

Movie studio to buy New Roads mill

Pair would spend \$1.5 million on building, site

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NEW ROADS — The owners of Emerald Bayou Studios, a motion picture and television production business operating in the city's old cottonseed-oil mill, say they are now ready to buy the facility.

Linda Thurman and Marquetta Cheeks said they are committing \$1.5 million to Phase 1 of developing a soundstage, production unit and offices. They have offered the city \$250,000 for the building and plan to spend the remaining \$1.25 million to develop the site.

The studio owners told the New Roads City Council on Tuesday that while the building has been appraised at \$355,000, New Roads would receive "in-kind benefits."

The studio would hire 20 permanent employees as well as construction workers, they said. Another boost for the local economy would be the hiring of production workers and the purchase of supplies when companies come to shoot movies, television shows and music videos in Pointe Coupee and surrounding parishes, they said.

If the council approves, the company wants a 45-day due-diligence period. Construction and renovation would take three to six months. The mill for years has been used mainly as a storage site for traffic barriers and Mardi Gras floats.

Council member Clipper White brought up a problem, though he said it should not block the sale.

Noting that the company plans to use all the surrounding property, White said hundreds of cars now park next to the old mill for high school football games. He asked if that could continue.

Thurman said the cost of insurance would be prohibitive, adding she doubted the city could afford to pay the extra insurance costs. She also said Emerald Bayou will need to use almost all of the space for its work.

Council members authorized City Attorney John Wayne Jewell to prepare an ordinance approving the sale and to advertise it and set a public hearing at a future council meeting.

Thurman said a class of 24 trainees has completed a 12-week course on film production at the Jumonville campus of Louisiana Technical College. She said she expects to have

100 trained workers soon, and some members of the first class have traveled to nearby cities to work with production crews.

Mayor Sylvester Muckelroy wanted to know how many of the company's employees would be local.

Cheeks said some jobs would require specific training and experience, meaning importing people, probably from California. But she said the company plans extensive local hiring, as well as buying supplies locally.

The mayor and council members were also told that a demonstration movie made by the company with local people will be shown at a cultural celebration in early November in the City Hall parking lot.

“Are we getting rent for that?” Muckelroy asked.

“No,” Cheeks replied. “But we won't charge you admission.”