

Altadena Filming Committee
Consultative Meeting Minutes with Film Professionals

Data: 12/29/16
Time: 7p-9:10p
Place: 1575 Homewood

AGENDA:

1. Welcome and introductions
2. Description of Film Committee goals
3. Review of Film Committee efforts to date
4. Q&A and discussion
 - a. In your view, what makes Altadena an attractive location for film shoots? In a related question: why is Altadena considered “film-friendly?”
 - b. What, if anything, might you suggest that would make Altadena a more popular filming location?
 - c. What, if anything, might you suggest to production companies to that might encourage neighbors to welcome a film shoot?
 - d. What, if anything, might you suggest, that would encourage film companies to patronize local businesses?
 - e. How might the film industry avoid overuse of some locations?
 - f. What, if anything, might you suggest to a community member who hosts film shoots?
 - g. If there happens to be a legitimate problem like a violation of a permit condition, what actions would you suggest for a concerned community member?
 - h. What are the most common problems caused by uncooperative neighbors? What remedies have you used in these cases?
5. Identification of any topics to follow up
6. Adjourn

MEETING NOTES

DISCUSSION

The discussion was wide ranging and covered several topics. These meeting notes reflect key discussion points from the meeting. The discussion points are organized by topic.

Why is Altadena an attractive location

Many companies report very positive experiences shooting in Altadena. The participants offered the following reasons why Altadena was a popular spot for on-location filming:

- The area can appear to be “anywhere USA.”
- It’s convenient to the studios.
- It’s easy to get around. There’s none of the headaches from LA traffic.
- Many ‘looks’ in close proximity. A Santa Fe look is a couple away from a mid-west look. As a consequence, there’s no need to travel and the crew can go home at night.
- A single base camp can reach a lot of location diversity. A crew can shoot in a variety of locations without a ‘company move.’ That is, there is no need to move catering, honeywagons, production vehicles, or personal vehicles.
- There’s ample satellite parking. Shuttling crew to satellite locations is very doable.

Los Angeles County Filming Permits

Altadena filming permits are issued by the county filming permitting service, FilmLA. The participants offered the following pluses and minus about the permitting process in Altadena:

- The County (as well as the city) approves permits on short notice – as little as two days. This compares very favorably to other areas where a permit approval may take as long as seven days.
- Filming permits in the County are expensive. The County requires payment of a variety of encroachment and road use fees. These encroachment and road fees amount to nearly \$1000 for the first day and nearly \$300 for every additional day of the permit. The County also requires a California Highway Patrol officer or LA County Sheriff's Deputy to be assigned to the shoot, at cost to the company, if the production activity occurs in the public right of way. Finally, the County also requires permit approval by the fire department, and, in certain cases, the presence on set of a representative of the fire department, all at additional cost
- Permit fees compare unfavorably to the City of LA, which does not always require fees for road use, and if they do, the fees are less expensive. For example a fire review fee in the County is \$550. The same service in the City of LA is \$150.
- Reduced fees would make filming in the County more attractive.

Crew parking and traffic

Participants identified illegal crew parking as a key issue. The participants described some of their efforts to cope with illegal parking.

- Many crew members tend to ignore the parking rules.
- There is no enforcement of permit conditions prohibiting cast and crew parking on area streets. Illegal crew parking can't be controlled unless there is enforcement.
- It can be difficult to distinguish a crew member's car from a neighbor's car. However, it is not impossible (e.g. if there's a 'water bottle and a call sheet' in the car.)
- Location managers have so many responsibilities at the location that they are unable to monitor illegal crew parking.

Law officers

Participants explained that they are required to hire a law officers from the LA County Sheriff's Department or the CHP. They explained that the law officers were there for traffic and safety, but expressed concerns that the officers typically do not provide a useful service. This was one of the primary concerns of the meeting.

They identified the following issues:

- Officers are expensive but seldom help facilitate the production effort.
- Officers do not help with enforcement of filming permit conditions like illegal crew parking.
- Officers seldom leave their cars. They seldom control traffic. For example, they do not help neighbors get out of their driveways. They do not help drivers around intersections where oncoming traffic is obscured by a production vehicle. They will not help a truck back up.
- Their job description is not clear. ("I honestly don't know what they do.") If they are asked to help with something, they occasionally will, but for a short duration only.
- The LA County law officers compare unfavorably with the retired LA Police Department officers that are used on City of LA location shoots. The retired LAPD officers are very 'hands-on.' They know what to do and will actively help, including calling the Department of Transportation to come and ticket parking violations. Participants expressed a desire to be able to hire retired LAPD officers for County film shoots.
- Officers seldom interact with the production team. "The most interaction [I have] is [to] make me sign the paper that says that I'm going to pay you."

- One participant avoids hiring CHP because they are difficult to work with.
- There was a consensus among participants that Location Managers were responsible for being the primary agent for enforcing permit conditions. However, in the likely event the location manager was occupied with other duties, the participants did not believe the law officer were expected to enforce permit conditions. Rather, participants were under the impression that FilmLA was responsible for enforcing permit conditions.
 - *Note:* On previous occasions, the committee has been told law officers are responsible for enforcement of filming permit conditions. When that policy was passed along to the participants, one replied. “Did they tell you that? They don’t.”

FilmLA Monitors

In other consultative meetings, the committee has been advised that FilmLA Monitors play a lead role in the enforcement of permit conditions. However, the participants of this meeting reported that FilmLA Monitors are rarely assigned to Altadena shoots.

Special Filming Conditions

The participants were generally aware that there were Special Filming Conditions in certain parts of Altadena. However different participants had different impressions and their understanding was conflating LA County “Special Filming Conditions” with conditions that were normally applied to all filming permits (e.g. shooting hours and/or parking restrictions.) The follow list captures the understanding the participants have of filming conditions that require a special effort.

- The only way to shoot in violation of the special conditions is to get signatures from the neighborhood. Otherwise the permit will be denied.
- Shooting all-night requires permission from the neighbors.
- For all-night shoots, Location Managers must make survey maps of the neighborhood. The maps record who says it’s OK, who doesn’t, and who refuses to sign. The survey maps are submitted to FilmLA to get the permit. Same for night shoots, unusual shoots or high frequency areas.
- If a neighbor in a house next door says ‘no,’ to an all-night shoot, that’s a big problem.
- A location manager will often pay the neighbor off for that signature, especially if the signature is requested in the evening.

Hosting

The participants described techniques used to help prepare a homeowner who hosts a filming. The goal of the preparation is to help the host understand what was expected by the film company and what might be done to help prepare the neighborhood. The participants described using the following techniques:

- Provide the hosting homeowner with a FAQ that helps the host prepare.
- Encourage the homeowner to communicate with the neighbors.
- Most issues are handled with communication. Most companies can’t afford to pay someone to go talk to people.
- People feel respected when someone takes the time to communicate and address their concerns.
- A requirement in Pasadena is that the production company send letters to the neighbors in advance of a shoot to give notification of the shoot and some explanation.

Overuse

The participants were aware of the problems caused by overuse and actively work to address the issue. They were especially aware that overuse creates problems among the neighbors and makes a neighborhood ‘unfriendly’ to film production. All noted that with frequency knowledge overuse could be avoided. They described using the following techniques to learn about possible overuse:

- Use social media to communicate with other location managers concerns about homes or areas that are overused.
- Obtain frequency reports on a location from FilmLA in advance of showing the home to the Director. FilmLA will provide frequency information to a location manager.
- Location registries are aware of how frequently a homeowner hosts a shoot. They can suggest to a home owner that the host needs to give the neighbors a break from film shoots for a time.
- These techniques may not be sufficient to learn about overuse of a location. The following causes were identified
- A homeowner may sign up with several listing services, so a location service may be unaware of how much a location has been used.
- Usage information may not be communicated in time. A property may be presented and selected by a director or producer without usage knowledge. That decision may be the result of having scouted a location without usage knowledge.

Obtaining neighbor support

The participants described using the following techniques when shooting in areas where neighborhood approval is required or if over use is an issue.

- Compose a letter describing the production and distribute to neighbors who may be affected.
- Look to the example of other cities. If overuse is an issue, institute a policy of requiring permission from people in the neighborhood.
- If the production has sufficient funds, offer payments. Payments seem to relieve most problems. It should be noted that many productions do not have budgets for payments to neighbors.

Issues with neighborhood payments

Participants expressed the following concerns about using payments to alleviate neighbors' complaints.

- Neighbors may grow to expect payments from all productions. Not all productions are budgeted for payments.
- Some neighborhoods have now organized to illegally require that every homeowner receive \$200. These extra costs make LA a less desirable place to shoot.

Support for local businesses

Participants were asked how film companies might be able encourage patronizing local businesses. With a few exceptions like purchase of gas, coffee, ice and soft drinks, there appears to be little reason to do business here in Altadena. Film companies come with all the resources they need, and film crew want to head home as soon as possible after a shoot.

SUMMARY OF DISCUSSION

Suggestions

Participants offered a number of suggestion for improvements that would make the area more film friendly.

- Require FilmLA to issue a frequency report for the location manager whenever an Altadena permit is issued.
- Obtain a job description for law enforcement officers so that location managers understand what duties the officers are expected to perform.
- Implement a customer satisfaction survey for the performance of law officers.
- Organize a film committee meeting with Teamsters leadership to relate Filming Committee's concerns about illegal cast and crew parking.
- Organize a film committee meeting with the law officers to discuss concerns raised in the meeting.
- Implement a system of neighbors parking passes so that law officers can distinguish neighbor cars from crew cars.
- Establish an Altadena film liaison who would be notified of all permits in the area
- Develop an outreach program to communicate with the community.

Complaints and concerns

The participants mentioned a number of concerns. The following issues were raised during the discussion:

- LA County permit costs. By comparison with LA City, LA County costs are high. In particular the road fees and fire inspector are high by comparison.
- On-location law officers for the Sheriff and CHP do not leave their cars and provide little or no support for production. The comparison with LA City officers is unfavorable. Particular concerns include lack of initiative to help, willingness to enforce permit conditions and reluctance to help control traffic when production vehicle obscure on-coming traffic.
- Law officers will not ticket illegally parked crew members.
- Encouraging more production in Altadena may lead to overuse. There is enough filming already. No need to encourage more productions.
- Avoid addressing overuse as a blanket, community-wide issue. Circumstances vary widely from street to street and neighborhood to neighborhood.
- Posting both sides of the street may lead to neighbor complaints especially when the posting leaves neighbors no place to park.
- Despite increases in LA County production. Runaway filming remains an issue.

Discrepancies with findings in other consultative meetings

The participants expressed an understanding of County filming policies that are at odds with information the Committee has received in other consultative meetings. These discrepancies should be resolved in order to convey the correct information to the community.

- All film shoots in Altadena require a law enforcement officer.
- All permits approved for New York Drive and Porter Drive will include a condition that requires posting no parking notices on both sides of the street.
- No permit will be issued for a production company to operate outside normal hours (i.e. 7a-10p) unless the production company obtains approval signatures from the neighborhood. Permit requests without neighborhood signatures are denied.
- No permit will be issued for an all-night shoot without permission from the neighbors adjacent to or across the street from the requested filming location.

FOLLOW UP:

The following items require follow up by the film committee

- Consult with County services to resolve the listed discrepancies
- Organize meeting with law officers to address concerns of film pros
- Arrange meeting with Location Manager's Teamsters lead.