

Atlantic County renews effort to create aviation industry around A.C. airport

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Atlantic County is continuing efforts to create an aviation industry around the Atlantic City International Airport, despite a bitter setback in January by former Gov. Chris Christie.

Last month, the Atlantic County Economic Alliance signed an agreement with TRIAD Associates, located in Vineland, for business development grant applications that could provide money for the ACEA to better promote investment in the county.

If approved, the funding will help get the county one step closer to creating its new desired industry following the collapse of the casino industry earlier this decade.

“We contracted with TRIAD to help us create a detailed aviation strategy as we continue to work toward diversifying Atlantic County and growing our regional economy,” said Brett Matik, ACEA board chairwoman.

Under the agreement, TRIAD also will write a market and labor analysis that identifies training opportunities in the region for businesses to find potential employees. The plan is meant to be a companion to the Angelou Report, which was released in 2015, that will make businesses’ moves and transitions to Atlantic County smoother, according to a statement from the county.

“This plan will build upon the countywide economic development strategy and action plan developed by AngelouEconomics that included aviation as one of five targeted industries to help diversify Atlantic County’s economy,” said ACEA Executive Director Lauren Moore. “It will also supplement our ongoing efforts to attract research and development entities to the Aviation Park.”

Meanwhile, the fight to secure state tax incentives around the airport has been renewed in the Legislature.

On Monday, the Assembly Commerce and Economic Development Committee will vote to move a new bill establishing a Garden State Growth Zone around the airport to the full Assembly.

The bill is sponsored by Assemblymen John Armato and Vince Mazzeo, both from Atlantic County, and was written in conjunction with the Greater Atlantic City Chamber of Commerce and the ACEA.

State Sen. Chris Brown, R-Atlantic and Senate President Steve Sweeney are sponsoring a companion bill in the state Senate.

In January, Christie vetoed a similar bill on his way out of office.

He defended his decision, saying he didn’t like it extending the same growth zone benefits the airport in Egg Harbor Township got to Atlantic City, Camden, Passaic, Paterson and Trenton.

This new bill creates the incentives only at Atlantic City International Airport and a one-mile radius around it.

The idea of establishing a Garden State Growth Zone is to attract out-of-state businesses to come into New Jersey. There has been debate among lawmakers about the effectiveness of this designation because companies that already do business in New Jersey were moving to other parts of the state to get the tax breaks.

But adding a growth zone around the airport was a good idea, lawmakers argued, because there is no “aviation industry” already established in New Jersey.

