

**REPORT OF  
THE MAYOR'S TASK FORCE ON FILMING**

**VANCOUVER**

**October 2007**

## TASK FORCE ON FILM INDUSTRY

### INTRODUCTION

Mayor Sam Sullivan launched the Task Force on the Film Industry to support Vancouver's film industry and improve its connection with local neighbourhoods (see media release in Appendix 1).

The objective of the Task Force is to recommend practical ways in which the City can help sustain the local industry and be sensitive to the needs of neighbourhoods and communities. Terms of reference for the Task Force are listed in Appendix 2.

The Mayor appointed Shawn Williamson, CEO of Brightlight Pictures, to chair the Task Force and work with Councillor Elizabeth Ball on this initiative. Members of the Task Force are listed in Appendix 2 and include representatives from Canadian and American production industry associations, residential organizations, a BIA representative, the Vancouver Police Department, Vancouver Park Board, Engineering Services, Real Estate Services, a location manager and an independent film producer.

### BACKGROUND

#### 1. The Industry in Vancouver

The motion picture industry in Vancouver is part of a billion dollar province wide industry, providing highly-skilled, well-paying jobs for technicians, craftspeople and artists, mainly in the greater Vancouver area. The production of feature films, television shows and commercials, and the infrastructure required to support that production, is an important economic generator for the province. Vancouver is the third busiest filming centre in North America, after Los Angeles and New York.

There was a total of \$1.23 billion spent on film, television and animation projects in British Columbia last year. According to the BC Film Commission, more than 200 productions were completed in B.C. in 2006. These included: 53 feature films, 39 television series, 63 movies-of-the-week, 13 television pilots, five miniseries, 30 documentaries, 161 short films and 18 animation projects.

The City of Vancouver's Filming and Special Events Office has a staff of four film liaisons, a supervisor, a manager and a clerk who deal with all film requests. In 2006 they generated more than 4,000 permits for film activity within the city. 'Guidelines for Filming' were established by Council in 1980 (and revised in 1988) to help facilitate the special requirements of the film industry, particularly the need to work as much as sixteen hour days, and to allow film activity on weekends. The 'guidelines' serve as the basis for all decisions made by Film Office staff.

## 2. Role of the City's filming office

The Film Office, part of Engineering Services, is responsible for managing location filming in Vancouver neighbourhoods. Challenged with helping to facilitate the unusual requirements of the film industry while at the same time balancing the rights of residents to peaceful enjoyment of their homes, the Film Office monitors usage of specific neighbourhoods, and works with Traffic Management, Vancouver Police and other City departments to make sure impacts of film work are minimized.

## 3. Community Impacts

Many of Vancouver's unique neighbourhoods are highly desirable as filming locations. While this is beneficial for the promotion of the City as a filming destination, there can be community impacts associated with this filming including loss of parking, traffic impacts, and late night filming. Some locations are used so frequently that the residents suffer from film 'burn-out' and the film industry is advised of filming 'hot spots' for which the City establishes temporary moratoriums on filming.

## Recommendations

The Task Force reviewed ways that the City could further support and promote the film industry. The following summarizes recommendations on this.

### 1. Hub Site & Parking Development

The downtown is a key strategic filming location for the industry. However, space for productions to work and park downtown are becoming scarce as the supply of surface lots continues to go down and the demand for other uses of public space increases.

Establishing 'filming hubs' and parking locations for filming trucks and equipment would provide dedicated sites for use by the film industry as a base of operations. These would reduce set up times and operating costs for the film industry and enhance the desirability of Vancouver as a filming destination.

Staff from the City and Film Commission would need to play a key role to identify possible City-owned sites, as well as developing strategies for funding and management of such locations.

**Recommendation:** That staff from the City of Vancouver and the Film Commission identify and implement 'filming hubs' in downtown Vancouver with dedicated parking, electrical power, internet and water hook ups.

**Recommendation:** That staff from the City of Vancouver explore opportunities for interim use of vacant City properties, and/or the creation of additional parking areas, for film parking and staging particularly in the downtown core.

## 2. Minimize the ‘filming footprint’

The film industry is facing growing pressures in terms of availability of space for parking vehicles and equipment during filming. As well, the more equipment used, the greater the impact, not just at the filming location, but in surrounding areas.

The film industry should be encouraged to minimize the number of trucks and amount of equipment required for their activity.

The filming industry relies on temporary power sources to operate on-location equipment, and this is often done through the use of fossil-fuelled generators. The industry should explore alternatives including temporary direct connections to the electrical power grid to reduce the requirement for vehicle idling.

*Recommendation:* That the film industry work to reduce the size and impacts of their ‘circus’ vehicles and work trucks in both residential and businesses areas.

*Recommendation:* That the film industry continue to investigate ways to promote the sustainability of the industry.

## 3. Olympics

Vancouver will remain open to filming during the 2010 Olympic & Paralympic Games - although scheduling may be limited.

It will be important to continue a dialogue between the City and the film industry in order for the industry to understand what to expect and to be able to respond to changing conditions as a result of this major event.

*Recommendation:* That the City maintain an ongoing dialogue with the industry through the B.C. Film Commission to confirm Vancouver will NOT be closed to filming during this period and inform productions how this event may impact their work.

## 4. Traffic Control & Signage

The City of Vancouver and the industry have initiated a series of meetings to outline acceptable traffic control arrangements at filming locations. This was done to bring traffic control for film activity more in line with arrangements used for street construction.

Parking availability is also a very sensitive issue, particularly in retail areas of the City. Businesses can be negatively impacted when drivers don’t bother to read the specific times on meter hoods or no stopping signs, and just drive away.

To minimize impacts on businesses no-stopping signs should be installed in a minimum time required for enforcement, rather than well in advance of filming, and signs should be removed shortly after completion of filming.

*Recommendation:* Endorse the City’s new traffic control plan for filming, as developed by Engineering Services and Vancouver Police Emergency Operational Planning Section staff.

*Recommendation:* Explore opportunities to improve the timeliness of installing and removing ‘no parking’ signage, particularly in commercial areas.

## **5. Management of hot spots**

The City carries out an important role in monitoring the impacts of filming and the level of tolerance to filming in local neighbourhoods. The levels of tolerance vary depending on the area and the type of impacts, but the City evaluates the tolerance by examining a number of factors, including frequency of use, type of work to be done, other events/activities in the neighbourhood and impacts of activity on residents

Once the City establishes a particular address as a “sensitive location” the information is shared with location managers and scouts who are looking for locations, and they are advised not to show it to a producer while they are on the list.

In neighbourhoods where filming occurs frequently, production companies should ensure the accuracy & timeliness of information on impacts provided to residents and businesses and be prepared to meet with the community to discuss them.

Neighbourhood meetings and exit polling by the City to monitor issues should be expanded to facilitate communications and neighbourhood input on an on-going basis where feasible, especially in sensitive areas. This could be done sporadically (4 times per year) through hardcopy survey forms (with return postage provided), e-mail or through the City’s website.

*Recommendation:* That the City continue to monitor local tolerance for filming and identify hot spots for filming using the current process and criteria for assessing impacts on individual properties and for establishing temporary moratoriums and filming restrictions.

*Recommendation:* Create location specific guidelines for areas with unusual filming concerns or issues - for example, how to deal with horses in Southlands, special business hours for Chinatown, specific parking concerns in Strathcona and notification procedures for new condos in Yaletown.

*Recommendation:* That all productions be required to issue thank you letters upon leaving locations with high impact, and encourage citizen feedback on any concerns.

## 6. Polling/notification

The City requires production companies to carry out polling to gauge the level of neighbourhood support for filming that exceeds the City's Filming Guidelines, and has the potential to create disruption due to late night filming or filming in sensitive areas.

The current process puts the onus on the production to do the polling. Production assistants distribute a letter (approved by the City) outlining the proposed work, then go door-to-door seeking signatures on a petition approving the request, although residents are given the option to respond directly to the Film Office if they prefer. Film Office staff then analyse the results of the poll, with greater weight given to those most impacted by the work, and determine whether the work can proceed as outlined, whether adjustments to the plan be made, or another location found.

Some of the drawbacks with the current process are the difficulty in finding residents at home and willing to answer their doors to strangers, the reluctance of some residents to sign a petition because of privacy concerns, public concern about the objectivity of a production company carrying out the polling, and difficulties in accessing residential strata buildings.

Polling & informational letters could be improved by reformatting them with production information on one side and letter from the City on the reverse. The City letter could be a "warmer" letter explaining the City's filming guidelines and Council's general support for the industry. Map enclosures outlining parking requirements and equipment placement should also be considered.

Objectivity could also be improved by having the City conduct its own polling in 'hot spots'.

Privacy could be improved for those being polled by providing alternatives to signing a petition such as response by e-mail or phone. However, an explanation should be included with the letter stating the requirements of disclosure under the provisions of the Freedom of Information/Protection of Privacy legislation.

Access to public buildings such as new residential strata buildings is difficult. Staff and the film industry should continue to explore ways of getting into secure buildings. Options include identifying property managers, contacting and encouraging communication between residents. Notices should be posted inside building, not on outside door. Notification and polling letters should be directed to individual owners in multi-unit buildings wherever possible.

Production managers should alert business/residents as early as possible when filming is proposed in a busy area. Advance notice, even without specific details of the work, helps commercial business owners plan around the filming disruptions. More specific information can be distributed closer to the date.

**Recommendation:** That City staff revise the polling and notification processes to improve objectivity, deal with privacy concerns, improve access to residential strata buildings and provide timely and accurate information to residents.

## 7. Working Together Collaboratively

There should be an ongoing commitment to maintain communications with the film community and the City of Vancouver and improve the way filming is managed in the City. Staff from City departments that have a role in filming (Engineering, Park Board, Police, Real Estate Services, and Licensing) should be represented. The Film Commission could also consider holding similar meetings with other municipalities and the City to help standardize processes.

The provision of adequate staffing resources to service the filming industry will ensure timely response to filming requests, and monitoring of filming impacts. The current level of resources currently does not provide staff with sufficient time to scope requested filming locations in advance of filming.

This advance scoping work could help staff identify potential issues with filming, help mitigate community impacts and facilitate timely approvals. On-site monitoring of film activity for compliance would assure the public that the City was committed to ensuring the activity was proceeding as approved.

While having staff available for on-site planning meetings and to follow up with visits to set while filming is taking place is important, the requirement by Parks Board to have on-site Park staff on set at all times filming is occurring adds significantly to production costs, and should be reviewed.

*Recommendation:* That the BC Film Commission coordinate twice-yearly meetings between senior City staff responsible for filming and the film community to maintain communications with the industry.

*Recommendation:* That the City of Vancouver review the level of staff resources in the Film Office in Engineering Services and Parks to ensure there are adequate resources to respond to industry needs and to carry out compliance monitoring on a cost recovery basis.

## 8. Industry Promotion

While the primary responsibility for promoting the industry in British Columbia rests with provincial agencies, there are some things the Mayor can do to support the Film Commission's work.

*Recommendation:* That the Mayor consider travelling to Los Angeles with representatives from the B.C. Film Commission and the Motion Picture Production Industry Association on one of their regular economic development missions to meet with studio executives to encourage productions to come to Vancouver.

*Recommendation:* That the Mayor's office create a "welcome" letter to producers of new projects considering coming to the Vancouver to film

## 9. Public Education

To increase the level of comfort the public has with filming, information could be disseminated through the following means:

- The City Film Office website should provide more information for residents and businesses about filming and its impacts, including a possible link to the Communities section of the B.C. Film Commission website.
- Neighbourhood meetings to explain the unique requirements of film, and to gather feedback on film activities in an area. These could be done at regularly scheduled meetings held by the various neighbourhood associations.
- Educational Handout for “what to expect” to be created and delivered with film notification and/or polling letters. This could be developed in conjunction with the B.C. Film Commission for all municipalities, posted on bulletin boards in Community centers and libraries in close proximity to filming areas and re-distributed in busy filming areas every two (2) years.
- An informational compact disc could be developed about filming - its benefits, impacts, special equipment and requirements, Clips from movies shot in Vancouver, could be included. This disc could be delivered to residents in high volume filming areas. The CD should be created by industry, not City, and could be distributed with the handout.

*Recommendation:* That City and Film Commission staff educate the public about filming benefits, impacts and processes used by the City to manage filming.

## 10. Code of Conduct for Film Crews

The British Columbia Film Commission has established a Code of Conduct for production personnel.

*Recommendation:* That the film industry ensure that B.C. Film Commission’s Code of Conduct is distributed to all production personnel to remind them of the expectations of the production about their activities, both film related and personal, while filming in local communities. Parking, smoking, garbage removal, noise and adherence to permits are all covered in the Code.

### Conclusion:

The relationship between the film industry, City government and the citizens of Vancouver has been a very positive one, and has led to Vancouver becoming the most popular production centre in Canada, and the third most popular in the world. More than 35,000 British Columbians are employed in the film industry, and the economic spin-offs in other industries are equally important.



As Vancouver's last remaining open spaces are developed, and as redevelopment increases density, the challenges facing the film industry are significant - independent of current issues associated with Canada's currency.

Therefore a joint effort by the industry and the City to support Vancouver as an important centre for filming is required.

We thank Mayor Sullivan for taking a leadership role in identifying the need to start this dialogue, and look forward to working with him and City staff on finding viable solutions.

Press Release

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE  
October 3, 2006

## Mayor's plan will keep film industry an economic generator

VANCOUVER, BC - Mayor Sam Sullivan today launched the Task Force on the Film Industry, a new initiative aimed at supporting Vancouver's film industry and improving its connection with local neighbourhoods.

The Mayor and Councillor Elizabeth Ball were joined by leaders in the film industry, business groups and community organizations to kick off the Task Force on the set of *Amped*, a television pilot produced by Vancouver's Brightlight Pictures, for Fox 21 and Spike.

"Film and television productions offer a significant economic and cultural benefit to our City and we must ensure that Vancouver remains one of the most sought-after locations for filming," said Mayor Sullivan. "This Task Force stems from City Council's commitment to economic development, and our strategy to create a more competitive business climate in Vancouver."

The Mayor's Task Force will report to City Council in early 2007 on ways the City can support the film industry through:

- A co-operative, sustainable and integrated approach from all City Departments, including Park Board, to facilitate better service to the industry;
- A review of current film production practices, guidelines and costs/fees;
- A review of opportunities to secure production and location facilities for the film industry;
- Initiatives to reduce impacts of film activity on business and residential neighbourhoods, schools and parks.

The Task Force will also recommend ways in which the City and Mayor's Office can promote Vancouver to the international film industry. "As Mayor, I want to let the world know that the City of Vancouver is not only a fantastic place to invest; we welcome film and television productions in our City," Mayor Sullivan added.

The Mayor has appointed Vancouver entrepreneur Shawn Williamson, CEO of Brightlight Pictures, to chair the Task Force. Members include representatives from various industry associations, neighbourhood organizations, a business improvement society, the Vancouver Police Department, Vancouver Park Board, a location manager and an independent film producer.

"The broad community and industry representation on this Task Force will enable us to develop recommendations around areas of interest to both the industry and to local neighbourhoods," said Councillor Ball. "This is also a wonderful opportunity for Council to encourage the creation of additional jobs for highly-skilled artisans, craftspeople, technicians and artists who work in film and television production."

"As an entrepreneur and film producer, I know Vancouver has the potential to become an even bigger player internationally," said Williamson. "This is an industry that is sensitive to the

needs of local communities in which we operate, and I am thrilled to be working with the Mayor and Councillor Ball, along with members of the industry and the community, to ensure that film and television productions will survive and thrive in this City.”

The Mayor’s Task Force on the Film Industry is the latest policy initiative supported by the Mayor’s Office over the past six months, in addition to EcoDensity, new Economic Development Guiding Principles, and the upcoming Public Disorder initiative.

## Mayor's Film Task Force Members & Terms of Reference

### MEMBERS

Mayor Sam Sullivan  
Councillor Elizabeth Ball  
Shawn Williamson, Brightlight Pictures (CHAIR)  
Gordon Hardwick, BC Film Commission  
Don Cott, Alliance of Motion Picture and Television Producers  
Tracey Wood, Canadian Film & Television Producers Association  
Michael Haldane, Commercial Producers Association of BC  
Bruce Brownstein, Location Manager  
Grace Gilroy, Producer  
Jack Fraser, Strathcona Residents Association  
Frank Shorrock, Shaughnessy Property Owners Association  
Leonore Sali, Gastown Business Improvement Society  
Inspector Steve Sweeney, Vancouver Police Department  
Representatives of the City of Vancouver and the Vancouver Board of Parks and Recreation

### TERMS OF REFERENCE

The Mayor's Task Force on the Film Industry is made up of industry, community and government representatives. The Task Force will report out this Winter on ways the City can support the filming industry through:

- A co-operative, sustainable and integrated approach from all City Departments, including Park Board, to facilitate better service to the industry;
- A review of current film production practices, guidelines and costs/fees;
- A review of opportunities to secure production and location facilities for the film industry;
- Initiatives to reduce impacts of film activity on business and residential neighbourhoods, schools and parks.

In particular, the task force will review and make recommendations on:

- Guidelines for mitigating the impacts of filming - including frequency and duration of film shoots - in neighbourhoods;
- A process for polling neighbourhood support for filming and for providing adequate notification of impacts and timing;
- A process for soliciting ongoing neighbourhood feedback on production impacts, and opportunities for educating the public about the nature of the film industry and its benefits to the community;
- Guidelines to assist the industry to reduce their requirement for Police support and associated costs at film locations;
- An inventory of City-owned locations which might be used to facilitate staging of filming equipment, particularly in support of downtown film locations;
- City staffing support and fees for facilitating film activities;
- Co-ordination among civic departments that can provide support for filming;
- Ways that the industry can limit the number of vehicles required to support filming in sensitive locations;
- Recommendations for dealing with impacts of the 2010 Olympic and Paralympic Winter Games on filming in the City;

Recommendations for how the City, and the Mayor's Office, can promote Vancouver as a competitive destination for filming.