



Lights, camera, action command attention

Nabeelah Shaikh gets an exclusive look at Durban Film City, about to be rolled out

THE international architects behind Durban's R7.5 billion film studio touched down this week as plans for the studio become closer to being realised.

The studio, which is earmarked for the old Natal Command Site, is the project of producer Anant Singh.

eThekweni city manager Siphon Nzuza and deputy city manager for economic development and tourism, Phillip Sithole, the architects, Thanu Boonyawatana and Eduardo Robles, and Singh did a walk-about at the site on Wednesday.

The process for Singh to realise his dream has not been an easy one.

He first negotiated a deal with the city in 2003 to buy the land for R15 million. The provincial government gave him the go-ahead at the time.

However, his plans were scuppered by Pietermaritzburg businessman Sunny Gayadin, who challenged Singh's purchase agreement with a court action. Gayadin died in May.

He had claimed Singh's deal with the city was not legitimate and he maintained that he was prepared to pay R250m for the site.

Gayadin took the matter as far as the Pietermaritzburg High Court, but lost subsequent fights in the Supreme and Constitutional Courts in 2012.

The official artist's impressions of what Durban Film City will look like were released exclusively to the Sunday Tribune on Friday and are being published for the first time.

The command site will be turned into a "world-class" mixed-use facility and two major hotel groups have



Sudhir Pragjee (Videovision Entertainment), Eduardo Robles (Creative Kingdom), Siphon Nzuza (city manager), Anant Singh (Videovision Entertainment), Phillip Sithole (deputy city manager) and Thanu Boonyawatana (Creative Kingdom) were at the site on Wednesday.

already shown interest in the development. There is potential for a four or five-star hotel being built as part of the project.

The architects behind Durban Film City are world renowned duo Robles and Boonyawatana, both of Creative Kingdom Architects.

They were responsible for famous buildings such as the Palace of the Lost City, the Palm Islands in Dubai, the first Ferrari Hotel in Spain,

and the Pearls of uMhlanga, also owned by Singh.

Singh said the project was a "dream come true".

"It has been a long wait. The

Mandela movie took 20 years to reach fruition and this taught me that patience eventually pays off.

"Yes, this film studio took ages to reach realisation but it is finally happening and once it's ready, it is going to be amazing for Durban and for South Africa," said Singh.

He said two international feature films and a local television series have already been bagged to be shot at Durban Film City, even before it is built.

"Construction is expected to start early next year and we plan to have it functional by mid 2018.

"I believe we can work on this quite swiftly and it's going to result in enormous job opportunities for the city. The rest of the process will be handled with architects electronically," said Singh.

Singh said his vision for the Durban Film City was in line with building a creative hub for the province.

"We've had great talent coming out of KZN and I want Film City to become a hub that will continue to nurture our talent.

"It's going to be a space for creative geniuses to enjoy, a space where artists can improve their talents and sell their art as well," said Singh.

Nzuza and Sithole said they were both ecstatic about the opportunities that Film City would create for Durban.

They said they had seen how other film studios have been beneficial to other South African cities.

"The Film City will boost morale in Durban. The fact that it will be housed within a tourism precinct is also great for the province.

"It's going to be wonderful for us because of the investment opportunities and it will boost investor confidence," said Nzuza.

Nzuza said the film studio would produce the best talents and create job opportunities for young people. He said he was proud that in his five months as city manager, he has been able to help conclude the process.

"I am optimistic about all that this project will bring for the city. It's a great time to be living in Durban."

nabeelah.shaikh@inl.co.za