner and better-run. The 11 casinos themselves could be subject to much less regulation and oversight by the state.

One or more of the casinos could be in new hands — at a much cheaper price — before the ball drops in Times Square again.

"2011 is going to be a very important year in advancing the solutions we need to keep Atlantic City competitive in the future," said Mark Giannantonio, president of the Tropicana Casino and Resort. "It is certainly a foundation year."

Bob Griffin, CEO of Trump Entertainment Resorts, which owns three casinos here, foresees 2011 as "a transitional year for Atlantic City."

"I'm not kidding myself about 2011; there's a lot of heavy lifting to do," he said. "But I'm very positive about the future three to five years after that because of the work we're doing now."

The most visible sign of progress in Atlantic City would be the resumption of work on the half-finished Revel casino at the northern end of the boardwalk.

Begun in 2007 before the national recession hit and credit markets dried up, Revel has been beset by problems, including the deaths of three key executives in a plane crash, a lack of funding to finish and a public backlash against a state tax break it once sought worth as much as $350 million over 20 years.

Revel ran out of money in January 2009, laid off 400 workers and stopped work on all but the exterior of the project until it could find money to do the inside. In April, Morgan Stanley pulled out of the project, already having spent $1.2 billion on it, deciding it was better to take "a substantial loss" than continue.

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