

Commission gives blessing for 80-acre movie compound

By [Joe Schoenmann](#) ([contact](#))

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The man who founded the Oakley sunglasses company has his eye on creating a camera manufacturing plant and movie studio in the Las Vegas Valley.

To that end, the Clark County Commission awarded Jim Jannard, founder and CEO of Red Digital Camera, zoning changes and waivers Tuesday morning to plan a high-end digital movie camera plant, a sound studio, and homes for himself, actors and others from the movie industry on 80 acres in the far southwest valley.

Jannard, 59, was listed in 2008 by Forbes magazine as the 134th-richest man in the U.S. with about \$3 billion in assets. He told the commission he has lived in the valley for more than a year and wants to create “a facility that we’re proud of, something that fits, something that makes sense to the community.”

In an impromptu speech made as much to concerned neighbors as to commissioners, Jannard said he envisions his corporate campus as a place of “endless opportunity for people to build their dreams in a community

that we believe can use some diversification and opportunities.”

Clark County is one of the nation’s areas hit hardest by the recession.

So although neighbors expressed reservations about traffic and the proximity of Jannard’s compound to their southwest valley homes, the county’s elected representatives stressed the importance of Jannard’s plans to help diversify an economy that has long relied on gaming.

“If the gaming industry gets a cold, Southern Nevada gets sick,” Commission Chairman Rory Reid said.

While stressing the importance of addressing neighborhood concerns, he added that “jobs should be job one for anybody who is elected right now.”

Somer Hollingsworth, director and CEO of the Nevada Development Authority, was nearly dancing with excitement after the commission’s 6-1 approval. (Commissioner Chris Giunchigliani voted no after expressing concerns about public access to the 70-acre canyon behind the planned campus.)

“This is the granddaddy, this is the one you always try to bring in, one that comes along maybe once in a career,” Hollingsworth said. “When they build this thing, people are going to want to work there, to live there. Everything about this is going to be first-rate and it’s just going to springboard from there.”

The Development Authority helped Jannard find the 80 acres and is aiding the company as it jumps through government hoops to obtain sales tax abatements, Hollingsworth said.

“Anything we can qualify him to get, we’re trying for,” he said, adding that he is also going to see if Clark County can “fast-track” the proposal, “because we’re in need of jobs and this is someone who is going to put a huge capital investment in the community. Everyone in the community wins on this as it grows.”

Jannard attended the meeting with Scott Olivet, the current CEO of Oakley Inc., and a member of Red Digital Cinema’s board of directors.

Olivet said he expects the Red campus, when completed, to create 1,000 to 2,000 jobs, many of them direct Red employees and other “immediate partners.”

Those numbers don’t factor in jobs resulting from ancillary businesses — restaurants, retail and the like — that will be spurred by Jannard’s development, Hollingsworth noted.

Of course, years of rumors have swirled of this or that movie company possibly moving to Las Vegas. But those ideas never took root.

Olivet all but guaranteed this one will, in large part because of the benefits Red Digital sees in creating its headquarters in Las Vegas.

“This is Jim’s dream. His first love is photography and ... given that he chose to live in Nevada, it makes sense to build a company where he lives,” Olivet said.

The campus is also going to be large enough to house research and development, living quarters and a studio. Finally, Las Vegas’ proximity to Los Angeles is key because many of those coming to work in movies and television live in L.A.

“And Las Vegas is obviously a city that understands entertainment,” Olivet said, adding that tax benefits “are secondary” considerations of the company.

Olivet underscored the importance of having the camera production plant and studio in one place: While industry people use the camera, they will be able to report problems or make suggestions to R&D staff who are on-site.

“So you’re getting that constant feedback on design and improvements,” Olivet said. “We see a tremendous benefit to that.”

Hollingsworth said he was forced to keep news of the Red Digital studio/R&D campus “under wraps” for months. Even people such as Ed Harran, assistant director of the Nevada Film Office, had not heard about it until Wednesday afternoon.

“People have called us a mini-Hollywood or a Hollywood East,” Harran added. “But we’re not even a

Burbank, let alone Hollywood, because of the lack of infrastructure, one of them being a camera house.

“You need infrastructure with state-of-the-art production equipment, and it sounds like this guy is doing it that way.”

And, of course, he added, “you need people to come here and shoot.”

That might not be a big problem given that Jannard’s digital camera is making big waves in the film industry, said Francisco Menendez, chairman of UNLV’s Department of Film.

“People were skeptical when they heard about Red technology four years ago, but so many features have been shot with it, no one doubts it anymore,” Menendez said.

On red.com, Red Digital’s Web site, the movies “The Informant” and “Angels and Demons” and the TV show “Southland” are cited as being shot with Red Digital cameras.

The opportunity for UNLV film students to learn from having a studio and research complex “in our back yard” is an obvious benefit too, Menendez said.

And when is all this going to happen?

Olivet admitted Red Digital is eager to get moving, but he could not estimate a timeline.

“There are many stages of approvals and reviews and things that we have to go through. We’re just happy as the plans unfold.”