

Major Movie Studio Could Become A Reality

Long Beach Studios In Escrow For Boeing 717 Facility

■ By **STACY CLEMENTS**
Staff Writer

Here comes Hollywood. The billion-dollar industry might soon pump some of its revenue-generating hoopla into the heart of Long Beach.

Long Beach Studios LLC, headed by entrepreneur and actor Jack O'Halloran, plans to turn the former Boeing 717 manufacturing site into "the largest independent production facility in the world," according to its Web site. While escrow hasn't officially closed, reports in the local media outlets and the enthusiasm expressed by various city leaders confirm the concept is en route to becoming a reality.

Robert Swayze, manager of the Long Beach Economic Development Bureau, says he has been working with O'Halloran and the Long Beach Studios team for more than a year, following a referral from Mayor Bob Foster's office. The department has facilitated key introductions and negotiations with The Boeing Company and Long Beach Studios.

"We understood Jack [O'Halloran's] vision within five minutes of our first meeting," Swayze states in an e-mail, noting that the studio would be located in the city's Enterprise Zone. "We think it will become a preferred shooting location and help stop the 'runaway productions' that take advantage of tax credits in other locations, such as New Mexico or Louisiana."

The giant hangar space and soundproof facilities, where large aircraft were once manufactured, also happen to be ideally suited for moviemaking. The plans include 40 soundstages, ranging from 12,000 to 200,000 square feet; office space; a five-star hotel; an underwater tank; and all the facilities for pre- and post-production. Essentially, it would become a self-contained city, similar to the studio lots in Hollywood (Paramount Pictures), Burbank (Warner Bros.), Culver City (Sony Pictures) and Universal City (Universal Studios). The Boeing site spans roughly 70 acres, and negotiations include the entire site.

"It would be a fantastic project. It would completely revitalize that area and also bring in a whole new industry that will not just be limited to the Boeing property," Assistant City Manager Suzanne Frick says.

According to City Manager Pat West, the studio would complete the city's "industry cluster." Oftentimes, he says, cities are built around one or two thriving industries that could fall and cause a local economic downturn.

"On any given day in Long Beach, you have three film permits issued, whether it's 'CSI,' 'Cold Case,' 'Criminal Minds' or a commercial," he adds. "We totally believe that if this gets off and running, the Douglas Park facility across the street will capture a lot of businesses that are going to be associated with this industry cluster."

If and when escrow closes, the city will expedite the permit process, Frick says.

The local impact is expected to be more than significant. "At full build-out, the project is estimated to create 1,500 to 3,000 jobs," Swayze states. "There's a halo effect with film production, because they attract significant pre- and postproduction work. And the concept of the Long Beach Studios – set up for 100 percent digital production – means it will attract substantial interest from the industry."

"Douglas, McDonnell Douglas and Boeing have been a part of the fabric of Long Beach for over 60 years, but we all know that the aerospace industry has changed," Mayor Bob Foster states in an e-mail. "What's exciting is that the new use of the site ties in with a growth industry – entertainment technology."

According to Swayze, entertainment technology has been a growing industry cluster in Los Angeles County for more than a decade. "As manufacturing has declined, entertainment employment has grown – and the future looks bright," he says.

Fifth District Councilmember Gerrie Schipske agrees, noting that she walked the property with O'Halloran about five months ago to observe his vision firsthand.

"It's going to be an incredible job opportunity," she says. "I'm crossing my fingers that the deal goes through. Historically, Long Beach had the first movie studio in California, and it was the largest employer – Balboa Studios. They kind of faded out in 1928, so this [has] historical significance . . . that could perhaps revitalize our job market down in that area." ■