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Guest column / Dennis Scardilli / A.C. must give up a little for Christie's plan to fly

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The report by Gov. Chris Christie's Advisory Commission on Gaming, Sports and Entertainment proposes reprogramming all of the Casino Reinvestment Development Authority money to Atlantic City and ending the current casino subsidy for horse racing. Those proposals require a quid pro quo on the part of Atlantic City.

It is important to recognize that those who live in the Atlantic City region are part of the "Atlantic City" that is on the table. It's not just the 35,000 residents of the city. The majority of the people who work in Atlantic City or whose livelihood is affected by it do not live in Atlantic City.

The proposed Atlantic City Tourism District includes gaming and commercial facilities that account for a reported 70 percent of Atlantic City's tax revenue. By focusing Tourism District property-tax revenue on the economic revitalization of Atlantic City, there is less need to cut off support for other projects in the rest of the state. Atlantic City's revitalization would then be less dependent on political realities in the rest of the state and more focused on redevelopment, job creation and creating a strong economy in the Atlantic City region.

Tourism District tax revenue could still be used to support the city's schools and to pay county property taxes. Funds going to the municipal budget could be adjusted to the per-capita level of similar-sized New Jersey cities. All other property tax revenue could be directed to the Tourism District to support the redevelopment and revitalization of Atlantic City and its region.

This revenue could be used for the Tourism District projects outlined in the governor's report. And it should also be used to help create Atlantic City non-tourism housing and neighborhood commercial development, including use of tax credits for property improvements along with property tax relief. That would create an increase in private-sector development and property values and bring additional property-tax revenue to the district, city and region.

Bader Field is an integral part of the fiscal restructuring necessary for the redevelopment of Atlantic City. Bader and its monetization should come under the control of the Tourism District.

Bader's sale proceeds could be used to transform Atlantic City, including leveraging the creation of a monorail linking the Bader Field, Boardwalk and Marina entertainment districts. This project not only addresses the legitimate concerns of those who have invested in the other districts. It also creates economic opportunities and jobs, both in construction, operation and spin-off development. Bader Field capital investment and Tourism District

tax revenues would also allow the Tourism District more extensive use of tax increment financing for infrastructure development.

CRDA funding in the rest of the state should still be reprogrammed for the redevelopment of Atlantic City and for its economic revitalization. The idea I've proposed should make that more palatable and could also allow the Legislature to revisit the use of CRDA funding in the future.

Who would spend the Tourism District money and to what end? The advisory committee report includes the sound recommendation that the highly successful public-private partnership in New Brunswick be used as the model for the proposed "Atlantic City Partnership." That recommendation should be adopted with the recognition that there are two organizations involved in New Brunswick's revitalization effort. New Brunswick Tomorrow is in charge of economic and social revitalization. The New Brunswick Development Corporation is in charge of physical and, hence, fiscal revitalization. Atlantic City needs both. Let's adapt, but not clone, those models to Atlantic City.

We should all thank the governor and legislators on the summit committee for their efforts on behalf of the Atlantic City region. Let's come up with a plan that enables those who follow us to look back 32 years from now and say, "and that was when Atlantic City really started to take off".

Dennis Scardilli has been Atlantic City's housing and economic development planner, assistant special tax counsel to the city and Atlantic County economic development director. He is now an attorney in Egg Harbor Township.

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