

Posted to the GA list on September 10, 2018

Subject: Film studio proposal for the Greenbelt Research Farm

Along with a few hundred others, I responded to the NCC's invitation to a site visit and open house on September 5 in order to learn more about the proposal to permit a film studio at the Greenbelt Research Farm off Woodroffe.

According to the 2013 GB Master Plan, 102 hectares of the 866-ha Research Farm is developable. (The NCC "bought" the Farm in 1988.) It comprises many buildings, largely unoccupied, except for a few that are leased to private companies. The proposed studio facilities would be on 9.6 ha, leased for 49 years. One existing building would be incorporated in the development but most of it would be new construction (4 buildings). There would be no loss of farm land and there would be buffers between it and the new development.

When asked why the development could not repurpose more existing buildings, the response was that they are either in bad shape or do not meet the studio's requirements, especially with regard to height.

There would be a number of "compensations," namely:

- the new buildings would meet the NCC's green building standards;
- hard surfaces would be reduced to the same extent as they are increased through this development;
- Black Rapids Creek would be re-naturalized (7 ha) and trail connectivity west of the Rideau River would be improved;
- the former Capital Golf Course in the Pine Grove Sector would be re-naturalized (21.5 ha).

A senior official in the NCC's real estate branch, Bill Leonard, explained that the re-naturalizations would be made possible thanks to the new lease revenues. I.e., unlike conditions of development in the City, the proponent would not finance them upfront. He estimated that 1.5 years of revenue would suffice to pay for these improvements and assured me that TriBro would be paying market rents.

The plan is to put this proposal to the NCC Board of Directors in November and proceed to detailed concept designs in early 2019. The amendment to the GB Master Plan is written specifically for this development, i.e., it is not a generic one that could see other non-federal uses on the GB as well.

There were two sets of open house boards: the NCC's and those of TriBro Studios. Access the NCC's panels from here:

<http://ncc-ccn.gc.ca/documents/proposed-amendments-to-the-greenbelt-master-plan-panels>

TriBro's are not available online but I recall one board that said the company is also eyeing another major site in Southern Ontario. Their web site says three new sites are under development (ref. <http://www.tribrostudios.com/initiatives.html>).

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*Comments:* The NCC and the Ottawa Film Office are clearly keen to see this proposal proceed. Not much detail was shown, leaving questions such as whether the infrastructure (energy & pipes) would suffice for this development and, if not, who would pay for the upgrades.

Not having to guarantee payment for the re-naturalizations also seems a major concession and raises the risk that they could not actually happen: What if Treasury Board reduces the Commission's budget to the tune of the new revenues? What if the NCC suddenly has other priorities?

One wonders how firm TriBro's intent is, given their major plans for new studios elsewhere as well.

Finally, as a veteran of the long struggle to achieve a reasonably "green" [new Master Plan](#), only to see it followed by... absolutely nothing -- an ongoing advisory group on implementation never materialized -- it irks that this proposal is breezing through in a matter of months.

Erwin