

**RFP: Redevelopment and Expansion of Midtown Production Studios
Aspect Studios Village
EMAIL LETTERS OF SUPPORT FROM THE PUBLIC**

Hello Councilmembers:

In advance of tomorrow's Quality of Life committee consideration of this issue, I write to you today on a couple of points related to the pending deal between the City of Santa Fe and Aspect Studios in acquiring city property at Midtown, a deal set to be finalized with the full council on December 11. You may recall I sent you a letter in support of this project in November.

First, I reiterate my support of this sale and this project, per the agreed stipulations between the city and the developer, and per the agreed-to price for the property. The City is not leaving money on the table. Midtown is in large part a very distressed property overall, long dormant, in need of redevelopment - with the promise to become a real jewel in Santa Fe's crown.

Second, recent posts were made to Facebook's Santa Fe Bulletin Board which include a 2-page letter dated March 20, 2024 - a letter from Arthur Neudek addressed to Karen Iverson of the City - apparently a cover letter for a more complete re-appraisal of the Midtown properties in this pending deal with Aspect. Context for this Facebook post is to suggest that the existing, pending deal with Aspect be renegotiated.

I responded to the post directly on Facebook, but want to take this opportunity to provide that response here to you all as well:

Deals to redevelop Midtown have fallen through - how many times?

And I wonder if the higher appraisal from March includes anticipated costs to bring the Midtown structures to a commercially viable use. Certainly they need much work to make these buildings usable long term as part of a larger film / television production studio. To situate post production facilities alone in a building like Benildus will require gutting portions of an entire floor, with lots of capital necessary to do so and to properly equip such a facility. Plus, The Screen - a perfect venue for future use by the Santa Fe Film Festival - a huge theater perfect for big screen presentations (and for production use in dailies, rough cut reviews, even premieres) - requires tons of capital in technology upgrades as well.

These are just a couple of many example structural costs the City will not implement on its own if the deal falls through. It takes a developer with access to ready capital, and a viable business plan to create the many opportunities Midtown presents. Opportunities which in turn will generate GRT for the city and state; more housing opportunities (in the

long term plan); and workforce development. You typically don't see such opportunities (and costs) reflected in a real estate valuation.

Plus, the developer's business plan is no doubt predicated on the previously agreed property acquisition costs - agreed to by the city.

Walk away from this by reopening the deal and the Midtown grounds will lay fallow for another five years or more, home to a growing community of prairie dogs. Walk away and you risk the city's reputation as a trustworthy, reliable partner in any future real estate transaction. Walk away and you risk softening in a future commercial real estate market. Walk away and you tell your fellow Santa Fe-ans you just flushed away some very high pay job opportunities.

Why would any other developer want to come to our table?

This is a penny-wise, pound-foolish position to take. Make the deal the city agreed to. Welcome and work with the developer to turn Midtown into the envy of the rest of New Mexico.

Thank you for your time and in welcoming perspective from the Santa Fe community on this important redevelopment opportunity.

Sincerely yours,
Robert Dennis
3 Morning Glory Circle
Santa Fe, NM 87506
cell 818-726-9851

From: Robert Dennis <robertedennis@gmail.com>

Sent: Thursday, December 5, 2024 3:57 PM

To: GARCIA, MICHAEL J. <mjgarcia@santafenm.gov>

Cc: SIGNE I. <silindell@santafenm.gov>; ALMA G. <agcastro@santafenm.gov>; CAROL <cromero-wirth@santafenm.gov>; PILAR FH. <pfhfaulkner@santafenm.gov>; LEE A. <lagarcia@santafenm.gov>; JAMIE A. <jcassutt@santafenm.gov>; AMANDA C. <acchavez@santafenm.gov>; mayor@santafenm.gov <mayor@santafenm.gov>; HERNANDEZ, DANIEL A. <dahernandez@santafenm.gov>

Subject: Quality of Life Committee meeting follow up - further notes re the Aspect Studios / Midtown deal

Councilor Garcia:

I followed the Quality of Life committee meeting via youtube on Wednesday Dec 4. You raised several points and questions re the pending Aspect Studios acquisition of property at Midtown. Let me address just a few of these here.

1. You questioned the need for soundstage/studio space, generally, in the larger marketplace

Soundstages are being constructed rapidly in many states (and internationally) to take advantage of production demand. We - Santa Fe and New Mexico - must remain competitive. Many of these developments are with states copying the New Mexico model tied to more aggressive tax incentives (Arizona; Nevada) (see: <https://variety.com/2023/artisans/focus/las-vegas-soundstages-nevada-incentives-1235776880/>). These states and communities partner with developers to assure they attract this important industry and the jobs productions create. Smartly led communities see the need and are responding.

Recent soundstage development examples include:

1. Just announced yesterday Dec 4 is a new \$900 million Netflix soundstage studio project near Trenton, NJ, to occupy an old army base of 290 acres (see: <https://www.msn.com/en-us/money/realestate/massive-nj-netflix-facility-ok-ed-by-local-planning-board/ar-AA1vliC1>).
2. A fifty-soundstage development of about \$900million, Desert Studios, is set for a 320 acre site west of Phoenix (see: <https://www.hollywoodreporter.com/business/business-news/desert-studios-an-arizona-production-complex-1235375499/>)
3. Warner Bros. sold the Warner Ranch lot in Burbank, CA to developer Worthe, and will lease back the soundstages currently under construction on the 30 acre site for this \$500 million project (The Ranch was WB's backlot, where shows such as Bewitched, Friends, and many many others once filmed; Worthe leveled the entire property prior to start of construction - and the new soundstages were well underway during my June visit) (see: <https://la.urbanize.city/post/500m-redevelopment-warner-bros-ranch-underway-burbank>)
4. Albuquerque as recently as October approved \$1 million in LEDA dollars to be combined with \$6 million from state LEDA dollars for Mesa Studios, a development on 56 acres near Double Eagle II airport (see: <https://www.cabq.gov/mra/documents/case-2024-7-mesa-film-studios-leda.pdf>)

Many other soundstage developments are in process. With the film industry in the midst of business cycle pauses and consolidation, now is the time to redouble efforts to maintain Santa Fe as a premium destination for film and television production. Locating a new studio to the center of the city will do just that. Let's not be left behind when the industry rebounds.

2. Community benefit - education

New Mexico developed first tier training for film production throughout the state, but in particular here in Santa Fe with SFCC and Stagecoach foundation - two organizations partnering with Aspect. The DDA requiring Aspect set aside 2000 square feet for film training use by these partners is an important key to bring trainees to a centralized production location - with direct access to productions underway at the site. That's an

incredible - RARE for the industry - opportunity for Santa Fe-ans. Add that much of this training will be free or very low cost to New Mexicans is a tremendous benefit not to be overlooked.

We must maintain a fully trained, capable workforce if Santa Fe is to continue to attract big budget productions to facilities such as Aspect Studios. The fact that the state's MAC (Media Arts Collective) encumbered its entire \$40 million allocation (state and fed dollars combined) - WITH NOT ONE DOLLAR targeted north of Albuquerque - means we here in Santa Fe must redouble our efforts to support film production training. Securing the Aspect deal for Midtown will build on our area's film training success in spite of the state ignoring Santa Fe through the MAC.

3. You suggest many other entities could be interested in Midtown, and at inflated valuations

Metropolitan Redevelopment Director Hernandez pointed out during your committee meeting that Sect Keyes shopped the Midtown opportunity around - to California and elsewhere - to no response. Then the RFP was let out.

As I understand it, Aspect was the sole respondent - the only developer to respond!

Further, the RFP was developed with significant community input - where transforming a portion of the campus into state of the art soundstage studio space was identified as a key desire of the Santa Fe community.

Where are the other developers interested in swooping in to buy the property at (poorly substantiated) inflated valuations? What are these other developers proposing? We risk giving up the substantial controls for Santa Fe as built into the DDA with Aspect Studios - you suggest we give up the bird in hand in favor of the two hiding in the bushes somewhere on campus? Developers who then might extract our pound of Santa Fe control over Aspect currently built into the DDA? Can you put a dollar figure on that control?

As to valuation - indeed the city has not maintained the property. My personal example - when we went to sell our home in 2020 to make the move to Santa Fe, I engaged in spending \$\$ on deferred maintenance - and learned the skills necessary to update a bathroom myself. It was a fixer before we sold. Had I not done that work, we would have taken a haircut on the property valuation. So - with Midtown's dilapidated buildings and downtrodden condition, the city is in the same situation. Santa Fe must take a valuation hit on any offer. (By the way, are the fire hydrants back in operation? Last I saw - and it's been awhile - they were still painted black because they were not in service)

Further, my guess is any potential upswing in market valuation for the property just took a hit - when two days ago the Governor and city leadership in Albuquerque put the Expo New Mexico fairgrounds on the market, letting out a RFP with responses due by end of January 2025. That's 236 acres of prime real estate, of a nature with wide open urban space similar

to Midtown. In addition to the housing that the RFP plan anticipates, I'll bet some RFP responses will include media / soundstage studio space there, too.

We wait much longer - if we push this deal off the table - perhaps at some future point we'll look back at the agreed \$5 million acquisition deal with Aspect and wish we had said "Yes!".

Don't torpedo this deal.

- Robert Dennis

cell 818-726-9851

land line 505-780-5120

PS - for context, a word on my background: On graduating with an MFA degree in Film Production from USC Cinema in LA, I went on to a 25+ year career in the motion picture industry, first in production, then segued into post production, with stints at HBO Pictures, Lucasfilm, on the lot at Disney Studios, and management of the Imax business for Technicolor. I started as a no-name kid in Central Illinois, surrounded by farmland, to go on to secure a pretty good career in Hollywood, with retirement here in Santa Fe. So I know something about this business, if I do say so myself.

Film and television is a high stakes, high reward business. Santa Fe rode the production carousel and grabbed the ring - don't let it go!

From: **Liesette Bailey** <liesette@santafe.film>

Date: Mon, Nov 11, 2024 at 1:20 PM

Subject: Letter in support of Midtown Buildings and Parcel Sale to Aspect Media Village

To: <mjgarcia@santafenm.gov>

Dear Councillor Garcia,

I am writing this letter in support of Midtown Buildings and Parcel Sale to Aspect Media Village. The Santa Fe International Film Festival(SFiFF) has become familiar with the company and its principal Phillip Gesue and as one of SFiFF's major corporate sponsors. We are in support of the sale and the vision of Aspect Media Village for Santa Fe's Midtown area.

It is critical to the success of our local film community to have local corporations and individuals who give back to the community. We have had further discussions with Mr. Gesue about his efforts to preserve the Screen theater as an arts movie theater and expect that this and his other endeavors here in Santa Fe come to fruition. It is important that Santa Fe's filmmaking capacity is expanded as the city is just hitting its stride as a desirable location to make movies. However, we critically need bigger, better facilities for filmmakers to bring their ideas to reality, and to keep the positive momentum going. On a personal note, as someone born and raised in Santa Fe and attended College of Santa Fe for dual

enrollment while in High School, it is very exciting to see the amazing potential for this parcel of Midtown revamped as a studio village.

In 2024 SFiFF became an Academy Award Qualifying festival and as the festival continues to grow as one of the top film festivals in the region, we hope that firms like Aspect Media Village will thrive and help us expand our efforts as a festival as well as help filmmakers bring their business here to make movies.

Respectfully,

Liesette

--

Liesette Bailey
Executive Director
Santa Fe International Film Festival (SFiFF)
418 Montezuma Ave Suite 22
Santa Fe, NM 87501
Office: 505.397.0371
Direct: 505.470.8063
liesette@santafe.film
SantaFe.Film

16th Annual SFiFF, October 16th-20th, 2024

From: Michael Donnelly <sfxfilms@pacbell.net>

Sent: Tuesday, December 3, 2024 4:30 PM

To: LINDELL, SIGNE I. <silindell@santafenm.gov>; CASTRO, ALMA G. <agcastro@santafenm.gov>; GARCIA, MICHAEL J. <mjgarcia@santafenm.gov>; ROMERO-WIRTH, CAROL <cromero-wirth@santafenm.gov>; FAULKNER, PILAR FH. <pfhfaulkner@santafenm.gov>; GARCIA, LEE A. <lagarcia@santafenm.gov>; CASSUTT, JAMIE A. <jcassutt@santafenm.gov>; CHAVEZ, AMANDA C. <acchavez@santafenm.gov>

Cc: Mayors Office <mayor@santafenm.gov>; HERNANDEZ, DANIEL A. <dahernandez@santafenm.gov>

Subject: Midtown Campus Quality of Life Meeting Dec 4 2004

CAUTION: This email originated from outside of the organization. Do not click links or open attachments unless you recognize the sender and know the content is safe.

Dear Council Members,

As a New Mexico film industry professional with 50 years of experience in cinema production and exhibition, I strongly support the continued development of Garson Studios and the Midtown Campus Screen parcel by Aspect Studios.

The protracted debate on closing this deal has gone beyond due diligence and is now hindering the business and cultural development of a unique, productive center with a

significant potential impact beyond our local community. A functional production and film exhibition center is pivotal to the profile of the domestic New Mexico Film industry, contributing to education, workforce development, and cultural spaces. Such a facility stands to foster a self-sustaining environment for local content creators and reduce dependency on external transitory revenues.

It is time to transition this project from the city's oversight to a developer who has shown exceptional good faith and interaction with the local film community. The approval delay seems to stem from discussions about valuation versus the investment required to achieve City compliance and facility modernization. Unaddressed, these additional expenditures would significantly raise the net cost above market value, delaying operations. Having visited the facility several times, I can attest that substantial work is needed, and that disuse and inaction have only increased the startup costs.

How many times have we all been through the vision of a bright future for a Midtown media community? Other proposals have come and gone, other developers have walked, and still we talk. We want it; the City wants it, and we have kissed a lot of frogs. Mr. Gesue has demonstrated considerable generosity and good faith towards the Santa Fe film community. He is well-regarded, listens to our needs, and will make sound business decisions with the Santa Fe community in mind. I am confident the Committee can find a workable solution.

As always, thank you for your ongoing work.

Cordially Yours,

Michael Donnelly

sfxfilms@pacbell.net

(505) 487 3407

(310) 486 2559

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Robert Dennis
3 Morning Glory Circle
Santa Fe, NM 87506
cell 818-726-9851

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Hello,

My name is Fiore, assistant Stage Manager for Garson Studios.

I am writing regarding the merger between Garson Studios and Aspect Media Village which I am in full support of.

I have been working for Garson Studios for 8 years. I have seen many productions done at the studios. These movies and TV shows brought a large amount of capital spent in Santa Fe, from rental to catering etc. Hundreds of people from New Mexico are hired for months, sometimes for an entire year.

The merger will keep productions coming and expanding the sound studios' capability will increase possibilities for even more productions. Garson Studios sometimes hosts multiple productions at the same time, and having more stages will make Aspect Media Village more competitive with other studios in the country.

The new owner has a big vision for the midtown area which includes renovations of the inside of existing buildings and outside of the entire property, reviving the entire Midtown.

This is a wonderful project that will make Midtown the center of filmmaking.

I cannot emphasize more how this merger is important for me and for New Mexico.

Best regards
Fiore
Dear City Council Members,

As a Santa Fe local, I strongly encourage you to pass the proposition to build Aspect Media Village. It thrills me and gives so much hope to hear that it's possible to bring the film industry closer to home. It's been difficult to find enough work in the film industry, mostly because the NM film industry is mostly based in Albuquerque or areas too far for me to travel to.

Furthermore, Santa Fe is a hard place to live lately as there are not even customer service jobs available to keep afloat financially. I have a handful of management level job experiences, and it is near impossible to find work in this town that is sufficient for surviving. Due to the lack of employment available, I find it to be an extreme to have to travel so far to pursue my dream job in the film industry.

Passing this proposition for Aspect Media Village WILL CHANGE MY LIFE and my career. It will also give many, beautifully creative people in Santa Fe, a chance to change their lives as well. This proposition will give so many community members employment opportunities that were never available before. It will give community members an opportunity to stop working dead-beat tourist trap jobs that are not sufficient for living.

This proposition will ensure better quality jobs for so many people who struggle financially in Santa Fe, NM due to it being a tourist trap of a town, where only service jobs are available to the working class.

Please, help change Santa Fe, for the better of so many. Please, accept this proposal for Aspect Media Village. It will definitely change my life by bringing more opportunity for growth to my doorstep. Be a part of changing my life; it is the reason I moved to Santa Fe, 4 years ago: I wanted to change my life.

Sincerely,
Alexandra Dombrow
(215)272-2080

Dear Councilors,

On behalf of Santa Fe Community College, I would like to express my support for the proposed sale of land at the Midtown Campus to facilitate the creation of Aspect Media Village. SFCC has collaborated with Aspect Studio for many months, and we are excited about the prospect of expanded training and employment opportunities for our students.

Aspect Studio has demonstrated its commitment to Santa Fe and to the development of film production in Santa Fe by renovating the former tennis complex into studio space. SFCC looks forward to participating in future phases of the Aspect Media Village.

Please feel free to contact me if I can provide any additional information.

Sincerely,
Becky Rowley
President
SFCC

We are fully behind the Mayor’s vision for the Midtown redevelopment and the partnership with Aspect Studios. This is exactly the kind of thoughtful, community-focused project Santa Fe needs to grow and thrive.

The plan hits all the right notes—affordable housing, job training, and huge investments in film and digital production. It’s not just about immediate benefits; it’s about creating long-term opportunities for our community. Partnering with local groups like the Santa Fe Community College and the Stagecoach Foundation means our youth will have access to real career pathways in fast-growing industries.

On top of that, the focus on sustainability and cultural spaces like The Screen theater makes sure this project reflects Santa Fe’s unique identity while supporting our local economy. It’s exciting to see a development plan that prioritizes the environment, the community, and our future all at once.

This isn’t just another project—it’s a chance to invest in Santa Fe’s future in a way that benefits everyone. I’m excited to see it move forward.

Elias Gallegos
Director of Film & Media
elias@georgermartin.com
elias@eliasgallegos.com
(818) 438-7216

9 December, 2024

From: James Gollin
Chair, Governor’s Council on Film and Media Industries

To: The Governing Body, City of Santa Fe
All:

I am Chair of the New Mexico Film Council, formerly the Governor’s Council on Film and Media Industries, appointed by the Governor and responsible for advising the Executive and Legislative branches of State Government on Film Policy.

While the redevelopment of the Midtown Campus is essentially a local issue, not a State one, as a long-time Santa Fean and a former member of the Santa Fe Film and Digital Media Commission, I am writing to express my support for approval of land sales and other transactions that will lead to the development of the Aspect Media Village.

A decade ago, when the Santa Fe University of Art and Design vacated the property, I chaired a working group focused on making sure that parts of the midtown campus would become available for film industry development, just the kind of project now proposed by Aspect Media. I participated in design charrettes and extensive discussions about balancing the need for affordable housing, open spaces, community and arts spaces, local commerce and the like with a major employer from the film industry. The bottom line is

that no housing is affordable to people without decent jobs, and while housing can and should be in-filled here and there around our City, there are very few large, well situated lots appropriate to creating new engines of employment.

Year upon year, I helped hold up the idea that at least some of the Midtown Campus should be anchored by a film industry campus. Eventually, I termed off of what is now the Santa Fe Film Council, was appointed by the Governor to Chair the State Council, and am now in my second three year term Chairing the State Council. During that period, I've seen and supported explosive growth of studio campuses around the state, from Las Cruces to Albuquerque to meaningful (but still insufficient) developments on native lands. And during that time, Santa Fe has held almost still, missing the opportunity to join in the heavily state-incentivized juggernaut of economic growth felt by other parts of the state. An early attempt to master plan the entire campus fell apart, as you all know, and the project went back to the design phase. There were rumors of a Facebook campus, an Apple project, a vast post-production or animation studio. None of them came to pass. The City has not been overwhelmed with bids and plans to redevelop parts of the Campus as film centers. The place is mostly empty, growing weeds more than growing careers. A bright spot has been the serious foot in the door at the former Shellabarger tennis center and now the related plans that now hold the promise to expand into a full-throated film campus by Aspect Media.

I have serious concerns that, if the City does not strike a deal with Aspect Media Village, the property will remain underutilized for another decade, and the City will lose its chance to ride a major wave of film, media, post-production job growth. Growth, which would also support correlated industries from food and beverage and hospitality to carpentry, electrical and plumbing to a variety of tech centric jobs, plus of course the creative industries. The dream for Santa Fe should be that local writers create ideas brought to life by local producers, directors, crew and actors, financed at least partly with NM funds, and with post-production gradually shifting more and more to proficient NM tech operators. The Midtown Campus could be a driving force for that dream. Or it could be a field of weeds.

I understand that there is some concern on the Governing Body over the appraisals and the prices to be agreed upon. I don't have enormously developed opinions on the deal itself, what would constitute fair recompense. I would state that fair market value is always best defined as what buyer and seller agree upon. In the real world, I don't see other film campus developers offering more than Aspect Media for the right to develop the property. In fact, I don't see any other bidders at all. If, after sharpening your pencils, you can get a better deal for the city, more funds coming in in later years assuming a success by Aspect, of course as a Santa Fean I'd be pleased with that. But if through excessive and unrealistic demands, you chase away the best prospect for job creation we've seen in a decade, and Santa Feans need to wait another decade or more before the campus is developed, our city will not be well-served by your actions. Please don't let greed or caution undermine what might be the best opportunity for economic and cultural development we might ever see.

Sincerely,
James Gollin



Hey Everyone,

The city votes tomorrow on whether our project can go through! The restaurant is part of the bigger movie studio village development project that only means good things for the city and our economic development. Please email your district's councilors especially if you're in district [#2](#) and/or come to the meeting tomorrow just to show support (email me for details, you don't have to come to the whole thing, otherwise you will hate me and start ordering dominos). This is make or break it for us opening the restaurant next year, so email and come to a very boring but important meeting :)

This e-mail is to confirm my support for sale of the Midtown Campus property to Aspect Media Village (*represented by Phillip Gesue*).

Mr. Gesue has contacted and shared his plans with many organizations and people who are intricately involved with the New Mexico film industry..... all have replied with a positive response. And many productions have already worked at the Garson Stages and in the relatively new stages of the former tennis center. This purchase would solidify the continuation of production on this property.

Many elements are involved with attracting film production companies to New Mexico and to Santa Fe. The proposed plan by Mr. Gesue is another vital piece to the current success of film production and all of it's benefits to the Santa Fe area (*economically and employment wise ... to name only two*). If not a facility for higher education, why not a media production facility?

After considerable research, it is a large risk he is willing to take and it is a risk that the City of Santa Fe should support.

It is also an opportunity for the City of Santa Fe to assist in the positive development of this centrally located property ... that is currently in "*relatively run-down*" condition. Previously the renowned actress, Greer Garson, supported the arts activities on this property ... each of you are now in a position to continue this positive growth.

Regards,
Alton Walpole

(I regret I am not able to attend the public meeting)

(I am a native New Mexican and have lived in Santa Fe since graduation from the University of New Mexico in the early 1970's. I have previously conducted film classes and workshops for the College of Santa Fe, Santa Fe Community College, Stagecoach Foundation and many other organizations in the state. I am a member of the Director's Guild of America and have worked on over 20 film productions in New Mexico as a Unit Production Manager (one of my job descriptions was to hire approximately 100 local technicians and talent for each production). I have worked on all the current stages in the Santa Fe and Albuquerque areas and in multiple other locations around the State of New Mexico)

Mountainair Films Inc.

PO Box 4097

Santa Fe, New Mexico 87502

Alton Walpole

505.471.9293 office

505.660.3343 personal cell

alton@mountainairfilms.com