

REPORT OF THE CHIEF LEGISLATIVE ANALYST

DATE: October 27, 2014

TO: Honorable Members of the Ad Hoc Committee
on Film and TV production Jobs

FROM: Sharon M. Tso 
Chief Legislative Analyst

Assignment No: 14-09-0644

IMPROVING EFFICIENCY AND COORDINATION OF FILM PERMITS

SUMMARY

Motion (Krekorian-Price-O'Farrell, CF 14-0471) included instructions that the Chief Legislative Analyst (CLA) to report on efforts by the Department of Recreation and Parks (RAP) and the Los Angeles Department of Transportation (LADOT) to improve efficiency and coordination of permits related to film, television and commercial productions. The Motion also requested various departments to report on their efforts to improve permit services through the data systems improvements.

Both RAP and LADOT report that they had previously experienced staff reductions that created difficulty in effectively responding to film permit requests. Both departments report that they have increased staffing in these areas and are able to meet existing services needs. Both departments also report that additional staff additions would be necessary to further increase their ability to meet the needs of film, television, and commercial productions.

Although short-term solutions have been put in place, additional evaluation is necessary to ensure that improved staffing levels are assigned to these services over the long term. Additional analysis by the City Administrative Officer (CAO), RAP and LADOT to identify workforce and performance criteria and staffing levels necessary to meet the needs of film, television, and commercial productions could address this issue. It is critical that these criteria incorporate timely delivery of service as a key metric. Further, additional evaluation is required to determine whether the fees charged by RAP and LADOT are adequate to meet the service delivery levels needed.

Finally, additional work efforts are needed by LADOT, RAP, the Los Angeles Fire Department (LAFD), and FilmLA to improve their informations systems, with follow-up reports to Council concerning their progress in these efforts.

RECOMMENDATIONS

That the City Council:

1. Instruct the Department of Recreation and Parks (RAP) and City Administrative Officer (CAO) to evaluate staffing options for the Film Park Office that include

additional full time staff to ensure continuity and consistency in the provision of services to the film, television, and commercial industry;

2. Instruct the CAO and RAP to develop workload and performance measures for the Park film Office, including consideration of timely service delivery, to ensure that adequate staffing can be identified and assigned to this service;
3. Instruct the CAO and RAP to conduct a review of the park filming fee, and adjust as necessary;
4. Instruct the Department of Transportation (DOT) and CAO to develop workload and performance measures for sign posting services, including consideration of timely service delivery, to ensure that adequate staffing can be identified and assigned to this service;
5. Instruct the CAO to review the DOT sign posting fee and determine whether the fee includes all relevant cost factors, and adjust as necessary;
6. Instruct the CAO and DOT to identify a source of funds to acquire additional equipment and software necessary to improve efficiency in the preparation, assembly, and posting of signs; and
7. Instruct the Chief Legislative Analyst, with the LADOT, RAP, the Los Angeles Fire Department, and FilmLA, to report in 60 days on the status of information systems upgrades and improvements.

FISCAL IMPACT STATEMENT

There is no fiscal impact on the City General Fund associated with this action.

BACKGROUND

Motion (Krekorian-Price-O'Farrell, CF 14-0471) approved by Council June 3, 2014, included instructions that the Chief Legislative Analyst (CLA) report on efforts by the Department of Recreation and Parks (RAP) and the Los Angeles Department of Transportation (LADOT) to improve efficiency and coordination of permits related to film, television and commercial productions.

The Motion also requested various departments to report on their efforts to improve permit services through the information systems improvements. This report provides a summary of efforts by RAP, LADOT, LAFD, and FilmLA to evaluate the information systems upgrades needed to improve permit efficiency and next steps to improve those systems.

Recreation and Parks

The Department of Recreation and Parks (RAP) has a long history of providing services to film, television, and commercial productions. The City's parks are ideal locations for many different

types of productions, and therefore a significant opportunity for the City to support production activities.

But the RAP relationship with productions is unique among City departments. Most City departments are contacted concerning a production once a permit has been initiated with FilmLA. Generally, the production has determined what their initial location and production needs are, has filed for a permit with FilmLA, and then FilmLA reaches out to City departments to help fill the needs of the production.

At RAP, interaction with a production begins well before a permit has been opened. Location managers scout park locations to determine the suitability of the site for their production. They will often submit a provisional reservation on a park location while they work out details of other locations and production scheduling. Once all of the production details have gained some clarity, then the permit is opened and some clarity is provided as to the details of the production activity in the park, including the actual days and times that filming will occur.

This unique interaction, then, requires a different level of staffing and data management. RAP is required to assist location scouts and managers prior to a permit application, manage provisional and final reservations, and then, during the production, monitor the filming activities. All of these steps are staff-intensive and require data management protocols and systems to effectively communicate with the industry.

Until recently, RAP did not have adequate staffing to meet the on-going and time-sensitive demands of the industry. As indicated in their report of September 3, 2014, however, RAP indicates that they now have staffing to improve their service delivery. But the report indicates that additional staff are needed to ensure that they are able to provide full service.

In addition, RAP reports that they have initiated a “buddy system” to ensure consistency and continuity in communications with production staff. One of the issues associated with the RAP staffing plan is that Park Film Office is staffed with part-time positions. There have been problems in communications among staff internally, resulting in confusion for production staff. This “buddy system” is intended to improve communications internally and provide clear information in a timely manner to productions.

Finally, RAP indicates that a fee increase is needed to ensure full funding to meet staffing needs associated with the Park Film Office. The current fee is \$450 per day to film on park property. The request is to raise the fee to \$562.50.

Additional Considerations

Additional review of the Park Film Office staffing plan should be conducted. Initial park reservations and permit processing may be improved if more full-time positions were dedicated to these services, rather than the current part-time staffing solution. Timely responses to industry requests is critical to ensure high-quality, timely, consistent City services to meet industry needs. Additional full-time, dedicated staff may be more appropriate to provide that level of service.

In addition, the Park Film Office should develop clear workload and performance measures to ensure that an effective staffing plan can be developed. Timely response should be a key factor in setting those measures. This is essential to allow RAP managers and City decision-makers an ability to better evaluate the provision of service and determine staffing levels.

The fees charged by RAP should also be reviewed further. The RAP indicates that fees should be increase, but the detail necessary to support this fee increase is not provided. Analysis by the CAO is required to verify and recommend the level of the fee. A review of and revisions to the staffing plan would inform the appropriate fees to be charged for production days in City parks.

It should be noted that some portion of the work RAP conducts prior to the application for a film permit may not, and cannot, be captured in the fees charged. A production may make several requests for film locations, then never use any of them. Or they may review and reserve several parks, then select only one in the end. As a result, staff costs associated with these efforts may not be reimbursed.

There are difficulties in assessing a fee for these services, as they occur prior to the issuance of a permit and the permit is the vehicle for the City to collect its fees. The City may be prohibited from incorporated these costs in to the fee structure as they do not relate specifically to the service provided through the permit. It may not be cost effective for the City to collect a fee for this pre-permit workload, but RAP should have a way to recognize those costs and decision-makers should be aware of the degree of services offered at no charge. Staffing levels need to reflect that this part of the service is essential, even though it may not be reimbursed.

These actions should provide greater insight into the costs associated with the services provided, workload and performance measures that will allow RAP to establish an efficient and effective staffing plan, a fee that will be appropriately set to cover costs associated with these service, and identification of the service costs that the City provides to the film, television, and commercial production industry that serve as the City contribution to support their efforts.

Further, these actions should allow RAP to develop greater flexibility and resilience in their staffing plans should conditions in the future negatively affect staffing levels. As a fee-supported service, RAP must be able to ensure that staff are available to provide the service. The information developed in this process should assist RAP in more quickly and effectively respond.

Los Angeles Department of Transportation

LADOT was instructed to report on their sign posting services related to film activities. Concerns were raised that temporary no parking signs were not posted in a consistent or timely manner. In their report of July 30, 2014, LADOT indicates that the Paint and Sign Operations unit had experienced a reduction in staffing that caused the delays in sign posting. The staff shortage has since been remedied.

LADOT has reviewed their current staffing plan in the Paint and Sign Operations in order to identify ways to better serve the film industry. They suggest that a solution would be to create an additional sign crew that would work during afternoons and weekends. This additional crew

would allow the unit to extend service coverage to 7 days a week. They estimate annual costs for this crew to be \$475,000, including overhead. LADOT also indicates that \$160,000 is needed to acquire equipment and software upgrades to improve their delivery of services.

The LADOT report also reports on the amount of fees collected over the last seven years and an explanation of their current fee structure for sign posting.

Additional Considerations

The LADOT report notes that sign postings related to film, television, and commercial permits accounts for 52% of the total signs assembled and posted by the Paint and Sign Operations unit. The remaining signs relate to demonstrations, public events, construction, utility work, and other similar activities. LADOT is not able to charge the posting fee for some of these obligations, such as demonstrations. As a result, LADOT is able to recover their costs for only a portion of the work completed by the Paint and Sign unit.

One element of the service provided relates to the signs available for posting. LADOT maintains a stock of pre-printed signs that they are able to deploy quickly. But many film, television, and commercial productions do not operate within the times listed in the pre-printed signs. This either requires LADOT to post signs with longer no-parking restrictions or to print custom signs. Posting restrictions greater than the period required creates negative impacts on the neighborhoods where filming occurs, while printing custom signs takes additional staff and materials.

Similar to staffing issues identified in the RAP Film Office, additional consideration should be given to the workload and performance measures in the Paint and Sign Operations unit. These measures should include consideration of the time sensitivity of their work efforts. With effective measures in place, decision-makers could more effectively monitor and address staffing matters that may arise in the future. Again, LADOT must ensure that adequate staffing is available to support this fee-supported service. LADOT should develop greater flexibility and resilience in their staffing plans to address conditions in the future that could negatively affect staffing levels.

In addition, further review of the LADOT posting fee may be warranted. It may be appropriate that fees reflect whether pre-printed signs or custom signs are produced, for example. In addition, the equipment and materials needs for the Paint and Sign Operations unit may not be fully reflected in the fee structure. The CAO and LADOT should review the current fees and report any adjustments that may be necessary.

Information Systems

Several departments, most notably RAP, LADO, and the LAFD, would benefit from enhanced information systems integration with FilmLA. Some permit information must be manually input two or three times, depending on film permit requirements and the department involved. Efforts are needed to ensure that these information systems are connected and that the number of times that data is entered is limited to ensure accuracy and efficiency in permit processing.

LADOT has recently updated their TEAMS information system to increase efficiency in film permit data management. These improvements may have components that could be transferred to or incorporated into information systems improvements for other departments. Another important information system available for use is the Public Works Street Reservation System. Departments already have access to and review data in this system as part of the film permit review process. Although TEAMS provides for detailed management of sign posting information, including staff scheduling functions, the system does not yet share data directly with FilmLA's Online Permit System (OPS).

At this stage, several interested City departments have formed a working group to evaluate the information systems currently in use and identify opportunities to build on those systems rather than creating new systems. The working group will work with FilmLA to determine the scope of the services needed, the systems that would be most appropriate to meet the scope requirements, and the resources needed to implement those system improvements.

Initially, the working group has determined that there are two types of information system needs. First, several departments currently cannot directly draw data from or input data to the FilmLA permit database. This requires that either they or FilmLA staff re-enter data multiple times into their proprietary systems. The intent for these departments is to ensure that all databases are able to share information and streamline data sharing. This should provide for a quicker response as City staff would not be entering data but rather analyzing the permit. It would also reduce errors that could occur through duplicate data entry. Second, some departments would seek to use permit data to streamline staff assignments for production monitoring. This effort would build on final, approved permit terms to allow departments to more efficiently assign and direct staff resources.

The Department of Recreation and Parks and the Los Angeles Fire Department are now in the process of documenting their work rules in a manner that would allow programmers to develop web-based systems that could connect to and share data with FilmLA. Consideration was given to the development of a more comprehensive systems solution with the assistance of the Information Technology Agency. It was determined, though, that this approach would require significant funding and up to two years to implement. The working group determined that the most expeditious solution was for these departments to develop these information systems improvements with current in-house and contractual resources.

In addition, LADOT will need to develop an interface with OPS to ensure that data is efficiently shared between both systems. LADOT is currently discussing the technical details with FilmLA and will report at a later date on their progress. LADOT has a separate funding request related to this systems matter pending before Council. Once approved, LADOT and FilmLA can move forward on this integration effort.



John Wickham
Analyst