

REPORT OF THE CHIEF LEGISLATIVE ANALYST

DATE: November 2, 2009

TO: Honorable Members of the Jobs and Business Development Committee

FROM: Gerry F. Miller 

Council File No: 08-1783
Assignment No: 09-10-1717

SUBJECT: 10 Hardest to Film Locations in Los Angeles

SUMMARY

At your request, the following report provides information on hard to film locations in the City of Los Angeles. On October 9, 2009, the City Council adopted a recommendation of the Jobs and Business Development Committee to instruct the Chief Legislative Analyst (CLA) and City Administrative Officer (CAO) to identify the 10 most difficult locations in the City of Los Angeles to film and seek solutions to the problems associated with filming at those locations. Local 399, the Motion Picture and Theatrical Trade Teamsters, provided information concerning several locations in the Los Angeles area have been identified as particularly difficult to film. These sites include government, private civic, and private properties.

RECOMMENDATION

That the City Council:

1. Request FilmLA to report on a quarterly basis on the 10 Hardest to Film locations; and
2. Request FilmLA to prepare a rental cost survey of frequently filmed locations.

BACKGROUND

Location managers are the link between the directors, producers, and artists creating a film or television production and the scores of people – electricians, set builders, make-up artists, and others – needed to make that production happen. They are also the people responsible for obtaining film locations, equipment, and permits. Location managers oversee coordination of all technical elements of a production on the ground and have expertise relative to the ease or difficulty in filming at any given location.


The Motion Picture and Theatrical Trade Teamsters, Local 399, represent Location Managers. Through their communication networks, they have provided information to the City concerning locations that are difficult to film. These locations are the AT&T Building in Downtown Los Angeles, County General Hospital, Farmers and Merchants Bank in Downtown Los Angeles, Griffith Park Observatory, the Japanese Heritage Museum, Library Park, the Los Angeles Chamber of Commerce Headquarters, the Los Angeles Zoo, and Terminal Annex in Downtown Los Angeles.

Sites were identified by location managers as difficult to film due to rental costs, restrictions on filming at the site, contractual requirements that negatively affect business decisions, restrictions on food service, and other issues.

Some locations are simply difficult to film, either as a result of their location or due to program activities at the location. Filming at the physical location of the Hollywood Sign is limited by a narrow, mountain road; limited parking facilities on the mountain; and extremely steep terrain. Filming at the Los Angeles Zoo is severely restricted due to on-going construction projects that restrict transportation throughout the facility. Further, the Zoo must comply with USDA and Association of Zoo and Aquarium regulations that may affect decisions regarding filming.

Based on an initial survey with identified property locations, it appears that communication issues and history are factors in the determination of difficulty. Perceptions of difficulty by location managers at times relate to experiences that are several years old. The current ease or difficulty of a given location isn't fully known as location managers have not gone back to a site due to historical difficulty. In other cases, such as with the Zoo, clear communication of guidelines and limitations due to construction activities and other determining factors would help location managers better understand legitimate difficulties and help both parties arrive at a solution that allows filming to proceed.

Lack of data creates a serious limitation in evaluating difficulty to film based on facility rental costs. There have been no comparison surveys of frequently filmed locations that can shed light on which rates are fair. Such a survey could provide context for the evaluation of whether a location is difficult to film due to excessive rental costs.



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Analyst