

Blockbuster of movie production site envisioned for Gwinnett

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JAN. 10, 2014 -- If even half of what is envisioned to be redeveloped as a modern media studio campus at the OFS site at Jimmy Carter Boulevard and Interstate 85 comes to pass, it'll be a whopper of a plan for Gwinnett. Work is to begin within three months on the massive project by Jacoby Development, and it promises to be a billion dollar development. Atlantic Station, which Jacoby also envisioned, is by comparison a \$2 billion project.



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It's huge. Already, quietly, three major movies have been shot in open warehouse facilities at the site. Jacoby has been working on conceptualizing this site for over a year now.

The first public announcement of the development came Thursday morning at the January meeting of the Gwinnett Village Community Improvement District (CID), where Jim Jacoby and Scott Condra appeared with details on the project.

It's big, and could end up with the biggest movie production lot in the nation. "Warner Brothers in Hollywood is 115 acres," Jacoby said, "And this one is 120 acres in total." Meanwhile, OFS plans to continue to produce fiber optics on part of the 169 total acres of the overall site.

Jacoby and Condra also said that up to four movies could be in production at the same time at the site, each one with budgets of up to \$150 million. All the work will be done in complete LEED certified facilities, making it one of Gwinnett's biggest green sites.

Closing on the land purchase and work on the project is expected to start within three months, by April 2014. The Jimmy Carter Boulevard frontage will have a limited amount of retail activity, with work on this to start "immediately."

A key component of the basis for the project is the eight-year old Georgia 30 percent tax credit legislation, now considered the best in the nation, which is the major reason that movie production companies are looking to Georgia. "This is a blockbuster," Jacoby said.

Part of the major components of the overall project will include:

- Converting Building 50 of the OFC complex into the major production facility. This building is most modern, built in 2000 in an expansion, and is now unused. Altogether, there will be seven sound stages in this building.
- Retrofitting half of the former OFC office (Building 20) as a film school, with classroom facilities and labs.
- Using the other half of building 20 for entrepreneurial high-tech firms. Altogether, this building has 300,000 square feet of space.
- In the southern end of the property, the most distant from Jimmy Carter Boulevard, will be multi-family and student housing. (This will come in later stages of the project.)
- Jacoby is considering relocating the present Gwinnett County Police Precinct at the very edge of the corner to another location in order to build a hotel on the site.
- The front of the property will also see in later stages high rise office exposure built, with a density similar, though smaller, to the Galleria complex in Cobb County. The Jacoby interests also see the possibility of high-end high-tech manufacturing on the site.

The developers see the overall facility used to make feature film, for television studios, for gaming development, and for action films. "Those in Avatar-like motion can capture the transition to games, and will be a big component of the future of films," Condra said.

Watch out Gwinnett: we may already be big in the movie business!



Movie studio project could revive Gwinnett Village, officials say

Story by Camie Young

Thursday, January 9, 2014

NORCROSS — Georgia's largest movie studio could open by this summer in Gwinnett, transforming the Jimmy Carter Boulevard corridor.

Just months before they close on a deal to retrofit much of the OFS site along Interstate 85, officials with Jacoby Development talked to Gwinnett Village Community Improvement District leaders Thursday about the plans that will bring \$1 billion in investment.

Company President Scott Condra said the first phase — opening up seven sound stages in a building once used to manufacture fiber optic cables — could be complete three to six months after the April closing with OFS.

While the company plans to continue operations on a portion of the site, Jacoby's plans for the development of the remaining 125 acres means Gwinnett will soon be home to the fourth largest studio lot in the nation, Condra said. He said Hollywood producers are already in talks about making the studio home base for \$100 million-plus productions, and an announcement will be made in the coming weeks about a Los Angeles company managing the venture.

"This is what we have planned on since we started the CID. You talk about a catalyst project; this is it," CID Director Chuck Warbington said, after the business organization's board members talked about the hundreds of people who would be employed on the sets and the potential of high-end restaurants housing and businesses that could surround the venture. "The economic impact it would bring back to the corridor is more than I ever envisioned."

With plans for a film school and some housing on the site, Condra talked about high-rise office buildings and a five-star hotel also planned for the project, which he described as an environmentally friendly "upcycling" venture.

"Gwinnett doesn't really have a Galleria, and that's what this could be," developer Jim Jacoby, the company founder, said.

Since a state tax credit began drawing the entertainment industry, Georgia has been the site of many filming locations, including "Wanderlust," "Identity Thief," "Flight," "Due Date" and "Last Vegas" in Gwinnett, as well as the upcoming movies "The Good Lie," "The Familymoon" and "Dumb and Dumber To" expected to come out this year. On Friday, a crew from AMC's "Halt and Catch Fire" will be shooting in Snellville.

In fact, as the OFS/Jacoby deal has taken shape, crews have been shooting the Fast & Furious 7 at the Norcross site, although filming has been on hold since the death of star Paul Walker.

Jacoby told the crowd that stars often choose the location of movies, adding that Adam Sandler previously would only agree to shoot in California and Hawaii before his work on "The Familymoon" around Lake Lanier.

Condra said many of movie stars would likely want to stay in luxury hotels in Atlanta, so the studio's access to Interstate 85 is key. But he is in talks with Gwinnett County to possibly relocate a police precinct to make room for a luxury hotel to be included at the site. The studio will provide jobs at every income level, he added, from the stars to the grips, caterers and cleaning crew.

As developers of Atlantic Station, which revived East Atlanta, Jacoby leaders said they have the same hope for the Jimmy Carter area, where infrastructure improvements will also be funded through tax allocation districts.

That was good to hear for business owners like CID Board Chairman Shiv Aggarwal.

"I think the three-mile radius (around the project) is going to turn around from Buford Highway to Lawrenceville Highway," said Aggarwal, the owner of Global Mall. "By 2018, we can celebrate a lot of things. I'm looking forward to it."