

## NEWS

# \$150 million movie studio proposed near Midtown could change Jackson landscape



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Mill Street Studios is the future home of a state-of-the-art media production facility, providing two 6,000 square-foot studios, two jumbo 17,000 square-foot sound stages, new production and post-production suites, as well as other facilities required for producing short and long-form content. *Contributed*

If long-time Hollywood insider Robert Schnitzer has his way, Jackson could soon be a hub for international movie making.

Schnitzer, along with local landowner and investor Charlotte Reeves want to create Mill Street Studios, a motion picture and media production facility, providing two 6,000 square foot studios, two jumbo 17,000 square foot sound stages, a 20-acre movie ranch, production offices and related support services.

As its name suggests, the campus would be located on Mill Street in Jackson on the edges of [Midtown](#).

"We want to do for the visual arts what music has meant for Mississippi," Schnitzer said in a phone interview from California.

His original tie to Mississippi was having made a 1975 horror movie, *The Premonition*, in the Jackson area. It happened to star [Ward Emling](#), who went on to spend 30 years as director of the Mississippi Film Office.

Schnitzer came back to Jackson in 2015 for the Mississippi International Film Festival as *The Premonition* was being shown as part of the festivities. It was there Reeves showed him the property on Mill Street and the idea for film studio was born.

But it was just a year ago when Schnitzer jumped into the project with both feet as he believed that streaming services creating more competition could mean a real opportunity for the Jackson property.

Since then, Schnitzer has been working to raise money and make the project a reality.

"There was all of a sudden a waiting list of years at the sound stages that were available to these streaming companies," Schnitzer said. "In Los Angeles, they started building 10 or more sound stages in various neighborhoods. The same thing was happening in New York."





A view of where Mill Street Studios would be located. It is the future home of a state-of-the-art media production facility, providing two studios, two jumbo sound stages, new production and post-production suites located minutes from Downtown Jackson as well as Hawkins Air Field. *Contributed*

That combined with companies looking for ways to make movies for less made the idea of raising money for the Jackson project seem more doable.

"The addition of a film studio in Jackson would be a wonderful tool in furthering recruitment of film production to central Mississippi," said Nina Parikh, the current director of the Mississippi Film Office. "Our goal is to have year-round filming, providing ongoing jobs for locals and spending with our local vendors and businesses. A studio allows for television and streaming series to have more confidence in locating here as they often have sets that need to be accessible for six to nine months of a year. While feature films will also utilize a studio, the ideal project is a series since they have a longer schedule of work, ongoing for years if the show is successful."



Schnitzer has gotten an architect to design the property and he has lined up investors and hopes that work can begin on the property by the second quarter of 2023.

In addition, Schnitzer's group has acquired 20 acres of raw property just 1.2 miles from the Mill Street Movie Ranch property for outdoor location production.

"Just being a mile away from the main campus is perfect for producers, because they will be able to rent office space at the studio and have just a 1-minute drive to be able to shoot on location," Schnitzer said.

There is also another acre of land a block away from the main campus to handle overflow parking, if there is a need.



A rendering shows the future site of Mill Street Studios in Jackson. *Contributed*

"We are currently getting requests for proposals from construction companies and the response has been very good," Schnitzer said. "The funding sources range from in Mississippi and the Southeast to others from around the country, including those who would want to invest in urban renewal."



The project would happen in two phases. The first, which would take nine months to complete, would cost an estimated \$20 million to restore and re-purpose the old cotton seed mill on Mill Street.

"Fortunately, the structures that are already there are amazing and sturdy and have been strong for the last 100 years," Schnitzer said. "The two buildings are perfectly structured for sound stages. So, we would have to sound proof them and bring in electrical and everything we would need."

The other \$130 million would go toward executive suites, a commissary, cafes, a restaurant, an outdoor stage, mill where the sets would be built, among other things. There is also the potential of building a boutique hotel, managed by a hospitality franchise, on property.



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"The whole idea is save money," Schnitzer said. "So, if the actors and producers can stay right there on the lot in a hotel, that saves time and money for everyone."

The second phase would take as long as a year to complete.

He also believes have Hawkins Field nearby for private aircraft to come in and our of the city is a perk for investors.

"If we can close the funding and line up the real estate developer within the next month or two, I can see us breaking ground in the second quarter," Schnitzer said. "I think we can have that first phase completed by the end of the year. Could there be something that delays the first phase? Yes. But we have done the homework, the planning and the hard work. ... We are moving ahead on all fronts."

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