
Numbers Game

Atlantic City faces various economic challenges

Casino revenue has declined to \$3 billion in 2012 from a peak of \$5.2 billion in 2006

Annual city budget of \$245 million hit by a wave of tax appeals by casinos

City's debt of \$219 million has been downgraded by Moody's, making future borrowing more expensive

Regional unemployment rate of 11.1% in August, compared with 8.5% for all of New Jersey

Poverty rate of 29%, compared with 9% for the state

Mr. Guardian, a native of Bergen County in northern New Jersey, ran a grass-roots campaign without significant party backing. A first-time candidate, he said he knocked on 3,000 doors and held cookouts at residential towers to introduce himself to voters.

Mr. Guardian made inroads with the city's many ethnic groups, some who had felt ignored politically, said Daniel Douglas, director of the William J. Hughes Center for Public Policy at Richard Stockton College of New Jersey.

"It was mostly hard work and innovations in reaching out to folks," Mr. Douglas said about Mr. Guardian.

The race was close, and Mr. Langford challenged the results after initially conceding. Mr. Guardian was certified the winner last week. Of the 7,497 ballots cast, Mr. Guardian received 3,929 votes and Mr. Langford received 3,568, according to records from the county clerk.

Mr. Guardian said he is hoping to start small in leading the city, for example, by improving the city's security and cleanliness with technology that will allow inspectors to use mobile devices to report problems. He wants to tap a \$3 million grant from a state authority to add more security cameras and to integrate existing private ones to allow police to use them.

Mr. Guardian said he would conduct a national search to replace employees he deems ineffective. He said he intends to reduce the size of the workforce by 100 through attrition and retirements to help with the budget.

In the long run, Mr. Guardian said he would use aggressive marketing to bring more conventions to fill empty hotel rooms during the week.

He also hopes to create an R&B museum, revive an entertainment district and attract a college branch through a partnership with Stockton College. He plans to meet with the college's president in the coming weeks.

Initial conversations have taken place about a possible Atlantic City campus but nothing is definite, said Sharon Schulman, Stockton's chief executive officer for external affairs.

Mr. Guardian's goal is to put the city on surer footing by 2020, which would be well into a second term. Then he hopes to retire in the city with his partner of nearly 20 years.

"If I screw up, I don't deserve to be re-elected. But I think it's going to take eight years to bring it to reality in the city," he said about his vision.

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