

CRAIN'S NEW YORK BUSINESS

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City film studios betting on strong second take after restrictions lift

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Getty Images

Film and production has created an estimated 1.4 million jobs in the state since 2011.

New York's film studios are betting big on a **quick rebound** for the industry when production returns from its **pandemic-induced hiatus**.

Expansion plans from Kaufman Astoria Studios and Steiner Studios in Brooklyn are set to continue once construction is allowed, and developers for new studios in Queens and Yonkers confirmed their plans are on track.

The studios' leaders face dual questions: When can construction return, and when can filming return?

"We won't be in the first wave of business to reopen, but I think we could come in the next batch," said Doug Steiner, chairman of Steiner Studios. "We are focused on making it work and making it safe."

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As consumers burn through shows on Netflix and Hulu, "the backlog for content is huge," Steiner said.

Anne del Castillo, commissioner of the Mayor's Office of Media and Entertainment, said studios and production crews are asking when they can come back.

"It is heartening to hear that question," del Castillo said, "and not a warning that they are not coming back at all."

Here is an update on some of the major expansion projects in the industry.

Steiner Studios

The waterfront operation plans to build at least 10 soundstages at the Brooklyn Navy Yard during the next several years. The studio already boasts 30 stages.

Steiner is working through permitting while awaiting approval to build the first two new stages this year. Another two will follow six months after the first project, Steiner said.

"That's all full speed ahead," he said.

The studio's most important effort is a massive back lot, which Steiner estimates could be done within two years. New York currently has no large back lots, where directors can fake city avenues.

An [increase in street filming](#) has rankled neighboring businesses. Del Castillo said the city is working with the industry to rethink how it shoots on location before filming resumes. That could make a back lot particularly useful for directors looking to forgo street shoots.

Kaufman Astoria

A new addition with two stages and 65,000 square feet of commercial offices was close to opening this spring. Hal Rosenbluth, president of the studio, said plumbers were installing toilet fixtures the day construction shut down statewide at the end of March.

"We were being constantly asked by productions looking to get in there" "When, when, when?" Rosenbluth said.

After the pandemic fades, "storylines may have to change, how they utilize people on stage may change," the studio executive said. "A lot is left to be worked out to make sure we are doing this safely. But the industry will come back."

Wildflower Studios

There is a similar mindset behind what will be the city's largest newly built studio. A development group that includes actor Robert De Niro closed in February on a \$72 million purchase of 5 acres in Astoria. Developer Adam Gordon, president of Wildflower, said the group hopes to open an estimated \$400 million studio at the site within two years, starting with groundwork this summer.

"As cities reopen, and filming restarts, there will be an explosion in content creation," Gordon said.

Bjarke Ingels Group is designing the roughly 650,000-square-foot studio.

Lionsgate Yonkers

The team behind a [\\$100 million film production studio for Lionsgate in Yonkers](#) closed a \$40 million construction loan last month and is waiting on the OK to start construction. The

developers, a partnership between Great Point Capital Management and National Resources, have the funding to build five stages.

Lionsgate—whose titles include Hunger Games and John Wick franchises—has leased out the property for at least 10 years and acquired the naming rights. The company plans to start filming there by the end of the year.

Robert Halmi, chief executive of Great Point, said the firm will double up its work schedule if necessary to meet its goal of opening to production by late fall.

Inline Play

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