Report Summary

This report responds to Council’s direction for staff to provide further details and options pertaining to the development of a purpose-built film and television production studio, Freshwater Production Studios, following the presentation from Cultural Industries Ontario North (CION) and Council Resolution CC2022-207 passed at the August 9, 2022 meeting of Council.

Resolution

WHEREAS the City of Greater Sudbury received the Freshwater Production Studios presentation at the August 9, 2022 meeting of Council and passed Resolution CC2022-207 directing staff to undertake additional due diligence and return with options for municipal participation in the project; and

WHEREAS the project aligns with City of Greater Sudbury objectives related to Business Attraction, Development and Retention and Economic Capacity and Investment Readiness; and

WHEREAS through FA2022-45 the City of Greater Sudbury has directed staff to develop an Employment Land Community Improvement Plan, a program which provides a vehicle for municipal support for projects advancing job creation and economic benefits for the community such as the Freshwater Production Studios;

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED THAT City Council supports the Freshwater Production Studios project as a candidate for the Employment Land CIP now in development and as described in the staff report entitled “Freshwater Production Studio Opportunity for Municipal Support” brought forward at the December 13, 2022 meeting of Council.

Relationship to the Strategic Plan, Health Impact Assessment and Community Energy & Emissions Plan (CEEP)

This report refers to an opportunity that would advance strategic objectives including Business Attraction, Development and Retention as well as Economic Capacity and Investment Readiness. The film studio concept also aligns with economic development strategic objectives and the Greater Sudbury Cultural Plan that both note the need for film studio facilities in Greater Sudbury.
Financial Implications

While there are no direct financial implications associated with this report, the proponent has requested municipal support worth $7 million towards the film studio development and this report describes approaches Council could consider for fulfilling the request.

Background

This report describes municipal experience in the creation and/or operation of film studios in other Canadian cities and outlines options for the City of Greater Sudbury to participate in the development of Freshwater Production Studios. An Employment Land Community Improvement Plan (CIP) program now in development and to be in place in 2023 appears to be the most appropriate method.

At the August 9, 2022 meeting, Council unanimously passed a resolution (CC2022-207) directing staff to undertake additional due diligence regarding the Freshwater Production Studios project proposal in order to:

1. Understand the role municipal governments have played in the creation and/or operation of film studios in other Canadian cities;
2. Prepare an analysis of the Freshwater Production Studios project to further build Council’s understanding of the proposal as presented at the August 9, 2022 meeting of Council; and
3. Develop options for participation in the project by the City for Council’s consideration.

The following report responds to these three directives and concludes, should Council wish to provide support, that the Employment Land Community Improvement Plan (CIP) program now in development would be most appropriate. Staff analysis indicates the project will advance the City’s objectives related to job creation and economic benefit, and helps create important sector infrastructure while increasing the city’s Gross Floor Area (GFA), an indicator of growth trends in the community.

The film and television industry produces significant economic impact for the local and regional economy. Greater Sudbury has benefitted from over $216 million in direct economic activity from the film and television industry over the past ten years, creating thousands of local crew jobs.

Cultural Industries Ontario North (CION), a non-profit cultural organization serving Northern Ontario, projects Freshwater Film Studio will create 1,384 jobs by year 5 and generate $60 million in new annual revenue for local businesses. This purpose-built film studio has the potential to create and retain jobs, develop and grow the local economy and increase the profile of Greater Sudbury in international markets, which is in line with the goals from the Economic Development Strategic Plan, From the Ground Up. It also fulfills objectives in Council’s Strategic Plan 2019-2027 related to Business Attraction, Development and Retention as well as Economic Capacity and Investment Readiness.

Analysis

Role of Municipalities in the Creation and/or Operation of Film Studios in Canada

Staff conducted research into film studio developments in other jurisdictions to learn about the role of municipal support in each case as well as the overall impact of these developments on the industry. Below are the results of this research, which includes interviews with key staff in those jurisdictions.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Studio</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Municipal Role</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Aeon Studio Group</td>
<td>Aeon Studio Group is developing Hamilton’s</td>
<td>In 2019 the City of Hamilton</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Studio (City)</td>
<td>Description</td>
<td>Municipal Role</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------</td>
<td>-------------</td>
<td>----------------</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| (Hamilton)   | first large scale studio production facility, Bayfront Studios, with 80,000 square feet on 7.5 acres of land.  
- Hamilton is a one-hour drive from Toronto, making it a popular host city for short-term filming which is otherwise based in Toronto.  
- Recently productions have been establishing roots in Hamilton with production office space and the development of studio space. Hamilton has five renovated studio spaces as well as a new proposed studio development, by Aeon Studio Group.  
- Aeon is now looking to build a live-work-play hub for the creative industries on a site adjacent to its current property.  
- This new economic cluster would include studios to produce film & television, animation, video games, virtual reality, music, and fashion. The district would also feature affordable workspace for artists and makers, office space for creative industry companies, event, and performance spaces, as well as learning and training spaces to build the local workforce.  
- The City executed a memorandum of understanding with the developer to sell City lands for the purpose of constructing the multi-purpose studio district at the Barton-Tiffany lands, consistent with its Hamilton Creative Industries Sector Strategy.  
- Since then the City addressed issues of soil contamination at the site and is working with the developer to cover remediation costs in order to reduce investment risk in order for construction to proceed without further delays. | |

| Calgary Film Centre | The Calgary Film Centre is a premier facility with 50,000 square feet of sound stages  
- Built on 8.35 acres, the Calgary Film Centre features 50,000 square feet of purpose-built studios over three sound stages and 25,000 square feet of multipurpose warehouse and workshop spaces.  
- William F. White International is an anchor tenant in the facility, providing equipment rental services. | The Calgary Economic Development Corporation (CED), advocated for film sector growth and provincial incentives prior to the studio development.  
- CED was the organization that initiated the development of the Calgary Film Centre in 2009.  
- Ownership and operations of the studio were transferred to the City of Calgary in 2018 for a contribution of $10 million, including land acquisition. |

| Capreol Arena (Greater Sudbury) | New Metric Media is the production company for Letterkenny and Shoresy, two series that shoot in Greater Sudbury and have a significant impact on the local industry in terms of job creation and local spending given that the production company has been returning to film in Greater Sudbury since 2015.  
- The majority of shooting days are set on location, however there is the need for studio space and ice rink filming, in particular for Shoresy.  
- In April 2020 New Metric Media made a proposal to City Council for exclusive use of one of the ice pads at the Capreol Arena for filming purposes. | In August 2022 the Planning Committee approved New Metric Media’s request to rezone the arena to permit audio visual studio use.  
- At the time of this report the lease agreement between New Metric Media and the City is being finalized |

<p>| Cinespace (Toronto) | Cinespace owns and operates studios in Toronto, Vaughan and Chicago, with 1.3 million square feet of production space totaling 25 stages over three sites. In Fall | Ports Toronto works with all levels of government to enhance economic growth in the City of Toronto and GTA. Ports Toronto signed a long- |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Studio</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Municipal Role</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| **Northern Ontario Film Studios** (Greater Sudbury and North Bay) | - The Northern Ontario Film Studio (NOFS) features a 16,000 square foot single span main stage floor, a hair and makeup room, a prop shop, a craft kitchen, laundry facilities and 3,000 square feet of office space.  
- NOFS is a significant contributor to the local industry development as the first film studio in the region and the only dedicated studio space in Greater Sudbury.  
- NOFS expanded to operate a studio space in North Bay through the purchase and renovation of a former school in 2016. | - The City of Greater Sudbury supported the development of NOFS through a lease agreement for the former Barrydowne Arena since 2012.  
- NOFS invested in the facility with considerable upgrades at their own cost.  
- The lease is re-negotiated on a three-year cycle, including temporary rezoning to permit commercial activities in this municipally-owned facility. |
| **North Star Studios** (North Bay)               | - In May 2022 North Star Studios announced its purchase of the 100,000-square-foot facility North Bay to house the city’s first dedicated film studio.  
- With $26 million in private investment the owner plans to convert most of the former Epiroc building into five sound stages for film and television productions. The building is on 4.8 hectares of land, offering potential future expansion opportunities. Currently North Star Studios has opened three of the proposed sound stages and ancillary services. | - At the time of this report staff are not aware of any public incentives provided for the studio’s development.                                                                                                  |
| **Pinewood Studios** (Toronto)                  | - Phase 1 of the $60 million, 260,000 square foot landmark studio complex included a 45,000 square foot purpose-built sound stage. Started in 2006, the completion of Phase 1 created an anchor and a catalyst for redevelopment in the Port Lands within the new Studio District.  
- Phase 2 of the expansion began in 2012 with the lease of additional 2.2 acres to build three new sound stages.  
- In 2018, Bell Media purchased a controlling stake in the studio and Toronto Waterfront Studios Development Inc. proposed a further expansion with 224,864 square feet of new non-residential uses, including studio space, new communication, broadcasting, and office space. When the work is finished, the Toronto location will offer a total of 16 sound stages. | - The City of Toronto acted in the capacity of landlord, owner, and lender to support the development of Pinewood Studios.  
- As the City’s economic development corporation, the Toronto Port Lands Company (TPLC) now part of CreateTO, sponsored research to understand why Toronto was losing big film productions to other cities. The research identified the need for purpose-built studio space and larger sound stages so Toronto could compete for international large-scale film productions.  
- In support of the City’s objectives, TPLC organized an international, competitive bid for a private joint venture consortium to develop the new project.  
- TPLC owned property in the Port Lands that could accommodate this project. Once the investors were in place, TPLC conducted a 30-acre remediation of the lands.  
- The result was the first private sector commercial investment to revitalize Toronto’s waterfront, with upcoming development. |
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Studio</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Municipal Role</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Screen Nova Scotia and Film PEI | - The provinces have invested new funding for film and television productions and reinstated tax credits to regain a competitive advantage in attracting productions in Atlantic Canada.  
- Both provinces are investing directly into the development of soundstages in order bolster the industry’s long-term sustainability. Nova Scotia will be investing $8 million towards the development of a purpose-built studio that will total 115,000 square feet. | - At the time of drafting this report the studio developments did not have direct contributions from the municipalities and projects were lead and funded by the province and provincial film commissions. Staff is in contact with representatives from Film PEI and Screen Nova Scotia for follow up as the developments advance. |
| Studio Bottega (Mississauga) | - Studio Bottega aims to break ground in the fall of 2022. It will be the first purpose-built studio in Mississauga and the largest of the other eight existing studios, which are housed in repurposed facilities.  
- The 850,000 square foot project consists of three buildings, two of which are sound stages with office and support spaces and the third is an above ground parking structure. | - The City of Mississauga supported the development of Studio Bottega by requesting a Ministerial Zoning Order. This provincial order will allow the project to be fast-tracked by up to a year sooner than if it were subject to the usual municipal approvals process.  
- The City of Mississauga worked with the other eight studios by ensuring services and approvals required for their development.  
- No further development incentives have been provided as Mississauga remains an attractive filming location due to its proximity to Toronto. |
| TriBro Studios (Ottawa) | - While Ottawa has several other smaller and repurposes studios, TriBro Studios was intended to be Ottawa’s first dedicated and purpose-built film studio.  
- In 2018 TriBro Studios proposed the construction of four state-of-the-art sound stages at the former site of the National Capital Commission’s Greenbelt Research Farm. The proposal also included a “creative hub” that would feature 25,000 square feet of workshop space and 50,000 square feet of production facilities and co-working space for film, television and animation studios.  
- The project is not proceeding as planned due to a number of factors, citing each parties’ timelines, refocused business direction, and COVID-related challenges such as supply chain issues. | - The Ottawa Film Office (OFO) is a not-for-profit organization funded by the City of Ottawa with the mandate to grow the film industry in Ottawa.  
- Through a partnership between TriBro and OFO, in 2020 the City of Ottawa Council guaranteed a $40-million 30-year loan to support the development of the TriBro Studios proposal.  
- The OFO has expressed its commitment to sourcing and supporting the development of a sound stage following the pause of this specific capital project. |

**The Freshwater Production Studios Project Proposal**

Cultural Industries Ontario North (CION) is a not-for-profit organization, based in Greater Sudbury, with the mandate of supporting and growing the film and television and music industries across northern Ontario. As reported to Council earlier this summer, the Greater Sudbury Development Corporation supported CION
during the development of the business plan for Freshwater Production Studios (FPS), a new purpose-built film studio.

Staff have completed additional research that supports the recommendation that municipal support is best provided through an Employment Land Community Improvement Plan program as outlined, noting the following key aspects of the studio development proposal:

- FPS is a proposed purpose-built 116,000 square foot film studio facility with three sound stages and accompanying support spaces. This layout and format have been selected to fill a gap in demand for studio space available in the region and across the province.

- It is projected that the film studio will create 1,384 jobs by year 5 and generate $60 million in new annual revenue for local businesses. These jobs are more consistent than location shooting positions, enabling year-round filming and returning television productions.

- Through a competitive process conducted by CION, William F. White International is the confirmed studio manager. This company is a foundational asset to northern Ontario’s film and television sector and one of the biggest names in the business in terms of production services across the country, bolstering the significance of their involvement in the project.

- The developer is contributing land for the film studio development as well as design and construction services toward the studio’s development. The property is on a 24-acre parcel located on the Kingsway and is conducive to studio activity and allows for potential expansion opportunities.

- The capital costs for the development of the film studio total $39.3 million. The developer has committed land valued at $2.4 million in addition to design and construction services. Private investors have committed $17 million pending municipal support. The balance of financing is secured through a bank loan.

- FPS has private investors and tenants in place to provide for the studio’s short- and long-term viability, however CION is also seeking public support to expedite the development and leverage current market conditions.

**Economic Impact of the Film & Television Industry**

According to reports from Ontario Creates, Ontario’s film and TV industry contributed a record-breaking $2.88 billion to Ontario’s economy in 2021, creating 48,135 high-value full-time equivalent direct and spin-off jobs. This represents an increase of 92% over the previous year. A portion of the 2021 increase can be attributed to COVID-19 recovery following the brief industry shut down in 2020. Prior to the pandemic there was a steady increase in production impact with $2.16 billion in direct spending in 2019 creating 44,540 jobs. Greater Sudbury is a major production center within Ontario and Canada. Over the past decade, the City of Greater Sudbury has attracted 165 film and television projects with a total local direct impact of over $216 million, which does not account for the indirect or spin off spending associated with those productions.

CION has projected that the film studio will create 1,384 jobs by year 5 and generate $60 million in new annual revenue for local businesses. Furthermore, studios bring more consistent jobs than location shooting enabling year-round filming and returning television productions.

In Greater Sudbury there has been significant development of new infrastructure and services dedicated to film over these ten years. However, given demand across the province, research and industry feedback indicates there are opportunities to increase the percentage of production budgets spent locally to keep those funds in Greater Sudbury, and staff actively markets local unique locations and service offerings. Furthermore, efforts to attract larger scale productions have been hindered by the lack of sufficient studio space and have lost production business that resorted to other communities with larger turnkey studio options.
Recent studies by Film Ontario and Nordicity have suggested that there is a significant demand for studio space since supply has outpaced current availability. This would create a prime opportunity to make Greater Sudbury the film destination of Ontario for the North. In Ontario, studios have been operating at near full capacity since 2016 and hundreds of millions of production dollars have been turned away.

Ontario Creates further reports that:

Concerns about access to studio space and increased workforce pressures are key considerations in ensuring Ontario remains an attractive production location. The City of Toronto projects a 63% increase in studio space over the next 5 years, requiring another 12,000 workers to be added to the local industry. Regionally, Northern Ontario has become a hub for production, with Sudbury, North Bay and Timmins all actively seeking to attract film and television production to the region, and studio space building developments have recently been announced in both Sudbury and Sault Ste. Marie.

Industry & Studio Outlook
The City of Greater Sudbury and the Greater Sudbury Development Corporation have recognized the significant economic impact of the film and television industry over the years. Anecdotal information shared by industry partners with experience in other jurisdiction indicates that northern Ontario is one of the fastest-growing film production markets in North America.

The economic success of the film and television industry is supported in large part by federal and provincial tax credits as well as training assistance and funding from the Northern Ontario Heritage Fund Corporation (NOHFC) at the provincial level and Telefilm Canada and the Canadian Media Fund at the federal level.

- While the sector has grown substantially in recent years, funding conditions have helped to increase local economic contributions.
- It is worth noting that film production activity was able to adjust to filming during the height of the pandemic and has demonstrated resilience during this challenging period.
- The NOHFC film fund in particular has been a major driver in attracting investments to the north since its introduction in 2004, and data related to the program indicates that every dollar invested delivers nearly $5 in local spending in the region.
- The NOHFC has supported the film and television industry since 2004, representing 498 productions and $289 million of support while leveraging over $600 million into the North as well. Since the start of the pandemic NOHFC has supported 60 productions filming in the North.
- Greater Sudbury and northern Ontario currently attract productions generally within a budgetary range of $1-$10 million for features and $10-$25 million for series. Because of limited budgets, these projects rely heavily on funding support from the NOHFC Film Fund as a key consideration in their decisions to bring their projects to the north, since the fund provides up to $500,000 in support per project.
- There is production activity that takes place in Greater Sudbury without NOHFC funding, although it is currently limited.
- In contrast, this film studio would be designed to attract productions that require the larger size, flexibility, transformability and range of services that can be provided by a studio.
- Investments in studio infrastructure would enable Greater Sudbury to attract productions with larger budgets.
- This is an important consideration as it makes these productions less reliant on the NOHFC film fund and corresponds with reducing the reliance of Greater Sudbury’s film and television sector on the film fund, reducing the risks associated with the possible cancelation of the funding by the province.

As noted, recent studies by Film Ontario and Nordicity have suggested that there is a significant demand for studio space since supply has outpaced current availability. In Ontario, studios have been operating at near full capacity since 2016 and hundreds of millions of production dollars have been turned away.

Options for Municipal Participation in the Project
With the demand for studio space outpacing availability, other jurisdictions have developed a variety of ways to incentivize the development of new studio facilities as noted above. Staff researched these and other options, including support in the form of grants, loans and equity alternatives, for the City of Greater Sudbury to invest in the film studio project. The assessed options included:

- **Grant** – currently in Ontario the Municipal Act restricts municipalities from providing funds directly to specific businesses. The option of flowing municipal dollars up-front via a grant opens the City to risks associated with funding a project that includes private-sector entities and is not recommended.
- **Loan** - a loan presents similar administrative challenges to a grant and does not meet the needs of this project.
- **Equity** – examples exist where municipalities take an equity (ownership) interest in a film studio development. With input from the City’s Legal staff, it is noted that this option would be complicated by the number of parties involved in the project and the fact that the current ownership group includes both non-profit and private businesses.

With this in mind staff recommend that municipal support is best considered through the Community Improvement Plan program, which is designed specifically to provide municipal support to projects like the film studio.

Community Improvement Plans (CIPs) are a sustainable community planning tool enshrined within the Municipal Act in order to empower municipalities to revitalize areas of a city or community by providing direct financial support to private sector businesses without risk of bonusing to an individual company. Several CIPs exist in Greater Sudbury now. A new Employment Land CIP under development will target development projects that result in new industrial development, job creation and economic benefit to the community. The CIP tool reduces risk to the municipality, as the City’s contributions primarily take the form of a tax increment equivalent grant. The grant program provides municipal support for the incremental increase in property assessment and municipal property tax resulting from the completed development.

The Employment Land CIP is being developed following Council resolution FA2022-45 directing implementation of the Employment Land Strategy. The program, which includes an application process, is anticipated to be in place in 2023. CION could apply for the Freshwater Production Studios development.

The CIP is an appropriate tool for municipal support of the project, as it is designed to provide support for private-sector developments and eliminates risks to the municipality that could be associated with traditional grants, since the dollars are flowed once the development is complete and operational and is provided in the form of a rebate on taxes already paid.

Staff have also explored the CIP approach with Cultural Industries Ontario North and the project team has confirmed their interest in the program. They are interested in applying for the Employment Land CIP program once it is in place in 2023.

**Risks of not providing Municipal Support**

As indicated in the Ontario Creates reporting, there is a race across Canada to open more film studios in order to satisfy production demand and capitalize on the timing to establish industry hubs for filming activity.

Should Council decide not to support Freshwater Production Studios, the studio would risk being delayed in its development and the opportunity to solidify its position as a film destination as productions seek studio space in other municipalities. Location filming has gotten more competitive and Greater Sudbury has lost new production business in recent years due to insufficient studio space.

**Infrastructure Development**

The proposed site for the project will require investments in infrastructure. The Kingsway is a controlled
access road that will require the development of an intersection to support the entrance to the site.

The Kingsway area was also identified as one of the eight strategic employment areas in the Employment Land Strategy endorsed by Council at the August 9, 2022 meeting.

The roadway and intersection associated with the property on the Kingsway is identified in the Official Plan as a connector from Levesque to Lasalle/Elisabella, and as such, may be eligible for Development Charge credits. The design for the intersection is largely complete, with some adjustments to be made to meet the needs of the studio development.

The City’s Policy on Development Cost Sharing also enables Council to consider cost sharing on a case-by-case basis in situations where a proposed road is identified as a major future road in the Official Plan and creates an improvement in the existing road network. The cost sharing would only apply to the road (not the servicing) and would be subject to Council approval.

A collaborative approach involving cost-sharing and DC credits will be explored pending Council’s direction for support and the project’s application to the Employment Land CIP program in 2023.

**Conclusion**

The development of the Freshwater Production Studios presents an opportunity for economic growth and job creation for the city and the North. The film studio will attract skilled workers and other production companies to settle in the region. The studio will act as an incubator for many smaller businesses servicing the industry (catering/craft, carpentry, set design, accounting, etc.).

CION is seeking municipal funding and support to advance the project to take full advantage of current market conditions. The requested capital investment is $7 million through a combination of support formats.

Through FA2022-45 passed August 9, 2022, the City of Greater Sudbury has directed staff to develop an Employment Land Community Improvement Plan, a program which provides a vehicle for municipal support for projects advancing job creation and economic benefits for the community. The Freshwater Production Studios proposal indicates opportunity to advance these objectives.

Staff recommend that the City endorses support for the Freshwater Production Studios project as a candidate for the Employment Land CIP now in development and encourage the project proponents to apply for the CIP program subject to its adoption by Council and finalization in 2023.

**Resources Cited**


**External Resources**

Nova Scotia, Government Invests in Film Industry Growth
Ports Toronto, Cinespace Studios to Lease PortsToronto’s Marine Terminal 52 Property to Develop Studio Facility and Support Growing Media Production Business in Toronto

Canadian Media Producers Association, Blueprint Studio City
https://cmpa.ca/indiescreen/blueprint-studio-city/

City of Toronto, Study of Film and Screen Industry Studios in the Port Lands and South of Eastern Employment District

Nordicity, Soundstage Market Sounding Assessment

Ontario Creates, Film and Television Statistics