SOUTHERN NEW JERSEY DEVELOPMENT COUNCIL
South Jersey's Voice For Progress

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LEGISLATIVE DISPATCH
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Legislative Summary

New! S2126 - Senator James Whelan (D2)

The bill permits development of solar and photovoltaic energy facilities and structures over landfills and quarries. It would require the Pinelands Commission to determine that the development of a solar or photovoltaic energy facility on the site of a closed landfill or quarry is conforming to the standards of the Pinelands Comprehensive Management Plan. The bill was referred to the Senate Environment and Energy Committee and has reported to the Committee with amendments.

New! S1410, S1411, S1815 - Senator Robert Smith (D17)

The package of bills establishes several new environmental rules in an effort to reverse what state officials see as decades of environmental neglect and contamination of Barnegat Bay. A joint legislative committee approved the bills.

Senator Robert Smith (D-Middlesex), chairman of the upper house's Environmental Committee, said Barnegat Bay is an environmental disaster more than 30 years in the making. The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration listed the Bay as having the second worst eutrophication problem in the country. Eutrophication is caused by high levels of nutrients in the water, causing an excessive amount of plant and algae growth, which chokes out native species.

U.S. Congressman John Adler (D-3rd) stated during the joint-legislative hearing that creating a clean and protected Barnegat Bay has been one of his top priorities in Congress and that it could provide more than $3.3 billion in economic benefits annually to New Jersey.

From the Governor's Desk

Christie Announces State-run Overhaul of Atlantic City

Governor Chris Christie announced the creation of the Atlantic City's casino district in an attempt to radically overhaul the way things are done in Atlantic City. The Governor has a plan in place to create an agency that will take over many duties from the Atlantic City government and other bodies related to reducing crime, promoting the area to tourists, and facilitating the financing of new development. The agency, which will be created by the New Jersey State Legislature,

will consist of members of the casino industry and local government representatives.

Gov. Christie issued a stern message to Atlantic City in January after a state comptroller's audit uncovered $23 million in municipal government waste. According to The New York Times, "This year, Atlantic City casino revenue is down almost 30 percent from the same period in 2006, and the casinos have shed about 12,000 jobs since then. In the first quarter of this year, 7 of the 11 casinos posted operating losses." Atlantic City casinos pay more than $900 million a year in state taxes and fees and about $1 billion in wages to 37,799 employees down from the 2006 peak of 45,101. The job losses are expected to accelerate when the Sugar House Casino opens in September in Philadelphia.

Gov. Christie's plan, most of which needs state lawmakers' approval, would stop the siphoning of $30 million in casino taxes to racetracks. He has proposed to close the Meadowlands Racetrack in East Rutherford. He also hopes to save the resorts up to $25 million by overhauling two state regulatory agencies that the casinos fund and that Gov. Christie's plan says can be duplicative. The resulting $55 million would go toward marketing. Gov. Christie, who says his plan calls for little new state spending, is already borrowing from a casino development fund to upgrade roads and land.

In the News

Concern over NJ Pension Program

When Governor Chris Christie's pension-cutting rhetoric began last March, many predicted a coming wave of retirements of public employees. That wave is officially here.

According to the Division of Pensions and Benefits, retirement applications from teachers, police officers, firefighters and state workers jumped 67 percent through the first seven months of the year. Nearly 14,900 workers in the public employees pension systems put in their retirement papers through the end of July-16 percent more than all of last year. Officials expect the total number of retirements will keep rising spurred by the expectation the governor will dig into pay and benefits of current employees. Teachers are leading the stampede for the exits. Retirement applications have more than doubled so far this year, with more than 6,400 educators putting in papers through July.

As of June 2009, the state's pension systems faced unfunded liabilities of $45.8 billion. That number assumed an annual 8.25 percent return on investments, an actuarial standard that many experts are now declaring as unrealistic. In the past decade, the pension system averaged 2.56 percent a year, not nearly enough to keep pace with projected costs. More pessimistic assumptions about rates of return peg the pension system liability as high as $173.9 billion.