



## **Overview of Municipal Film Permitting Practices in the GVRD**

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Prepared by the BC Film  
Commission

March 28, 2007

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

### BACKGROUND

In April of 2000, the Regional Administrative Advisory Committee and the GVRD Board of Directors supported development of initiatives to streamline and standardize local filming guidelines, policies and fees as they relate to permitting film production in GVRD communities. The Board requested the BC Film Commission to establish a process to develop these initiatives, including the participation of municipal film administrators, the GVRD, industry representatives, and other relevant agencies.

Since 2000, BCFC, industry and all levels of government have worked together to implement many of these initiatives. Actions that have been successfully undertaken include:

- Development of a standard industry code of conduct;
- Creation of the Location Management and Property Managers Guide to provide location managers, private property owners and municipal and regional governments with templates to more effectively service production requests;
- Two location-focused Film Forums hosted by the BCFC, held in 2000 and 2003 and several orientation sessions for municipal staff
- The BCFC Web site was improved and expanded as a portal to production throughout the province; and,
- The creation of a central BCFC database of film locations and a means of tracking issues as they relate to location management.

As more and more communities across North America compete to attract film business, it is paramount that municipalities across the Lower Mainland are able to provide a receptive environment for film and television production. A receptive environment means adapting to the industry's specific needs which include flexibility, responsiveness, certainty and cost. The capacity of municipalities within the Lower Mainland to meet these needs and provide consistent and transparent treatment for production activity within all municipalities is considered desirable for maintaining BC's competitiveness and encouraging the continued growth of the industry in British Columbia.

Unlike other competing film centres such as Los Angeles or Toronto that provide one-stop permitting, Greater Vancouver is made up of 21 local governments that are independently responsible for permitting film production activities within their respective jurisdictions. Over the years, each municipality has adopted its own film policy and guidelines, and has successfully managed film location requests. While most film activity proceeds relatively smoothly, there are inconsistencies among municipalities in terms of the application of film policies, regulations and associated fees. This can create a less than optimal client service experience for production companies that commonly film in multiple jurisdictions and also can lead to uncertainty in terms of the costs and approval processes required by each municipality.

### PURPOSE OF STUDY

The purpose of this study is to develop a profile of municipal film permitting in the GVRD and identify best practices to encourage a more positive and sustainable business climate for production activity in the Lower Mainland.

More specifically, the objectives of the study are to:

- Develop a comprehensive understanding of film permitting practices, resources and procedures used in all 21 GVRD municipalities;
- Examine region-wide opportunities and challenges associated with film permitting processes.
- Identify best practices as they relate to providing responsive, timely and cost effective service to industry clients while respecting the interests of local citizens and the business community.
- Provide recommendations to enhance location resource management practices and build on the region's success in attracting film business.

Given the highly mobile nature of the industry and its economic importance to this province, a coordinated assessment of film location issues and concerns within the Lower Mainland and proactive action to address them will help to sustain Greater Vancouver's film friendly reputation and demonstrate that GVRD communities are committed to growing this important sector of our economy.

### METHOD OF STUDY

The key steps that we undertook to develop a profile of film permitting in Lower Mainland municipalities are as follows:

- Collected published municipal data related to municipal film permitting practices and procedures in all 21 Lower mainland municipalities.
- Conducted a literature search of reports and studies related to the film industry in BC, other parts of Canada and internationally.
- Conducted structured interviews with both municipal film coordinators and location managers active in all sectors of BC's motion picture industry. The primary purpose of these interviews was to solicit feedback with respect to film permitting approaches employed in different municipalities, assess location management practices and identify actions that could be taken to improve current service to the industry. A summary of the survey results of our interviews with municipal film coordinators and location managers is provided in Appendix I and II.
- Prepared the report which summarizes the results of the research findings and provides recommendations to enhance municipal film permitting practices in British Columbia's film and television industry.

### SURVEY FINDINGS

1. Film coordinators play a key role in facilitating production and act as the first point of contact for productions wanting to film on municipal streets and property. However, the amount of time that film coordinators spend on film related issues varies by municipality.
2. Almost all municipalities have a film policy and film guidelines approved by council and 86% of the municipalities have guidelines available online.

3. Just over half of the municipalities require productions to obtain business licenses for filming.
4. Ninety five percent of municipalities require film companies to notify residents and businesses when they will be affected by filming.
5. The majority of municipalities have restrictions on late night filming; however, the filming hours vary among municipalities. The most common filming hours among the 21 municipalities in the GVRD are from 7am to 10pm daily. When filming must occur after curfew, most municipalities (76%) leave the extension of filming hours up to the discretion of the film coordinator.
6. Most film coordinators (81 %) have final authority for permitting film activity in their communities.
7. The majority of film coordinators see flexibility and speed as the greatest strengths to their current approval process. The key weakness most often identified by film coordinators is a lack of adequate municipal human resources.
8. The majority of film coordinators (71 %) visit film sets in their municipalities.
9. Almost 50% of municipal film coordinators said some areas in their communities are currently experiencing location burn-out, and (52%) limit the duration or frequency of filming in popular locations.
10. The majority of municipalities (71 %) publish an annual rate sheet that details all of the municipal related costs for filming and 67% have their rate sheet available online. However, almost half of the location managers surveyed said there is not enough detailed information online regarding municipal filming guidelines and fees, making planning and budgeting difficult.
11. There is considerable variance in film related fees for municipal services among the 21 municipalities surveyed.
12. Just under half of the municipalities surveyed (48%) issued more film permits in 2005 than in 2004.
13. Nearly half of the municipal film coordinators surveyed (48%) would like to see more data and statistics collected on film related activities in their municipalities.
14. 76% of municipal film coordinators and 86% of location managers think a more standardized approach to film permitting in the Lower Mainland would increase the overall efficiency of the process. Aspects of the film permitting process that both film coordinators and location managers identified as priorities for standardization across municipalities included the filming application, film permits, fee schedules, insurance agreements and parking and traffic control.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

The most common recommendations to improve municipal film guidelines suggested by municipal film coordinators and location managers included:

- ✓ Improving resident letters and polling procedures;
- ✓ Using traffic control companies instead of costly police for traffic control;

- ✓ Extending filming curfews;
- ✓ Clarifying indemnity clauses to eliminate confusion over who is responsible for what in the case of an accident.
- ✓ Increasing the standardization of forms, fees, insurance documents, and filming policies across the Lower Mainland;
- ✓ Clarifying fee schedules so it is easier to forecast filming costs; and,

**The most common recommendations to improve the overall efficiency of film permitting processes in Greater Vancouver included:**

- ✓ Increasing standardization among municipalities;
- ✓ Starting from Yes
- ✓ Streamlining electrical permits;
- ✓ Increasing the amount of film information available online.
- ✓ Encouraging film coordinators to spend time on set;
- ✓ Increasing the consistency among municipal film guidelines;
- ✓ Creating a more flexible grid system that allows filming anywhere within a certain area;
- ✓ Making film coordinators available after hours on a fee for service basis;
- ✓ Creating a film office and set of film rules for provincial land.
- ✓ Allowing film coordinators to have more authority than residents when deciding whether or not to shoot in a particular area.

1. **The most common best practice identified by both film coordinators and location managers with respect to municipal film permitting is having a “start from yes” mentality and an overall proactive approach to film permitting.**

By far the most appreciated best practice in the municipal film permitting process is having an overall empowered attitude and proactive approach to filming. Although the clarity of filming guidelines and the cost-effectiveness of municipal fees are important to the industry, location managers identified having a “start from yes-mentality” towards filming as the most important best practice in the municipal film permitting process. It is up to the film office staff to give their clients the best level of service to ensure that the needs of the industry are met without unreasonably troubling the residents in their communities.

2. **Another best practice mentioned by both municipal film coordinators and location managers is making sure that filming guidelines, forms, detailed fee schedules, and maps of the city are available online.**

While 86% of municipalities have film guidelines and a film policy available online, only 71% have their filming rate sheets available online. The lack of detailed fee schedules online was the most common problem identified by the location managers. Budgeting is already difficult because of the variance in fees charged among municipalities in the Lower Mainland. It is recommended that municipalities make an effort to post clear, up to date, and easy to forecast fee schedules in the filming sections of their websites and indicate whether or not GST is included in the stated fees.

3. **It is recommended that professional development opportunities be supported for both Location Managers and Municipal Film Coordinators**

95% of film coordinators and 63% of location managers would be interested in participating in professional development opportunities. For the municipal film coordinators, increased film

industry knowledge and coordinated set visits were the most mentioned areas for professional development. For location managers, budgeting, scouting, risk management, team management, and public speaking were identified as areas of interest for professional development.

4. **It is recommended that Municipalities consult with industry stakeholders when updating their filming guidelines.**

Only 14% of municipalities have consulted with industry when updating their filming guidelines. It is recommended that future updates should follow the more democratic model used by the city of Vancouver and Langley Township, in which a diverse task force of members from government, industry, and the public takes part in the process of reviewing and modifying municipal filming guidelines. West Vancouver and Richmond also distributed draft guidelines to a number of stakeholders in the filming community in order to get their advice prior to formally adopting a new set of filming guidelines.

5. **All municipalities would benefit from increased film industry data collection.**

It would be beneficial to increase the amount of film industry data and information collected by municipalities. Only 48% of municipal film coordinators said they collect film industry data. Although most film liaison offices can determine the number of permits they issue each year, this number does not depict the number of days of filming by the industry in local communities. Data such as the number and type of productions shot, the number of shoot days and the municipal revenue generated from filming would allow governments to track trends in the industry as well as the economic benefits to local communities and the Province.

6. **A more standardized approach to filming among municipalities would help to increase the effectiveness of the film permitting process and in the Lower Mainland and enhance client satisfaction.**

76% of municipal film coordinators and 86% of location managers said that increased standardization of film guidelines would benefit the industry. The most recommended areas for standardization included the filming applications, film permits, fee schedules, insurance indemnity forms, and parking and traffic control policies and noise bylaw enforcement practices.

There is considerable debate, however, as to the feasibility of achieving complete standardization of film policies in the Lower Mainland. Many film coordinators noted that filming guidelines are set by municipal councils and often out of their control. Any effort to increase the standardization of film policies would certainly require the involvement and approval of municipal councils. Several film coordinators and location managers recommended that a practical first step to standardizing municipal guidelines could be the creation of a standard filming application for all municipalities, which can be submitted online.

7. **It is recommended that municipalities and industry stakeholders collaborate to develop new public relations strategies.**

Film industry-related articles in local newspapers and industry involvement in community events and initiatives are opportunities to raise awareness of the film industry's contribution to communities. It is recommended that Film Coordinators work with industry to post good news stories about the industry in their local papers. Productions are encouraged to donate to local charities and participate in community initiatives in order to build community support and goodwill.

8. It is recommended that as a next step in this process, the BC Film Commission form a Film Location Resource Advisory Committee.

This committee should include representation as follows:

- Locations Caucus Chair Directors Guild of Canada – BC District Council
- 2 Location Manager representatives from DGCBC Locations Caucus
- 1 Location Manager representative from the Commercial Production Association of Western Canada (CPAWC)
- 3 Municipal Film Coordinators from GVRD municipalities
- 1 representative from the Regional Film Commissions Association of BC
- 1 representative from the Sea to Sky, Sunshine Coast and Fraser Valley areas
- 1 MPPIA representative
- 1 Chair - Manager of Community Affairs - BC Film Commission

The committee would have a mandate to identify opportunities and processes for the implementation for all the above initiatives. The Committee's mandate would be to agree on specific standardization criteria, such as noise bylaws, rates for service, application and location work sheets for consideration by local government administrators. The Committee could also identify professional development opportunities for Location Managers and Film Coordinators as they relate to location use in the Lower Mainland and the Province in general. This committee should be formal in nature with members voting on motions, keeping detailed minutes and developing appropriate agendas to address these issues.



## **Executive Summary**

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## I. INTRODUCTION

### A. BACKGROUND

Film and television production activity is recognized as a significant economic contributor to communities across the Lower Mainland. Over 30,000 British Columbians work in the industry and the value of production spending in BC exceeds \$1 billion every year. The industry also purchases millions of dollars in goods and services from local businesses. From car rentals to catering and costumes to construction, production activity brings new money into communities and creates higher than average multiplier effects due to the spending it generates in other sectors of the economy.

Unlike other competing film centers like Los Angeles or Toronto that provide one-stop permitting, Greater Vancouver is made up of 21 municipalities that are individually responsible for permitting film production activities within their respective jurisdictions. Over the years, each municipality has adopted their own film policies and guidelines and successfully managed film location requests. While most film activity proceeds relatively smoothly, there are inconsistencies among municipalities in terms of the application of film policies, permitting requirements, and fee rates for municipal services. This creates a less than optimal client service experience for production companies who commonly film in multiple jurisdictions and can cause uncertainty in terms of the costs and approval processes required by each municipality.

In April of 2000, the GVRD Planning and Environment Committee recommended that the GVRD Board of Directors support development of initiatives to streamline and standardize local filming guidelines, policies and fees as they relate to permitting film production in GVRD communities. The Board requested the BC Film Commission to establish an appropriate process to develop these initiatives, including the participation of municipal film administrators, the GVRD, industry representatives, and other relevant agencies. This review was to include consideration of:

- The film industry Code of Conduct;
- A standard film application;
- Review of fee and rate structures across municipal boundaries and
- Mechanisms to collect and monitor information about film activity, production data, film permits and fees, and production issues

Since 2000, BCFC has worked with industry and all levels of government to implement many of these initiatives. The Film Commission has worked with both industry and communities to develop tools and policies that encourage best practices in facilitating production throughout the province. Actions that have been successfully undertaken include:

- Development of a standard industry code of conduct;
- Creation of the location management and property managers guide to provide location managers, private property owners and municipal and regional governments with templates to more effectively service and manage production requests;
- Implementation of the Provincial Film Policy;
- BCFC hosted two location-focused Film Forums, held in 2000 and 2003;
- Development of the BCFC Web site as a portal to production; and,
- Creation of a central database of film locations and a means of tracking issues as they relate to location management.

As more and more communities across North America compete to attract film business, it is paramount that municipalities across the Lower Mainland are able to provide a receptive environment for film and television production. A receptive environment means adapting to the industry's specific needs which include flexibility, responsiveness, certainty and cost. The capacity of municipalities within the Lower Mainland to meet these needs and provide consistent and transparent treatment for production activity within all municipalities is considered desirable for maintaining BC's competitiveness and encouraging the continued growth of the industry in British Columbia.

## **B. PURPOSE OF THE STUDY**

The purpose of this study is to develop a profile of municipal film permitting in the GVRD and identify best practices to encourage a more positive and sustainable business climate for production activity in the Lower Mainland.

More specifically, the objectives of the study are to:

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- Identify best practices as they relate to providing responsive, timely and cost effective service to industry clients while respecting the interests of local citizens and the business community.
- Provide recommendations to enhance location resource management practices and build on the region's success in attracting film business.

Given the highly mobile nature of the industry and its economic importance to this province, a coordinated assessment of film location issues and concerns within the Lower Mainland and proactive action to address them will help to sustain Greater Vancouver's film friendly reputation and demonstrate that GVRD communities are committed to growing this important sector of our economy.

## **C. METHOD OF STUDY**

The key steps that we undertook to develop a profile of film permitting in Lower Mainland municipalities are as follows:

- Collected secondary data related to municipal film permitting practices and procedures in all 21 Lower mainland municipalities.
- Conducted a literature search of reports and studies related to the film industry in BC, other parts of Canada and internationally.
- Conducted structured interviews with municipal film coordinators and location managers active in all sectors of BC's motion picture industry. The primary purpose of these interviews was to solicit feedback with respect to film permitting approaches employed in different municipalities, assess

location management practices and identify actions that could be taken to improve current service to the industry. A summary of the survey results of our interviews with municipal film coordinators and location managers is provided in Appendix I and II.

- Prepared the draft and final report which summarizes the results of the research findings and provides recommendations to enhance municipal film permitting practices in British Columbia's film and television industry.

## D. STRUCTURE OF THE REPORT

This report is divided into five chapters:

- This chapter has provided an overview of the purpose and method of study.
- Chapter II provides an overview of location filming and describes the key roles and responsibilities of municipal film coordinators, location managers and the BC Film Commission.
- Chapter III summarizes the results of the interviews conducted with 21 municipal film coordinators.
- Chapter IV summarizes the results of the interviews conducted with 21 location managers who are active in BC's production industry.
- Chapter V highlights the key commendations provided by both municipal film coordinators and location managers with respect to municipal film issues in the Lower Mainland.

The major findings and conclusions of our review are presented in the executive summary.

## II. OVERVIEW OF LOCATION FILMING

Film and television production is a complex business that involves many players with a variety of different skill sets. This chapter provides an overview of the unique characteristics of on location filming and outlines the roles of key stakeholders who are involved in facilitating and managing on location production.

### A. CHARACTERISTICS OF ON LOCATION FILMING

Since the era of big studio production in Los Angeles, the film industry has sought out real locations to film the sets described in a script. British Columbia has been a destination film location for some 50 years, but it has been only within the last 20 years that it has become a destination production centre. Production companies film more on location than on the studio lot because it provides a more realistic look, it's less expensive, and it's faster. British Columbia's production industry has benefited from the province's broad range of natural locations - from deserts to glaciers and rangeland to rainforest. Coupled with an eclectic mix of urban, industrial, commercial and other man-made structures, British Columbia has the ability to provide virtually any type of location. That ability however is governed by how readily those locations can be accessed - and at what cost.

Other than the day to day filming activities within the region's studios, filming in Greater Vancouver means filming on location. Most municipal procedures, fees and requirements relate in some way to managing site access and how the productions conduct their affairs while on the site. Location access is inherently an on-going issue, since new sites are continually sought to respond to the particular needs of individual productions. Location management teams and film coordinators have to strike a delicate balance between satisfying the unique and often impactful requirements of filming while respecting the interests of local citizens and the business community. Some neighbourhoods and business areas are experiencing a high frequency of use. These locations require more intensive management to protect against location burn-out and to avoid a reduction of the variety of locations available.

### B. ROLE OF KEY STAKEHOLDERS

The film industry operates in a fast paced, highly mobile and volatile environment that is often subject to change due to weather, shooting schedules, access to locations, cast availability and other factors. This transitory environment is part of the production process and requires cooperation, effective communication and flexibility on the part of all industry stakeholders, including municipal agencies, property owners, location managers and the general public. Any attempt to facilitate or manage this industry must be responsive to the unique and complex nature of the business. The following paragraphs provide a brief description of the specific role that municipalities, location managers and the BC Film Commission play in BC's production industry.

#### 1. Role of Municipalities

Municipalities play a key role in the production process by providing production companies with access to local government services such as police and fire and coordinating the use of public property including streets, municipal buildings (including schools and libraries) parks, and all of the other essential municipal and government services required when shooting a production on location.

With the proliferation of filming in the Lower Mainland, and the lobbying efforts of the BC Film Commission and industry the majority of local governments have developed the necessary processes and policies to service the needs of the industry and offered their full support to facilitate productions ranging from commercials and small independent films to television series and feature films. This support is critical to ensuring access to “public” film locations and is a key factor in BC’s ability to maintain its international reputation as a “film-friendly” production centre.

As filming in the Lower Mainland developed to the point where it was no longer an “occasional” event, each municipality responded by putting in place effective procedures to manage film location requests. In areas where the volume of production activity warranted, municipalities, like Vancouver and Burnaby, developed full-time film office coordination staff to meet the regulatory needs of location filming activities. Where activity was less frequent, staff in other departments like engineering and economic development assisted with Producers’ requests. While there is no consistent delivery model, all 21 municipalities have been proactive in ensuring the impact of production is positive.

## 2. Role of Location Managers

The Directors’ Guild of Canada defines the role of “The Location Manager” as being responsible for securing locations for the approval of the Producer in consultation with the Director, Production Designer, Producer and Director of Photography. The Location Manager’s duties include, but are not limited to:

- Locating sites to be used in production which are based on production’s creative, logistical and budgetary needs;
- Serving as the key contact for the general public, property owners and those impacted by production activities;
- Liaising with municipal film offices and other authorities to gain permission to access “public” property for filming;
- Maintaining the negotiated condition and use of the location site in accordance with the rental contract or government permit; and,
- Ensuring that safety standards are met as required for any/all special effects and stunt related work.  
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As well as arranging and negotiating site use, the Location Manager’s role usually involves managing location sites throughout the shooting process. This involves working to strict budgetary and time limits and maintaining a high standard of health and safety and security. The demands of organizing crews and dealing with a range of people - from producers to the police - make this an intense and varied role.

## 3. Role of BC Film Commission

The British Columbia Film Commission was created in 1978 and has been proactively promoting British Columbia as a motion picture destination and world class production centre to the international film and television industry for close to 30 years. In that time, production expenditures have increased from \$12 million in 1978 to more than \$1.2 billion in 2005. BC is known as a place where industry, government, labour and the community work together to support the province’s dynamic and multi-sectored motion picture industry which contributes significantly to the economic well being of this province.

The Commission's key roles and activities include:

- Marketing BC internationally as a world class production centre;
- Facilitating access to BC's "World of Looks" and maintaining an extensive digital library of locations throughout the province;
- Working with industry, municipalities, business owners and the community to keep BC production friendly and competitive with international markets; and,
- Fostering the competitiveness and sustainability of the sector.

The BCFC fulfills this mandate through a number of strategic activities that relate to four core areas of focus:

- **Marketing and Sales:** promoting British Columbia's "World of Looks" and marketing BC internationally as a cost competitive and world class production centre to further the growth and diversity of film and television production in the province.
- **Production Services:** providing timely, project specific and customer driven production support including digital location packages, location expertise and a comprehensive in-house digital locations library with over 10,000 locations and 185,000 digital images.
- **Community Affairs:** ensuring communication, understanding and effective partnerships between the industry and key stakeholder groups in order to ensure continued sustainability and support for the industry.
- **Operations and Performance Enhancement:** Operation of an effective and efficient provincial film commission with clear goals and measures.

### III. SURVEY OF MUNICIPAL FILM COORDINATORS

This chapter summarizes the results of our survey of municipal film coordinators in the Greater Vancouver Regional District and provides information on the role of municipal film offices with respect to film policies and guidelines, film permit requirements, location management practices and fees for services in all 21 Lower mainland municipalities.

#### A. ROLE OF MUNICIPAL FILM COORDINATORS

1. **Film coordinators play a key role in facilitating production and act as the first point of contact for productions wanting to film on municipal streets and property.**

The role and specific responsibilities of a municipal film coordinator varies somewhat depending on the municipality in question, however, in general, film coordinators act as the first point of contact for productions wanting to film on municipal streets and property, and are responsible for processing and issuing permits and acting as a liaison between location managers, municipal officers and the public. This position provides direct service to clients with respect to the issuance of filming permits, the contravention of bylaws to accommodate the needs of productions, the coordination of municipal services such as fire, police, parks, environment and engineering departments as well as dealing with public complaints and other film related inquiries.

2. **The department responsible for municipal film coordination varies across municipalities; however it is most commonly the responsibility of the engineering or economic development department.**

Film production, by its nature is a complex process and requires communication and coordination between many municipal departments. In over 30% of the municipalities surveyed, film coordination resides in the engineering department, which generally is responsible for a wide number of public services, including traffic control, parking and use of city streets.

*Which department within the municipality does the municipal coordinator position fall under?*

Responses	Number	Percent
Engineering	7	33%
Economic/Business Development	6	28%
General Administration	4	19%
Parks and Recreation	2	9%
Cultural Services	1	4%
Bylaw Services	1	4%
<b>Total</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>100%</b>

In 28% of municipalities, film coordination falls under the responsibility of the department of economic development, which illustrates the importance of film, television and commercial production activity to the long-term health of communities and the industry's positive impacts on local businesses. In other municipalities, film coordination is the responsibility of general administration, parks and recreation, cultural services and bylaw services.

3. The length of time that municipal film coordinators have spent in their position ranged considerably, from 14 years to just over two months.

Half of the film coordinators surveyed have worked in their positions for 2 to 5 years, while 23% have been film coordinators for 1 year or less. The average number of years of experience among the 21 film coordinators surveyed was just under 4 years.

*How long have you been in this position?*

Responses	Number	Percent
1 year or less	5	23%
2-5 years	11	50%
6-10 years	5	23%
11-15 years	1	4%
<b>Total</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>100%</b>

Many of the respondents indicated that while film coordination was a relatively new position, they had been an employee of the municipality for a much longer time period.

4. The amount of time that film coordinators spend on film related issues ranged considerably. Almost half of the film coordinators surveyed spend less than 25% of their time on film related issues.

It is important to note that in the municipalities that see little filming, film coordination is often done off the side of the desk by municipal officers who have other responsibilities. Almost half of the film coordinators surveyed spend less than 25% of their time on film related issues.

*What percentage of your time do you spend on film related issues?*

Responses	Number	Percent
25% and under	10	48%
26% to 50%	4	19%
51% to 75%	3	14%
76% to 100%	4	19%
<b>Total</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>100%</b>

The most common responsibilities for film coordinators other than film include general office administration, special events, and engineering services. Other less common responsibilities range from bylaw services to corporate planning and even cemetery management. In municipalities that see consistent filming, the coordinators spend between 70% and 100% of their time on film-related activities. The busiest municipalities, such as Vancouver, have up to 5 additional staff to handle film industry requests. In several other relatively busy municipalities, film coordinators have assistants to help service the industry.

## B. MUNICIPAL FILM POLICY AND GUIDELINES

1. **Almost all municipalities have a film policy and film guidelines approved by council and 86% of the municipalities have guidelines available online.**

As the volume of film and television production increased over the last decade, many municipalities have developed or updated film guidelines in attempt to promote the industry while looking after the needs of their residents. Today 95% of the municipalities in the Lower Mainland have film guidelines and a film policy approved by council.

*Does your municipality have film guidelines and a film policy that has been approved by council?*

Responses	Number	Percent
Yes	20	95%
No	1	5%
Total	21	100%

In the fast paced production industry, easy access to information is extremely important, and 86% of municipalities have made their filming information available online.

2. **90% of the film coordinators feel their film guidelines are clear and consistent in their application.**

While most film coordinators feel that their guidelines are consistent in their application, several coordinators noted that their guidelines are vague in order to allow for flexibility in unique situations.

3. **43% of municipalities have updated their filming guidelines within the last 2 years.**

Many municipalities have recently updated their filming guidelines. There are, however, several municipalities that have kept their guidelines unchanged for over ten years. Of those municipalities who have recently updated their guidelines, the most common revisions included changing their fee schedules and increasing the similarity of their guidelines to surrounding municipalities.

4. **Only 14% of the municipalities have consulted with industry when updating their filming guidelines.**

A large majority of municipalities, 86% had never consulted members of the film production industry when developing their film policies, guidelines, and/or fee schedules. The few municipalities that did consult with industry created task forces of various stakeholders from local government, industry, the community, and the BC Film Commission to develop or update their guidelines.

*Were updates to film guidelines based on consultation with industry?*

Responses	Number	Percent
Yes	3	14%
No	18	86%

Total	21	100%
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It seems logical to assume that input from the film production industry would be beneficial for any municipality that is updating its film production guidelines. This is the approach recently taken by the City of Vancouver and the Township of Langley, which have included many members of the film and television production industry on task forces developed to address local filming issues.

## C. MUNICIPAL FILM PERMITTING PROCESSES

1. **Just over half of the municipalities require productions to obtain business licenses for filming.**

48% of municipalities in the Lower mainland do not require productions to obtain a business license unless their corporate office is based in the municipality.

### *Do you require a Business License to film in your municipality?*

Responses	Number	Percent
Yes	11	52%
No	10	48%
<b>Total</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>100%</b>

In those municipalities that do require business licenses (52%), the yearly fee ranges from \$25 to over \$400. Most municipalities offer ½ year rates to productions shooting for shorter time periods. Many municipalities do not require productions to obtain business licenses because they realize that unlike other businesses that have a long term operation in their municipality, film crews usually only operate in a municipality for a very short time period.

2. **Almost all municipalities require film companies to notify residents and businesses when they will be affected by filming.**

It is a fairly universal policy across the Lower Mainland to advise the public when noise, lighting, or traffic control for filming will affect their daily routine. 95% of municipalities have this policy in place.

3. **Most municipalities have restrictions on late night filming; however, the filming hours vary among municipalities. The most common filming hours are from 7am to 10pm daily.**

86% of municipalities have policies for accommodating late night filming in contravention of local noise bylaws. The three municipalities that don't have formal restrictions allow filming at night as long as it doesn't violate their noise bylaws. 86% of municipalities with restrictions allow filming to take place between 7am and 10pm daily. In the busiest filming centre, the City of Vancouver, filming is allowed from 7am to 11pm weekdays, except Fridays until midnight. Weekends are 8am to 12am on Saturdays, and 8am to 11pm Sundays.

*During what hours is filming allowed?*

Responses	Number	Percent
7am-10pm everyday	14	86%
7am-7pm everyday	1	5%
7am-10pm weekdays and 8am-11pm weekends	1	5%
7am-11pm weekdays, 8am-12am Saturday, and 8am-11pm Sunday	1	5%
7am-11pm everyday	1	5%
<b>Total</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>100%</b>

4. Sometimes the level of noise generated from film shoots is higher than levels permitted by local bylaws; but, because the level of noise generated by film shoots is less than other industrial activities, 76% of municipalities have procedures for the relaxation of noise bylaws.

*Are there procedures for relaxation of noise bylaws?*

Responses	Number	Percent
Yes	16	76%
No	5	24%
<b>Total</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>100%</b>

The most common procedure for relaxing noise bylaws is polling the affected neighborhood and achieving a majority approval. In those municipalities that do not have formal procedures, it is up to the discretion of the film coordinator to allow or prohibit filming depending on the level of noise and the proximity of affected residents.

5. When filming must occur after curfew, most municipalities (76%) leave the extension of filming hours up to the discretion of the film coordinator.

While several municipalities require between 75% and 100% support from the public in order to allow filming past curfew, most let the film coordinator use their judgment to evaluate the situation and determine the best course of action.

6. Because the film coordinators are responsible for managing valuable resources (their filming locations), most film coordinators (81%) have final authority for permitting film activity in their communities.

81% of the coordinators have final say in whether or not to allow filming. Most of the coordinators who do not have final authority must seek approval from their supervisors in order to allow abnormally complicated shoots or filming in extremely sensitive areas.

*Do you have final authority for permitting film activity in your communities?*

Responses	Number	Percent
Yes	17	81%
No	4	19%
<b>Total</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>100%</b>

7. When asked whether or not the turnaround time for permitting meets the needs of the industry, almost all coordinators responded with a confident “yes”.

90% of film coordinators feel they can process and issue permits quickly enough to keep up with the demands of the fast paced film production industry. Only two film coordinators said they need to improve their permit issuing speed.

*Do you feel that the turnaround time for permitting meets the needs of the industry?*

Responses	Number	Percent
Yes	19	90%
No	2	10%
<b>Total</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>100%</b>

8. Most film coordinators see flexibility and speed as the greatest strengths to their current approval process.

Other common strengths mentioned were low permit and filming fees, having a “yes” mentality towards filming and a comprehensive knowledge of the industry.

*What do you see as the major strengths of the current approval process?*

Responses	Number
Flexibility	8
Speed	7
Low permit and filming fees	3
Film friendliness	3
“Yes” mentality	2
Knowledge of industry	1

9. The most common weakness with the film permitting process mentioned by film coordinators was a lack of adequate municipal staff.

24% of film coordinators said they could operate more efficiently if they had more staff to help out with processing filming requests. The next most common weakness mentioned by municipal film coordinators was the lack of standardization of film policies among municipalities in the Lower Mainland.

*What do you see as the major weaknesses of the current approval process?*

Responses	Number	Percent
None	11	53%
Lack of adequate municipal staff	5	24%
Lack of standardization	2	10%
Lack of information online	1	5%
Fees are too high	1	5%
Two electrical permits are required	1	5%
<b>Total</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>100%</b>

## D. LOCATION RESOURCE MANAGEMENT

1. The majority of film coordinators visit film sets that shoot in their municipalities.

71% of the coordinators surveyed monitor film projects or conduct site visits for productions shooting in their municipalities.

*Do you monitor film projects or conduct site visits?*

Responses	Number	Percent
Yes	15	71%
No	6	29%
<b>Total</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>100%</b>

Of the coordinators who conduct site visits, 60% visit at least half of all productions shooting in their municipalities. 29% of film coordinators do not visit film sets. Many coordinators mentioned that they would like to visit more productions but are unable to do so because of a lack of time and resources.

2. **48% of municipal film coordinators said areas in their communities are currently experiencing location burn-out.**

For municipalities that see regular filming, location burn-out is rather common. Certain areas with distinctive "looks" are always going to be more popular than others. It is up to the municipal film liaison to use their judgment in collaboration with the location manager to either allow or temporarily restrict filming in areas where residents or business are routinely affected by filming. Different coordinators have different methods for managing these locations.

3. **Around half of the municipalities limit the duration or frequency of filming in recurring locations.**

Almost all of the busiest municipalities have policies to restrict or reduce filming in recurring locations. Those municipalities that see little filming don't have such limits simply because they don't have many locations that are filmed in repeatedly.

*Do you have limits in either duration or frequency when filming in recurring locations?*

Responses	Number	Percent
Yes	11	52%
No, too few recurring locations	10	48%
<b>Total</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>100%</b>

Most all film coordinators look at the history of filming in the area and use their judgment to restrict or allow filming. Many of the busiest municipalities publish “hot lists” to control frequency of filming in extra sensitive areas.

4. **When asked to rate the film friendliness of their municipalities on a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 is not at all film friendly and 5 is extremely film friendly, 91% of film coordinators gave their municipalities either a 4 or a 5.**

Almost all municipal film coordinators consider their municipalities to be either very or extremely film friendly. Those coordinators who rated their municipalities 3 or lower cited residential concerns as the main reason for the low scores.

*On a scale of 1 to 5 where 1 is not at all film friendly and 5 is extremely film friendly, how film friendly do you consider your municipality?*

Responses	Number	Percent
1 – Not at all	1	5%
2	0	0%
3 – Somewhat	2	10%
4	13	62%
5 – Extremely	6	29%
<b>Total</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>100%</b>

## **E. FEES FOR MUNICIPAL SERVICES**

1. **Most municipalities publish an annual rate sheet that details all of the municipal related costs for filming.**

71% of municipalities publish a rate sheet, and 67% have their rate sheet available online. In the extremely fast-paced film, television, and commercial production industry quick and easy access to filming fees online is very important.

2. **There is very much variance in fee rates among different municipalities.**

It is strongly encouraged that municipalities use a cost-recovery method as opposed to a revenue generating method when charging fees for municipal services. Several municipalities see film permitting as an opportunity to boost municipal revenue and charge higher fees for their services. Many other municipalities recognize the benefits of film production to their local economy and keep

their rates low in order to encourage filming.

3. **Around one fifth of the film coordinators feel that their filming fees are higher than the cost of delivery for municipal services.**

19% of filming coordinators feel their fees are over priced, 14% feel that their fees are under-priced, and 67% feel that their fees are reflective of the cost of delivery for their services.

*Are the filming fees reflective of the cost of delivery for municipal services?*

Responses	Number	Percent
Yes	14	67%
No, they are overpriced	4	19%
No, they are under priced	3	14%
<b>Total</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>100%</b>

4. **About two thirds of the municipalities in the Lower Mainland do not charge administrative fees on top of their basic municipal fees.**

*Does your municipality charge administrative fees on top of other filming fees?*

Responses	Number	Percent
Yes	8	38%
No	13	62%
<b>Total</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>100%</b>

The majority of municipalities do not charge administrative fees. Among the 38% of municipalities that do charge administration fees, the charges range between 10% and 15% and they are usually only added on top of the bill for police and fire services. Several municipalities charge administrative fees on top of all other fees.

5. **Just under half of the municipalities have never increased their fees for servicing film industry requests.**

14% of municipalities have increased their fees within the last 2 years, and 48% have never increased their fees. It is interesting to note that several municipalities have actually decreased their fees over the last two years in order to bring more business to their communities.

*When was the last time that fees were increased?*

Responses	Number	Percent
Never	10	48%
Within the last 2 years	3	14%
Within 3-4 years	2	10%
Within 5-6 years	2	10%
7-8 years ago	2	10%
8-10 years ago	2	10%

Total	21	100%
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76% of film coordinators do not know of any plans to increase their fees in the future. Of the 24% municipalities that are planning to increase fees, the most common reasons given were to adjust to inflationary pressure and to pay for additional staff.

## F. DATA COLLECTION

### 1. Just under half of the municipalities issued more film permits in 2005 than in 2004.

48% of municipalities issued more permits in 2005 than in 2004, 10% issued less, and 33% issued the same number. The municipalities that saw the highest growth in permits issued from 2004 to 2005 were Coquitlam with 114% growth, the District of North Vancouver with 105% growth, Langley Township with 86% growth, and Delta with 58% growth in film permits issued.

*Did the number of film permits issued in your municipality last year increase, decrease or stay the same compared to 2004?*

Responses	Number	Percent
Increased	10	48%
Decreased	2	10%
Stayed the same	7	33%
Don't know	2	10%
Total	21	100%

### 2. Many municipalities do not track information and data related to servicing film activity.

Only 52% of municipalities have procedures for tracking film industry data. The most common form of data collected is municipal revenue generated from servicing the industry. 43% of municipalities track revenue from filming, 10% track shoot days, and 10% track the types of productions shot in their municipality. The development of a system to collect film industry data is strongly encouraged because it is relatively easy to collect and very useful for municipal and regional governments to track the progress and the economic impact of the industry.

*What information and other data related to film activity does your municipality track?*

Responses	Number	Percent
No film data collected	10	48%
Municipal revenue from filming	9	43%
Shoot days	2	10%
Types of productions	2	10%

### 3. 48% of municipalities would like to see more data and statistics collected on film related activities in their municipalities.

The types of data that film coordinators would like to see collected include economic impact, number of shoot days, municipal revenue from filming and the number of residents living in the

municipality that work in the industry.

*Would you like to see more data and statistics collected on film related activity in your municipality?*

Responses	Number	Percent
Yes	10	48%
No	11	52%
Total	21	100%

## IV. SURVEY OF LOCATION MANAGERS

This chapter summarizes the results of our survey of 21 location managers from various sectors of the production industry. While several of the questions are different from the municipal film coordinator survey, many are the same or similar, and we will compare results from the two groups in Chapter 5.

### A. PROFILE OF LOCATION MANAGERS SURVEYED

1. The location managers surveyed have considerable experience in the film, television, and commercial production industries.

57% of respondents have been location managers for 6 to 10 years, while 23% have been location managers for 11-15 years. Only 10% of respondents had been location managers for less than 5 years.

*How long have you been a location manager?*

Responses	Number	Percent
1 year or less	0	0%
2-5 years	2	10%
6-10 years	12	57%
11-15 years	5	23%
16-20 years	2	10%
Total	21	100%

2. The Location Managers surveyed work for a mix of high and low budget feature films, MOW's, TV series and commercials.

The Location Managers commented that they work most often on feature films (48%), followed by TV series (33%), and commercials (14%).

*In the last few years, what types of productions have you worked on most often?*

Responses	Number	Percent
Features	10	48%
TV Series	7	33%
Commercials	3	14%
MOW's	1	5%
Total	21	100%

3. Although the location managers have worked in many Lower Mainland municipalities, the municipalities of Vancouver, Burnaby, and the District of North Vancouver have been filmed in most often by the location managers surveyed.

*In the past few years, in which municipalities in Greater Vancouver have you spent the most time doing business?*

<b>Responses</b>	<b>Number</b>
Vancouver	20
Burnaby	14
District of North Vancouver	6
City of North Vancouver	4
Langley Township	4
Surrey	3
Delta	3
Richmond	3
Langley City	2

## **B. FEEDBACK ON MUNICIPAL FILM GUIDELINES AND PROCESSES**

1. Just under half of location managers surveyed said there is not enough information online regarding municipal filming information.

Quick and easy access to filming information on the internet is extremely important in the fast-paced film and television production industry. Most location managers mentioned the lack of detailed fee schedules online as biggest problem. It was recommended that all municipalities have fee schedules online that are detailed enough for them to actually forecast their budget before they begin filming. It was also suggested that municipalities indicate whether or not GST is included in the stated fees.

*Do you find there is sufficient information online regarding municipal film guidelines, permit information, and fee schedules?*

<b>Responses</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Yes	12	57%
No	9	43%
Total	21	100%

2. Over half of location managers surveyed use the BC Film Commission website as a portal to municipal film permitting information.

Most of the location managers surveyed who do not use BCFC's website mentioned that they don't use it because they are already familiar with most of the information available on the site.

*Do you use the BC Film Commission Website as a portal to film permitting information?*

Responses	Number	Percent
Yes	11	52%
No	10	48%
Total	21	100%

3. **More than half of the location managers surveyed feel that the municipal filming guidelines are clear and consistent in their application.**

The 48% who said guidelines are not clear mentioned that the vagueness of the guidelines can have either positive or negative effects on productions. Some noted that it can be a good thing if the film guidelines are vague because it allows coordinators to be more flexible when dealing with unique situations. Others noted that the lack of clarity in the guidelines results in inconsistency, causing problems and making it hard to know what to expect.

*Do you feel that the current municipal filming guidelines are clear and consistent in their application?*

Responses	Number	Percent
Yes	11	52%
No	10	48%
Total	21	100%

Achieving an appropriate balance between flexibility and clarity is a difficult yet necessary responsibility for those in charge of writing municipal filming guidelines.

4. **Almost all location managers surveyed feel that the turnaround time for film permitting meets the needs of the industry.**

Most location managers said they usually receive their permits within 1 to 2 days after their applications are submitted. 86% of location managers feel that the majority of municipalities' process and issue film permits fast enough to keep up with the demands of the industry.

*Do you feel that the turnaround time for film permitting meets the needs of the industry?*

Responses	Number	Percent
Yes	18	86%
No	3	14%
Total	21	100%

A number of location managers noted that there are several municipalities that are routinely slower than others, which often hinders the production process. This considered, it is good to know that overall municipal offices are issuing film permits in a timely manner.

5. When asked what weaknesses they see in the current film permitting processes in Greater Vancouver, the most common weaknesses mentioned by location managers were that municipal staff have a “no mentality and an overall unaccommodating attitude towards filming.

Other weaknesses included a lack of permitting uniformity among municipalities, the tendency to use film permits as a means to generate revenue, insufficient knowledge about the industry on the part of municipal staff and the amount of paperwork involved when shooting in multiple municipalities.

*What weaknesses do you see in the current film permitting processes in Greater Vancouver?*

Responses	Number
Municipal staff often have a “no-mentality,” and an overall unaccommodating attitude towards filming	8
Lack of uniformity among municipalities	7
Don't know	3
Municipal Fees are based on revenue generating model rather than a cost recovery model used	2
Lack of film industry knowledge among municipal staff	2
Too much paperwork when shooting in numerous municipalities	1

### C. LOCATION RESOURCE MANAGEMENT PRACTICES

1. When asked how supportive the public is of filming in the Lower Mainland, just under half of the location managers said the public is very supportive of filming.

Many location managers noted that the public’s tolerance of the industry varies from neighborhood to neighborhood. Yet overall, 57% of location managers felt that the public is somewhat supportive and 43% felt that the public is very supportive of filming. One common concern was that some residents have the idea that productions are loaded with money and should be obligated to pay cash to anyone who is even slightly inconvenienced by filming. The truth is that the public deals with heavy traffic, lack of parking, and noise from other industries such as construction, yet nobody expects to get paid for these inconveniences.

*How supportive do you feel the public is of filming in Greater Vancouver?*

Responses	Number	Percent
Not very supportive	0	0%
Somewhat supportive	12	57%
Very supportive	9	43%
Total	21	100%

Often complaints from a small group of residents create a false perception that the majority of people are upset with the film industry. In reality, public complaints are a fact of life for many other important industries such as construction and road work. The many benefits of the film industry to BC's economy and to the 25,000 to 30,000 BC residents who earn their livelihood off of the industry should not be compromised by complaints from a small proportion of the population.

2. **Parking, traffic, and noise were the most common community concerns identified by location managers.**

People especially dislike seeing large trucks in front of their homes, the noise and smog from generators, and noise and bright lights late at night. In order to promote the long term sustainability of the industry, production teams must work hard to communicate with the public and answer their concerns without simply handing out money.

*What are the most common concerns that communities have with the film industry?*

Responses	Number
Parking	13
Traffic	10
Noise and pollution from generators	4

3. **Location Managers recommended increasing communication and involvement with affected residents to better manage filming in popular and extra sensitive locations.**

The most common recommendation was to increase communication and involvement with the residents of affected neighborhoods. Most residents just want to know that their voices are being heard and their suggestions are taken into consideration. Other common recommendations included giving neighborhoods a rest after long shoots, reducing the use of generators near houses, and limiting night time filming in "hot spots."

*Do you have any recommendations to help manage filming at recurring locations?*

Responses	Number
Increase communication and involvement with the residents in affected neighborhoods	10
Give neighborhoods a rest after long periods of shooting	8
Reduce the number of vehicles parked in front of people's houses	4
Reduce the use of generators near houses	3
Reduce night time filming in hot spots	1

4. Location Managers had many suggestions with respect to actions industry professionals, associations or levels of government could take to improve the public's acceptance and tolerance of the industry.

The most recommended action to improve the public's acceptance and tolerance of the industry was through PR campaigns on TV, in movies, and in newspapers that show the benefits of the industry and thank the public for their support.

*What actions could industry, professional organizations, or government take to improve the public's acceptance and tolerance of the industry?*

Responses	Number
Create PR advertisements on TV, in newspapers, and in theatres to thank public and show the benefits of BC film industry.	13
Place ads in the newspaper thanking the public for supporting such an important industry	6
Treat the film industry like other important industries in BC	4
Compile a list of the number of people living in each municipality who work in the film industry	3
Make sure the crew is as professional as possible when dealing with public	2
Donate money to local community projects	2
Encourage everyone who works in the industry to join their neighborhood associations	1
Give production team business cards to hand out to merchants when they purchase anything for the production	1

Several location managers commented that they feel the film industry is held to a higher standard than other industries such as construction and road work that also cause short term inconvenience to the public. It was suggested that perhaps a more aggressive public relations campaigns undertaken by industry, professional associations and levels of government would help increase the public's acceptance and tolerance for production activity.

5. 90% of the location managers surveyed use the BC Film Commission's Digital Locations Library often or very often and of those that use the library, 86% found it to be very or extremely useful.

*On a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 is not at all useful and 5 is extremely useful, how useful would you rate BCFC's Digital Locations Library?*

Responses	Number	Percent
1 – Not at All	0	0%
2	1	5%
3 – Somewhat	1	5%
4	10	48%
5 – Extremely	8	38%
Total	21	100%

Recommendations to improve the digital library included making sure that location pictures and contact information are up-to-date and providing access to the library off-site. Over 80% of the location managers surveyed indicated that they would be willing to donate files to help build BCFC's Digital Locations Library.

## D. FEES FOR MUNICIPAL SERVICES

1. When asked whether or not the fees charged for municipal services are reflective of the cost of delivery of these services, Location Managers most commonly answered "no".

38% of location managers surveyed feel that the fees charged for municipal services are higher than the cost of delivery (i.e. they are not getting a good value because fees are over priced). 33% said they feel that fees are reasonable, and another 29% said that the value varies from municipality to municipality.

*Do you feel that the fees charged are reflective of the cost of delivery for municipal services?*

Responses	Number	Percent
No, fees are over priced	8	38%
Yes, it's a good value	7	33%
Varied (good value in some municipalities, bad value in others)	6	29%
Total	21	100%

In general, location managers commented that excessively high application fees were a common concern. It was also mentioned that productions don't mind paying for municipal services so long as they are getting a great value in terms of the effort on behalf of the municipal staff in facilitating their filming requirements. Location managers working on lower budget productions expressed concern that in many municipalities the fees are based on big budget productions and are often far too expensive for smaller projects.

2. With regards to the fee rates across the Lower Mainland, most location managers said there is significant variance in filming fees from municipality to municipality.

Each municipality has its own set of fees for the services it provides, and some municipalities charge significantly higher rates than others. 62% of location managers said there is very much variance in fees, 19% said there is some variance, and 19% said there is slight variance.

*How much variance is there regarding fee rates among different municipalities?*

Responses	Number	Percent
Significant variance	13	62%
Some variance	4	19%
Not much variance	4	19%

Total	21	100%
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Location managers commented that West Vancouver, the City of North Vancouver, and the City of Vancouver are the most expensive municipalities to shoot in (in that order) whereas Delta, Coquitlam, and Burnaby were rated as the least expensive to shoot in (in that order).

## V. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR IMPROVEMENT

This chapter summarizes the recommendations for improvement put forward by both location managers and municipal film coordinators surveyed with respect to municipal film permitting guidelines and processes, best practices, film friendliness, professional development opportunities, and opportunities for standardization.

### A. MUNICIPAL FILMING PERMITTING GUIDELINES AND PROCESSES

**1. Film coordinators and location managers offered a number of recommendations to improve municipal filming guidelines.**

In general there was consensus that guidelines must be clear and that consistent procedures are used to respond and address issues that arise. While location managers and municipal film coordinators operate from fundamentally different perspectives, the interests of achieving a film friendly environment was commonly shared.

**2. The most common recommendations to improve municipal film guidelines suggested by municipal film coordinators included:**

- Improving resident letters and polling procedures;
- Defining the public's role in approving or prohibiting filming;
- Using less expensive traffic control companies instead of costly police for traffic control;
- Extending filming curfews; and
- Clarifying indemnity clauses to eliminate confusion over who is responsible for what in case of an accident.

**3. The most common recommendations to improve municipal film guidelines put forward by location managers included:**

- Increasing the standardization of forms, fees, insurance documents, and filming policies across the Lower Mainland;
- Clarifying fee schedules so it is easier to forecast filming costs; and,
- Allowing film coordinators to have more authority than residents when deciding whether or not to shoot in a particular area

Location Managers commented that the differences in both the amount of fees charged and the methods used to charge fees in each municipality often make it difficult for productions to calculate filming costs and stay on budget.

**4. Recommendations by municipal film coordinators to improve the efficiency of film permitting processes in Greater Vancouver included:**

- Increasing standardization among municipalities;
- Streamlining electrical permits; and,
- Increasing the amount of film information available online.

5. Recommendations by location managers to improve the efficiency of film permitting in Greater Vancouver included:

- Encouraging film coordinators to spend time on set;
- Increasing the consistency among municipal film guidelines;
- Clarifying indemnity agreements;
- Creating a more flexible grid system that allows filming anywhere within a certain area;
- Making film coordinators available after hours on a fee for service basis; and,
- Creating a film office and set of film rules for provincial land.

## B. OPPORTUNITIES FOR STANDARDIZATION

Unlike other competing film centers, like Los Angeles, Toronto, or New York that provide one-stop permitting, Greater Vancouver is made up of 21 local governments who are independently responsible for permitting film production activities within their respective jurisdictions. Both location managers and municipal film coordinators were asked if they think a more standardized approach to film permitting in Greater Vancouver would increase the overall efficiency of the process. The majority of respondents surveyed feel that a more standardized approach to filming policies in the Lower Mainland would be beneficial for both productions and municipal governments.

1. **76% of municipal film coordinators and 86% of location managers think a more standardized approach to film permitting in the Lower mainland would increase the overall efficiency of the process.**

Most film coordinators mentioned that a centralized permitting office similar to Los Angeles or Toronto would not work well in Greater Vancouver. However, a more regional approach towards standardized filming applications, permits, and fees was recommended by the majority of municipal film coordinators and location managers surveyed. One location manager commented however that guidelines and forms are not as important as a film friendly attitude on the part of municipal staff.

*Do you think a more standardized approach to film permitting in Greater Vancouver would increase the overall efficiency of the process?*

Response	Film Coordinators	Percent	Location Managers	Percent
Yes	16	76%	18	86%
No	2	10%	2	9%
Don't Know	3	14%	1	5%
<b>Total</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>100%</b>

2. Aspects of the film permitting process that both film coordinators and location managers identified as priorities for standardization across municipalities included the filming application, film permits, fee schedules, insurance agreements and parking and traffic control.

*Which parts of the film permitting process could be streamlined or standardized to improve the overall efficiency of the process?*

Responses	Film Coordinators	Location Managers
Filming application	15	16
Fee schedules	8	11
Insurance agreements	7	10
Film permits	9	9
Parking and traffic control	2	2

It is important to note that a previous attempt by the BC Film Commission (with the support of the Greater Vancouver Regional District board) to standardize guidelines in 2001 encouraged many municipalities to dedicate resources to the development of guidelines and management of film activities in their respective communities. Many municipalities have updated and clarified their guidelines since the recommendations made in 2001. However, little progress has been made with regards to standardizing the filming guidelines, permitting processes, and fees throughout the Lower Mainland.

### **C. BEST PRACTICES WITH REGARDS TO SERVICING FILM INDUSTRY ACTIVITY**

1. **The most common best practice identified by both film coordinators and location managers with respect to municipal film permitting is having a “yes” mentality and an overall proactive approach to film permitting.**

It is extremely important for film coordinators to be proactive and try to find solutions to problems no matter how difficult the situation at hand. For example, if a production wants to shoot in an area that is particularly sensitive to filming, instead of simply saying no, the film coordinator could either allow filming to occur there with minimal noise and impact on residents, or recommend filming in an area with a similar look that is less sensitive.

2. **Another best practice mentioned by both municipal film coordinators and location managers is making sure that filming guidelines, forms, detailed fee schedules, and maps of the city are available online.**

In addition, many location managers said they appreciate the City of Vancouver and New Westminster for their quick and easy system that allows production to submit applications online and recommended that other municipalities adopt the same system. Another common best practice mentioned by the location managers was having all fees based on a cost recovery model, which is clear and easy to forecast for budgeting.

Other best practices mentioned by the Film Coordinators included:

- Placing ads in the local paper thanking the public for their support during and after film shoots,
- Using traffic control companies instead of costly police or RCMP to Lower costs for

- productions,
  - Keeping a photo database of potential filming locations to show location managers and scouts, and
  - Donating a portion of the municipal revenue generated from filming to promote film projects for local youth.
3. With regards to the film friendliness of municipal film offices, there were slight discrepancies between the ratings given by the municipal film coordinators and locations managers surveyed.

We selected the five municipalities that issued the most film permits in 2005 and asked the location managers to rate the film friendliness of municipal services for each of the 5 municipalities on a scale of one to five where one is not at all film friendly and five is extremely film friendly. In the table below, we compare the average rating given by the location managers with the rating provided by the film coordinator with respect to the “film friendliness” of their own municipality.

**Municipal Film Friendliness**  
*(on a scale of 1 to 5 where 1 is not at all film friendly and 5 is extremely film friendly)*

Municipality	Municipal Film Liaison’s Rating	Average Rating Location Managers
Surrey	5	4.6
Burnaby	4.5	3.8
District of North Vancouver	4	4
New Westminister	4	3.6
City of Vancouver	4.5	3.5

As indicated in the table, with the exception of the District of North Vancouver, the location managers’ ratings were slightly lower than the ratings provided by municipal film coordinators. The location managers gave Surrey the highest average rating in terms of film friendliness (4.6), followed by The District of North Vancouver (4.0), Burnaby (3.8), New Westminister (3.6) and the City of Vancouver (3.5). Several location managers applauded Surrey for its “yes mentality”, cost effectiveness, and overall desire to facilitate the needs of the industry.

4. Many Municipal Film Coordinators and Location Managers undertake activities to help build support for filming in their communities.

38% of film coordinators participate in outreach activities to increase support for filming in their municipalities. With film activity growing throughout the Lower Mainland, many film coordinators are undertaking activities to promote the industry and developing more film-friendly communities in an effort to bring more business to their municipality.

The most common action taken by municipal film coordinators is to release interesting film news like the number of shoot days, types and names of productions being shot, famous actors in town, etc. to their local press. This is best achieved after the production is complete, or in consultation with the Unit Publicist for the production. Other common actions include placing ads in local

newspapers that thank the public for their support of the industry, donating municipal revenue from filming to local programs, networking with local business and community organizations, and helping local film schools and community colleges promote student films.

5. **Location managers also undertake activities to promote the benefits of the film industry, and they recommended several additional actions that industry, government, and professional associations could take to improve the public's acceptance and tolerance of the industry.**

The easiest and least expensive action taken by location managers is to follow the BC Film Commission's Code of Conduct and Best Practices by ensuring that their crew is as professional and polite as possible when dealing with the public. Location managers, location scouts, and PA's are often the face of the industry. When they are courteous to residents, business owners, and municipal staff, they can have a very positive effect on the public's acceptance and tolerance of the film industry.

One especially creative public relations method used by several location managers helps demonstrate the economic benefits of the industry to local businesses. The production gives every crew member a stack of business cards called "film dollars" to hand out to merchants every time they make a purchase for the production or for themselves while they are at work. Whether the employees purchase expensive pieces of furniture for set decoration or simply coffee and lunch at cafes, these "film dollars" show local merchants the concrete benefits that the film industry brings to local businesses.

## **D. OPPORTUNITIES FOR PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT**

1. **The majority of municipal film coordinators surveyed would like to participate in professional development opportunities related to servicing the film industry.**

90% of the municipal film coordinators surveyed would be interested in participating in film related professional development opportunities. When asked what training or professional development opportunities they felt would be beneficial, the most common area was film industry knowledge.

*Would you be interested in participating in professional development opportunities for municipal film coordinators?*

Responses	Number	Percent
Yes	19	90%
No	2	10%
Total	21	100%

Other recommended areas included conflict resolution, communications courses on public speaking and writing, and traffic management courses. The BC Film Commission has acted on this input and hosted several day long "Film 101" sessions that allow municipal film coordinators to learn more about the industry and engage in dialog with several experienced professionals from different parts of the film production industry.

2. Over 60% of location managers were in support of continued professional development opportunities.

62% of location managers surveyed would like to see a skills development program for location managers. Areas that were commonly identified for skills development include budgeting, scouting, risk management, urban planning, team management, accounting, and public speaking.

*Do you think a skills development program would be beneficial for location managers?*

Responses	Number	Percent
Yes	13	62%
No	8	38%
Total	21	100%

When asked if a professional certification program for location managers would be beneficial to the industry, only 23% of the location managers said yes. 67% of location managers said they would not be in favor of a certification program and 10% said they would need more information about the potential program to make a decision. Those location managers who were not in favor of a skills development or certification program commented that on the job training is the best way to learn, the Directors Guild of Canada's past attempts to initiate a skills development program have been unsuccessful, no other occupations on the production team must be certified, and that such a program would be too difficult to create, administer, and enforce.