



City of Richmond

Report to Committee

To: Parks, Recreation and Cultural Services Committee

Date: May 30, 2021

From: Marie Fenwick
Director, Arts, Culture and Heritage Services

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Re: 2020 Richmond Film Office Year in Review

Staff Recommendation

That the staff report titled, "2020 Richmond Film Office Year in Review," dated May 30, 2021, from the Director, Arts, Culture and Heritage Services, be circulated to industry stakeholders for their information.

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REPORT CONCURRENCE		
ROUTED TO:	CONCURRENCE	CONCURRENCE OF GENERAL MANAGER
Finance Division	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
Economic Development	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
SENIOR STAFF REPORT REVIEW	INITIALS: 	APPROVED BY CAO

Staff Report

Origin

The City of Richmond has had a dedicated Film Office since 2007. One of the key mandates of the Richmond Film Office is to provide a “one-stop shop” resource for film productions, as well as provide centralized services to Richmond businesses and residents affected by filming. In 2018, Council adopted Policy 1000–Filming on Location in Richmond which formally acknowledges the economic and social benefits of filming.

The purpose of this report is to provide an overview of the 2020 film activity in the City, as well as to advise of early indicators for 2021.

This report supports Council’s Strategic Plan 2018-2022 Strategy #7 A Supported Economic Sector:

Facilitate diversified economic growth through innovative and sustainable policies, practices and partnerships.

7.1 Demonstrate leadership through strategic partnerships, collaborations and exploring innovative and emerging economic practices and technical advancements.

7.2 Encourage a strong, diversified economic base while preserving agricultural land and maximizing the use of industrial land.

7.3 Attract businesses to locate in Richmond and support employment and training opportunities in Richmond as we grow.

This report supports Council’s endorsed 2019-2024 Richmond Arts Strategy Objective 3.3:

Broaden the economic potential and contribution of the arts.

3.3.3 Continue to create favorable conditions for the filming industry in Richmond.

This report supports Council’s endorsed Resilient Economy Strategy Actions 5.6.2.2

Continue to support film and television work in Richmond.

Background

The Richmond Film Office oversees the production of and facilitates filming activities in Richmond. The office processes filming applications, provides permits for filming activity on City-owned properties, and assists with location scouting within the City. Staff facilitate all City services required for filming and coordinates invoicing for those services. The most common services include policing, staff liaisons, location rentals and use of city streets.

A core initiative of the Richmond Film Office is to liaise with motion picture industry and community stakeholders on film-related matters in order to promote the growth of Richmond’s film sector. The key objective of these efforts is to attract production crews to shoot on location in Richmond on both public and private property. In recent years, the film office has also worked to help attract and facilitate the opening of film studio facilities in Richmond.

COVID-19 Update

The motion picture industry, like many sectors in British Columbia, continues to be impacted by COVID-19. In March 2020, in response to the Provincial Health Officer’s guidelines, live action production companies and supply companies servicing the industry went on a temporary hiatus. During this time, stakeholders from the industry came together forming The B.C. Motion Picture COVID-19 Best Practices Coalition to address the various factors that would allow the industry to safely return to work. The Coalition, in consultation with WorkSafeBC, published a set of high level Safety Guidelines and developed *The B.C. Motion Picture COVID-19 Pandemic Production Guide* to support the assessment and management of COVID-19 risk in all types of production, and assist employers in developing their own COVID-19 safety plans across departments.

On June 24, 2020, as part of Phase 3 of B.C.’s Restart Plan, production activity was officially permitted and gradually picked back up in the Lower Mainland. The motion picture industry in B.C. continues to pivot as Provincial, Federal, and International guidelines regarding COVID-19 shift, with the key priority remaining the safety and well being of cast, crew, and the communities in which filming activity takes place.

2020 Film Days

2020 was an eventful year for filming activity in Richmond. Once the motion picture industry was given the tools needed to safely return to work, the Richmond Film Office received a steady stream of requests from both returning and new productions.

Table 1: Richmond Film Activity 2013-2020

Year	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
Shoot Days	147	133	189	276	205	211	238	128
Prep/Wrap/Hold Days	52	65	380	291	253	209	256	377
Total Days of Filming Activity	199	198	569	567	458	420	494	505

Within Richmond, there are many non-City owned locations used for filming including Steveston Harbour Authority, Metro Vancouver, BCIT Aerospace Technology Campus, and the Gulf of Georgia Cannery. These locations and other private property owners are not obligated to

report revenue or filming days to the City. As a courtesy, film production companies generally alert the Richmond Film Office regarding filming to ensure compliance with bylaws, to avoid any traffic or other conflicts in the area and so that the filming can be included in City records. In 2020, there were 406 days of filming activity managed by staff on City-owned property, five days of filming activity on Metro Vancouver property, 19 days of filming activity at the Gulf of Georgia Cannery, 17 days of filming activity at BCIT Aerospace Technology Campus, and 58 days of filming activity at Steveston Harbour Authority.

The decrease in shoot days from previous years can be attributed to the temporary hiatus during the initial months of the pandemic, along with the cautious return to work by the industry. In the past, productions were able to film in close proximity with each other or film at the same location(s) back to back, however, this is currently constrained. Furthermore, the significant increase in prep/wrap/hold days are a result of productions following strict COVID-19 guidelines which require additional time and larger footprints in order to ensure a safe working environment.

2020 Film Studio Facilities

As the motion picture industry in British Columbia recovers and rebuilds itself from the temporary setback presented by the COVID-19 pandemic, the need for studio spaces in the Lower Mainland continues to rise. Demand for film studio facilities has been increasing for a number of years in the region. This demand has been further amplified over the past year with productions preferring to film at a studio facility whenever possible in order to ensure a safe and controlled work environment.

In 2020, staff worked with Warner Bros. Television on a project to convert two warehouses into film studio facilities. The properties, located in the East Richmond area, have been leased by Warner Bros. Television for a term of 10 years each. Together, the studio facilities provide 170,831 square feet of sound stage and office space. It is projected that the production that is currently occupying the facilities will provide regular employment for an average of 250 cast and crew.

2020 Filming History

The productions that filmed in Richmond for 2020 included:

- **Motion Pictures:** *Wayward*, and *Hello, Goodbye and Everything in Between*;
- **Television Movies:** *The Mari Gilbert Story*;
- **Television Series:** *Zoey's Extraordinary Playlist* Season 1 & 2, *A Million Little Things* Season 2, *The Stand* Season 1, *Home Before Dark* Season 2, *Supergirl* Season 5, *Above the Moon*, *Midnight Mass* Season 1, *Omens* Season 1, *Narcoleap* Season 2, *Are You Afraid of the Dark* Season 2, and *Superman & Lois* Season 1;
- **Commercials:** *Project Tokyo*, *Kia Project X*, *Destination B.C.*, *Advil*, and *Turbo Tax*; and

- **Marketing Campaigns & Commercial Photoshoots:** *Tourism Richmond Stakeholder Video Shoot, B.C. Bird Trail Photo & Video Shoot, and FORM Swim Evergreen.*

2020 Filming Revenue

The Richmond Film Office brought in more revenue and cost recoveries in 2020 than in any previous year, with \$573,956 in service and location charges processed. This is an increase of 16.5 per cent from 2019. The breakdown of revenue was as follows:

- \$238,079 in location rental fees;
- \$46,125 in street use and parking fees;
- \$158,271 in various cost recoveries (e.g., staff time cost recovery, fire hydrant permits, special effects permits);
- \$61,831 to the Richmond RCMP Detachment; and
- \$69,650 for administration fees.

As per Provincial guidelines, the City charges on a cost recovery basis for the majority of services, however location rentals are billed at market rate.

Film revenue collected by the City in 2020 is higher than other years for a variety of reasons including:

- Productions that have leased local film studio facilities generally prefer to film in locations in Richmond;
- Productions such as “*Home Before Dark*” Season 2 and “*Midnight Mass*” Season 1, used the City’s heritage sites and parks as reoccurring filming locations for the duration of their seasons; and
- Productions are requesting larger footprints for longer durations, in order to be able to abide by COVID-19 motion picture industry guidelines.

Along with ongoing filming activity, staff also focused on strategic initiatives in 2020, which are paying off in the first quarter of 2021. Examples of strategic initiatives included:

- Staff worked closely with Warner Bros. Television to facilitate the processes required to gain final occupancy of two buildings for use as film studio facilities.
- Staff sit on Creative B.C.’s Municipal Film Advisory Committee, and worked closely with industry stakeholders to develop plans, implement processes, and provide feedback on the motion picture industry’s COVID-19 return to work materials.
- Staff are active in the Community Affairs Committee, a group of municipal, provincial, union and studio executives who meet regularly to address issues and best practices regarding the motion picture industry.

Early Indicators for 2021

There has been a steady uptake in film activity during the first quarter of 2021. The Film Office has issued 24 film location agreements to date, with two large-scale productions filming for multiple weeks on City property. In order to accommodate as many productions as possible with

the least amount of impact to residents and other industries, staff consider film applications very carefully and work closely with productions to consider a variety of locations within the City.

As the International, Federal, and Provincial responses to the COVID-19 pandemic shift, the motion picture industry continues to pivot, with productions choosing to film in regions that are safe, stable, and cost effective. It is expected that filming activity in B.C. will remain steady in 2021, unless there are any drastic shifts in the Provincial or Federal response to the pandemic. Staff will monitor the situation and continue to liaise closely with the industry.

Economic Benefits of Filming

Each year the Motion Picture Association Canada (MPA-Canada) releases economic studies from data collected from the global studios they represent that highlight the impact that the motion picture industry has on the local economy. In 2019, MPA Studios alone, spent more than \$578 million on goods and services from almost 12,000 businesses in British Columbia. In Richmond, MPA member studios supported more than 500 businesses with almost \$4 million spent on the purchase of goods and services (such as costumes, catering, and automobile rentals). While economic studies from 2020 have not yet been released by MPA-Canada, it is expected that the impacts the motion picture industry has on the local economy will continue to remain positive and strong. MPA-Canada member studios include Walt Disney Studios (Disney, ABC Television), Paramount Pictures, Sony Pictures Entertainment, Netflix Studios, Universal City Studios (NBC Universal, Universal Cable Productions), and Warner Bros. Entertainment.

According to Creative B.C.'s 2019-2020 Impact Report, B.C. continues to be the largest motion picture hub in Canada and third largest in North America, with \$2.41 billion Total Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in value added to B.C.'s economy. The Total GDP measures workers pay and profits resulting from the industry's activities and is part of Creative B.C.'s new measurement mechanism for government and industry. Furthermore, insights show that there are between 60,000 to 70,000 British Columbian "workers" in the motion picture industry. As the industry is largely comprised of gig or freelance workers, this type of work remains difficult to measure however, data indicates that this equates to 35,332 total full-time equivalent jobs when traditional approaches to "hours worked" are used as a measurement tool. In Richmond, beyond the revenue generated by the City and public properties, filming continues to contribute significant direct and indirect revenue to local businesses and land owners.

British Columbia has over 120 sound stages representing over 2.5 million square feet of purpose built stages and warehouse conversions. Productions are actively seeking warehouse spaces and converting them into film studio facilities. As of 2020, the City has six film studio facilities, three are operated by stage management companies and three are operated by studio production companies.

The film sector is a major employer in the City with an estimated over \$22 million in wages earned by residents employed in 2019. The 2020 wage totals are yet to be released, however film production unions are anticipating that 2020 wage totals will be lower as a result of the impacts of COVID-19.

Emerging Initiatives

As filming activity continues to increase in Richmond, staff are working closely with stakeholders at Creative B.C., motion picture industry representatives, and neighbouring municipalities on a variety of initiatives. On February 26, 2020, prior to the restrictions by the Provincial Health Office, staff worked with the Provincial Film Commission at Creative B.C. and the Steveston Merchants Association to host a Film Meet & Greet. The event, which took place at a local business on Moncton Street, was tailored towards merchants in Steveston Village; an area which continues to be the most popular location for filming in Richmond. Merchants were able to have one on one conversations, ask questions, and share feedback with key stakeholders in the industry. As a result of the event, the film office has made additional contacts and implemented a number of changes based on the feedback of attendees.

Financial Impact

None.

Conclusion

Notwithstanding the many impacts of COVID-19, 2020 was a record breaking financial year for the City of Richmond Film Office. The increase in service and location fees processed can be attributed to multiple factors, including the establishment of film studio facilities in Richmond and productions requiring more space and time in order to successfully abide by industry safety guidelines. Staff are committed to working with stakeholders to establish and execute strategic initiatives and adjust existing services in order to enable the motion picture industry's recovery and growth during and beyond COVID-19. The film sector continues to be an important economic industry in the City. The financial impact through employment and fees for locations is significant and beneficial to the City and its residents.



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