

Special Counsel Jim Johnson's Atlantic City Report

The Report includes (i) a historical account of the City's present circumstances, (ii) recommendations for continuing progress, (iii) an analysis of the chronic challenges that have faced the City, and (iv) a framework for sustainable prosperity in the City moving forward.

The Report's recommendations were made independently and many are still under review by the administration. The report separated its recommendations into categories, as follows:

- **Municipal capacity:** The Report details the City's failure to foster or reward the dedication of its municipal employees, and its history of corruption among public officials. In response to these concerns about inadequacies in City government, the Report highlights potential avenues to build a lasting municipal infrastructure, including through increased training for senior managers, utilization of new technologies to expand data management and collection, and movement back towards civil service benefits and protections for city employees.
- **Planning and development:** The Report notes that the City's planning functions have dwindled in size and available resources, and have thus failed to address re-growth outside of the Tourism District. It further outlines methods to revitalize the City and facilitate collaboration between DCA and the City to rebuild its critical planning function. Most importantly, the Report makes the following specific recommendations:
 - (i) The future planning director of the Department of Planning and Development should create a Master Plan for the City;
 - (ii) CRDA and City planning offices should occupy the same space moving forward;
 - (iii) The City should review its outdated permitting regulations;
 - (iv) The City should focus on catalytic strategic projects, such as a food market, and shift to neighborhood-based investments with the help of CRDA; and
 - (v) There should be a continued focus on supporting families facing foreclosure in the region.
- **Public health:** The Report details public health issues in the City, including significant disparities in care and outcomes between African-American residents and white residents of the City. Following meetings with the Mayor, the County, Atlanticare, and the NJ Department of Health, the Report advocates for a working group to conduct a needs assessment regarding its residents and develop strategies to address those needs.
- **Law enforcement and crime:** The Report reviews issues with the Atlantic City Police Department and, to a lesser extent, the fire department, that speak to the perception of a lack of safety in the City, particularly beyond the resort areas. In an effort to improve public safety and the perception of safety, the Report recommends reviewing existing staffing levels, providing implicit bias and de-escalation training to the department, standardizing internal affairs investigations, and establishing a Citizens Advisory Board that would address issues between the Department and the Community.

- **Casino industry:** The Report analyzes the role of the casino industry in the fiscal crisis facing Atlantic City, and proposes pathways to combating industry losses and ensuring the City can build on its economic strengths. In that regard, the Report recommends that the State form a task force to review recent casino closings to determine whether changes can be made to the regulatory framework, and suggests that the City expand efforts to promote itself as a destination.
- **Economic development:** The Report further looks at retaining, attracting, and strengthening businesses in the City to combat slow regional growth, as evidenced by recent data from the Bureau of Labor Statistics. The Report ultimately recommends: (i) building on current efforts to create regional business and catalyze small businesses; (ii) supporting efforts to develop collaboration between Atlanticare and Stockton University; (iii) shifting the policy focus to millennials and young entrepreneurs; and (iv) developing strategies to enhance commuter access to Atlantic City.
- **Jobs:** The Report outlines the concerning statistics for the City, including its 9.3% unemployment rate, \$28,000 median income figure, and 27% homeownership rate. To boost employment opportunities, the Report suggests: (i) establishing an institutional home for the Employment Council, a group of stakeholders convened by the Chamber of Commerce; (ii) engaging the Department of Labor and Workforce Development in jobs efforts, particularly for data analysis and securing training grants; (iii) working with the Superintendent of Schools to establish internships; and (iv) codifying efforts to employ individuals with felony convictions.
- **Youth:** The Report emphasizes the importance of the City's youth, and highlights the daily physical, mental and emotional struggles that the under-18 population faces, particularly as a result of the staggering poverty rates in the City. To address these concerns, the Report recommends: (i) expanding access to high-quality summer and after-school programs; (ii) redirecting CRDA to invest in Atlantic City youth; and (iii) identifying state grant programs to support the population.
- **Civic infrastructure:** The Report explores the importance of community engagement in the City's revitalization efforts. In this regard, the Report proposes: (i) including a member of the neighborhood civic associations on the Executive Council, which would be a council comprised of local political, industry, academic, and labor leaders to collaborate regarding their operational authority over the City's revitalization efforts; (ii) building a database of resources, events and opportunities; and (iii) exploring efforts to increase engagement between the casinos and the City.

Return to Local Control: The Report states that Atlantic City has a number of challenges that will only be resolved with significant direction from and partnership with the State. It states that the current State oversight should last until the expiration of the State's authority in the City under the Municipal Stabilization and Recovery Act, unless at some point before that 1) municipal capacity is on strong footing and 2) Atlantic City's reliance on state aid has been substantially reduced or eliminated.