

Report to Strategic Priorities and Policy Committee

To: Chair and Members
Strategic Priorities and Policy Committee

From: Scott Mathers, MPA, P. Eng
Deputy City Manager, Planning and Economic Development

Subject: Film London Review and Next Steps

Date: July 18, 2024

Recommendation

That, on the recommendation of the Deputy City Manager, Planning and Economic Development, the following actions be taken with respect to continuing Film London through the London Economic Development Corporation:

- a) This report **BE RECEIVED** for information;
- b) Civic Administration **BE DIRECTED** to prepare a budget amendment for permanent funding for Film London starting in 2025 for consideration as part of the 2025 Budget Update process; and
- c) Subject to the approval of funding through the 2025 Budget Update, Civic Administration **BE DIRECTED** to bring forward an amending agreement to London Economic Development Corporation Purchase of Service Agreement to reflect the continuation of the Film London program.

Executive Summary

The purpose of this report is to provide an update on the Film London program, to seek direction to prepare a budget amendment for permanent funding for Film London starting in 2025 for consideration as part of the 2025 Budget Update process and, subject to approval through the 2025 Budget Update, obtain direction to bring forward an amending agreement to the London Economic Development Corporation Purchase of Service agreement to reflect the continuation of the Film London program.

The review of Film London has shown that LEDC has been working diligently to attract filmmakers and to build London's reputation as a film-friendly city. Since 2021, London's film industry has made significant contributions to the local economy, generating over \$1 million and creating more than 300 jobs for local crew and talent.

London has hosted feature films like "You Gotta Believe," "Please, After You," "Sunshine City," and "Turn it Up," along with episodes of popular shows such as "The Amazing Race Canada," "Salvage Kings," and "Ghost Hunters of the Grand River."

Key highlights of Film London include curating London assets, creating an accessible database, enhancing the city's "film-friendly" reputation, collaborating with local stakeholders, and developing partnerships with unique attributes like the London International Airport and Fanshawe College. Additionally, Film London has been facilitating growth and retention through various initiatives, such as: partnering with local events like the Forest City Film Festival, collaborating with the London Music Office for film incubator programs, and marketing London through advertising campaigns and industry conferences. Film London has also advocated for increased regional tax credits, created a London Film Fund pilot program, and led the creation of Film Incentive Coalition of Ontario (FICO).

Film London's commitment to the film industry is evident and their efforts are positioning the city as an attractive destination for filmmakers. With a focus on workforce development and community engagement, London is becoming an exciting hub for filmmakers.

Linkage to the Corporate Strategic Plan

Council's Strategic Plan for the City of London, 2023-2027, identifies Economic Growth, Culture, and Prosperity as a Strategic Area of Focus. Film London aligns with and supports the following Strategic Areas of Focus, Expected Results and Strategies:

Outcome 1: London encourages equitable economic growth and diversification.

Expected Results:

1.1: Small and growing businesses, entrepreneurs and non-profits are supported to be successful.

Strategies:

- Strengthen existing and introduce new partnerships and programs that support small and growing businesses, cultural and non-profit organizations, and entrepreneurs.

Expected Results:

1.2: Increased economic activity from the core and the greater community.

Strategies:

- Support economic development initiatives through key business organizations including the London Chamber of Commerce, Pillar, LEDC, TechAlliance, SBC, and Business Improvement Areas.
- Expand marketing and promotions initiatives focusing on events, activity, and business opportunities in London.

Expected Results:

1.4: London is a regional centre that proactively attracts and retains talent, business, and investment.

Strategies:

- Attract and retain a skilled workforce by marketing London as a destination for new investments, education, and talent.
- Foster and leverage strategic partnerships that promote collaboration, innovation, and investment in business and employment.

Outcome 2: London is a destination of choice.

Expected Results:

2.2: Enhanced and increased creation and distribution of arts and culture activities, goods and services; notably the film and music industries.

Strategies:

- Create databases for filming and recording locations and local talent.
- Market London to creative producers throughout the cultural industries, including film and music productions in Toronto and other markets.

Analysis

1.0 Background Information

1.1 Previous Reports

- London Economic Development Corporation Purchase of Services Agreement 2024-2027, December 12, 2023, SPPC
- Film Update – Moving Forward, March 30, 2021, CPSC
- London's Film and Multi-Media Strategy Update, November 3, 2020, CPSC
- London's Film and Multi-Media Industry Update, August 13, 2019, CPSC
- Growing London's Film and Multi-Media Industry, May 29, 2017, SPPC
- Annual Review, 2017 Special Events Policies and Procedures Manual, March 20, 2017, SPPC

2.0 Discussion and Considerations

2.1 Film London - Background

On November 3, 2020, Civic Administration prepared a report titled 'London's Film and Multi-Media Strategy Update' which identified strategic objectives related to the film sector. The strategic objectives emerged from a series of industry consultations undertaken by Cobalt Connects in 2018, who was awarded the engagement contract. As a result, Cobalt Connects identified a number of priority themes and actions.

On November 10, 2020, City Council resolved that Civic Administration be directed to submit a business case as part of the 2021 Annual Budget Update process to support the implementation of the film strategic objectives. As a result, and as part of the 2021 Budget Update process, on January 12, 2021, City Council approved Budget Amendment #9, London's Film Strategy Plan. This approval allocated \$300,000 per year for 2021, 2022, and 2023 from the City of London's Economic Development Reserve Fund to support the following strategic objectives: funding and advocacy, marketing and promotion, attraction, growth and retention, and workforce development.

On March 30, 2021, a staff report, titled 'Film Update- Moving Forward', provided City Council with Civic Administration's recommendations for moving the film sector forward. By way of background, Civic Administration considered different models to implement the deliverables as approved by City Council and worked with community partners throughout the process. This work included discussions with other jurisdictions focusing on how they develop the film sector, as well as a local scan of what bodies may be best positioned to provide success for City Council. Throughout these discussions and scans, it became evident that the City of London's involvement in the sector, mainly being reactive through the issuance of Film Permits, required an increased proactive economic development lens and approach to better support growth in the sector and London's attractiveness as a film destination. These discoveries led to deeper discussions with the LEDC and the alignment of the film strategic objectives within their scope of expertise and responsibility.

The recommendations in the March 30, 2021, report indicated that the preferred course of action to move London's film sector forward was to move responsibility for Film London to the LEDC, noting that there was alignment between the film deliverables and the services purchased from LEDC through its existing Purchase of Services Agreement (PSA) and that LEDC provided the right economic development expertise to build on work that was already done. The recommendation was for the City of London to add the \$300,000 per year allocation to LEDC's PSA for the implementation of the deliverables. The LEDC PSA was also well aligned with the timelines of the funding for the film strategic objectives as approved by City Council, being 2021, 2022, and 2023.

As a result, on April 13, 2021, Council, authorized and approved an Amending Agreement to the LEDC 2020 PSA, adding a new sub-section (3g):

“support the development and implementation of London's Film Strategy, focused on **funding and advocacy, marketing and promotion, attraction, growth and retention, and workforce development.”**

In addition, section 9 had an additional section (2):

“(2) an additional \$300,000 per year (inclusive of HST, and not adjusted annually), subject to City of London annual budget approval, for the period ending December 31, 2021, and thereafter for each twelve-month period ending December 31, 2022, and 2023 related to the services outlined in subsection 3 g;”

As a result, LEDC created Film London, hired a manager, and developed a plan to implement the strategic objectives.

Furthermore, as part of a December 12, 2023, 'London Economic Development Corporation Purchase of Services Agreement 2024-2027' report, Civic Administration recommended to approve the LEDC PSA which included the following clause related to the film portfolio:

“(2) a one-time allocation of \$300,000 BE AUTHORIZED and APPROVED from the Economic Development Reserve Fund to LEDC for 2024 for services to implement London’s Film Strategy, as set out in section 3(g) of the Agreement, noting that additional funding beyond 2024 is subject to City of London annual budget approval and subject to the prior written annual request of the Deputy City Manager, Planning and Economic Development as directed by Council.”

As such, the LEDC was funded to implement the identified film strategic objectives for 2024, subject to a review to determine the future of the program. Civic Administration has reviewed the program, and the findings are noted below.

2.2 Film London Review and Update (2021-2023):

Since 2021, the film industry contributed over \$1 million to the local economy, created over 300 jobs for local crew and talent by successfully attracting and working with 25 productions. Highlights include “The Changeling” for Apple TV+, “Blackberry” for CBC and XYZ Films, “Mr. Monk’s Last Case” for NBC Universal, “Pradeeps of Pittsburgh” for Sony Pictures Television, “You Gotta Believe” for Well Go USA Entertainment, and most recently, “Motorheads” for Amazon Prime. Additionally, entire feature films that have been filmed in London include “Please, After You,” “Sunshine City,” and “Turn it Up,” as well as episodes of “The Amazing Race Canada,” “Salvage Kings,” and “Ghost Hunters of the Grand River.”

London is a UNESCO City of Music, regionally recognized as a location for creative talent, necessary infrastructure (soundstages, post-production studios), the variety of its locations, the growing sectors adjacent to entertainment like tech, tourism, sports and culture, and for the overall inclusive nature of the city.

This document highlights the key activities and progress of Film London:

Initiative/Action	2021	2022	2023
Website Film Databases: Locations	94	120	198
Website Film Databases: Performers	23	127	170
Website Film Databases: Resources	70	86	87
Website Film Databases: Crew	63	106	132
Film Location Tours	4	18	22
Film Projects (Productions Filmed)	15	11	15
Social Media Followers (Twitter, LinkedIn, Facebook and Instagram)	386	1490	2660
Jobs created	N/A	N/A	217
Revenue from film and TV production	N/A	N/A	\$1M

1. Attraction:

- [Curated London assets and created an accessible database](#) for easy access. To date, Film London’s online database boasts 1800 users, 173 locations, 165 performers, 143 crew members, and 88 resources.
- Enhanced London’s “film-friendly” reputation by supporting local property owners, institutions, crew, talent, and civic administration as they engage with film productions.
- Collaborated with City of London Community Development & Grants department to build strong processes for meeting production needs, including permitting, road closures, canvassing, signage, parking, and more.
- Enhanced the Ontario Creates Locations Library of London properties.
- Developed partnerships with London’s unique attributes such as the London International Airport, Fanshawe College, Woodholme Manor, ReForest London,

CTV London, Citi Plaza, and the London Provincial Offenses Offices to highlight London's particularly desirable filming destinations.

- Marketed London resources such as Accounting Services, Legal support, Talent Agencies, Service Production Companies, IATSE 105 members, office space, parking amenities, etc.
- Maintained relationships with City of London Special Events team to coordinate and orchestrate efficient permitting and road closures.
- Liaised with local hotel Sales Managers to establish preferred rates for visiting talent and crew where possible.

2. **Local Growth and Retention:**

- Partnered with the Forest City Film Festival to execute programs during the Ontario Screen Creators Conference and administered the [Feature Film Project Pitch Contest](https://fcff.ca/sponsors/) (<https://fcff.ca/sponsors/>).
- Collaborated with the London Music Office to create plans for film [incubator programs](#) designed to give emerging filmmakers the opportunity to work one-on-one with industry professionals to hone their craft and take the next step to developing their project.
- Sourced existing venues to use as or convert into possible production studio space.
- Marketed City of London owned industrial lands to potential developers for production studio build (<https://filmlondon.ca/studio-land/>).
- Partnered with local service providers to assist in growing their brands and raise awareness of services (<https://filmlondon.ca/local-resources/>).
- Partnered with local businesses such as the Hyland Cinema, Shock Stock, Forest City Comic-Con, Forest City London Music Awards, London Music Office, London Music Hall of Fame, London Lesbian Film Festival, All Things Film, and TAP to offer seminars, workshops, and panels for emerging filmmakers.

3. **Workforce Development:**

- Hosted networking events with the goal of bringing the local industry /talent together. Film London events regularly host 100+ attendees at such events.
- Hosted ongoing seminars that educate Londoners on the specifics of working with film & television productions ([seminar 1](#)) ([seminar 2](#)).
- Organized job-fair events that connect local talent and crew with businesses and content creators ([job fair](#)).
- Worked with post-secondary institutions to source talent, investigate curriculum gaps and create training opportunities based on industry feedback.
- Created a London post-secondary film and multi-media alumni network from Fanshawe, OIART and Western to connect those working in industry.
- Created London "crew rate-sheet" that will easily identify London's established crew for easy cost analysis by visiting producers.
- Supported the inclusion of Black, Indigenous and People of Colour within the creative sector.

4. **Marketing and Promotion:**

- Launched a series of [advertising campaigns](#) that target industry professionals in the GTA, and on national and international platforms such as Playback Magazine.
- Showcased London at leading industry conferences and festivals, such as Toronto International Film Festival, Banff World Media Festival and the American Film Market.
- Engaged local content creators to establish a [social media](#) presence that can highlight events and opportunities led by both Film London as well as partnering businesses.
- Engaged local videographers to create promotional material for London, such as sizzle reels, b-roll, vignettes and more (<https://filmlondon.ca/gallery/>) (https://filmlondon.ca/featured_locations/).

5. Funding and Advocacy:

- Film London has led several initiatives to advocate for increased/additional regional bonus tax credits, as further financial incentives are necessary to grow the volume of film and television production throughout SWO.
- Researched incentives in other provinces to lay the groundwork for a viable program in which to model, such as British Columbia's multi-tiered Regional Bonus program.
- Worked with Tourism London to leverage the Municipal Accommodation Tax funding and create a London Film Fund pilot program, modeled after the Northern Ontario Heritage Fund Corporation's Film & Television Stream.
- Led the creation of [Film Incentive Coalition of Ontario \(FICO\)](#), with several municipalities across Ontario including Stratford, Woodstock, Chatham-Kent, Kitchener-Waterloo, Brantford, Hamilton, Kingston, and more.
- Developed regional referral protocol with London's neighbouring communities such as Strathroy, St. Thomas, and Chatham-Kent to strengthen the benefits of hosting productions across Southwestern Ontario Community.

2.3 Recommendation for Film London

Film London has been actively fostering the growth of the film industry in London. Film London's initiatives include partnering with local events like the Forest City Film Festival, collaborating with the London Music Office for film incubator programs, and marketing London through advertising campaigns and industry conferences. Film London has also advocated for increased regional tax credits, created a London Film Fund pilot program, and led the creation of Film Incentive Coalition of Ontario (FICO). With a focus on workforce development and community engagement, London is becoming an exciting hub for filmmakers.

In summary, Film London's multifaceted approach which involves local partnerships, talent development, marketing efforts, and advocacy, is helping to position London as a thriving destination for film production and creativity. Film London has been instrumental in promoting the city as a desirable filming location and supporting the local film industry, and therefore Civic Administration recommends that Film London continue under the LEDC PSA on a permanent basis.

In order to continue Film London on a permanent basis, Civic Administration is seeking direction to prepare a budget amendment for permanent funding starting in 2025 for consideration as part of the 2025 Budget Update process (recommendation b). Subject to approval of the budget amendment, Civic Administration is also seeking direction to bring forward an amending agreement to the PSA with LEDC to reflect the continuation of the Film London program and establish the required funding (recommendation c).

3.0 Financial Impact/Considerations

In December 2023, Municipal Council approved funding to LEDC with a one-time contribution of \$300,000 from the Economic Development Reserve Fund to support London's film strategic objectives for 2024, subject to a review to determine the future of the program.

Civic Administration is seeking direction to prepare a budget amendment for permanent funding starting in 2025 for consideration as part of the 2025 Budget Update process. LEDC has indicated that Film London can continue with \$300,000 of funding in 2025, but requests that this funding be indexed with inflation after 2025, consistent with LEDC's PSA with the City of London for the other services they perform. The amount and inflation increase will be reflected in the budget amendment to the 2025 Budget Update, subject to Municipal Council's approval to bring forward the amendment.

4.0 Next Steps

In order to continue Film London on a permanent basis, Civic Administration is seeking direction to prepare a budget amendment for permanent funding starting in 2025 and to present an amending agreement with LEDC to continue the program.

The budget amendment would come forward as part of the 2025 Budget Update which is scheduled to be released on October 28, 2024, with approval in late November/early December. Subject to approval of the budget amendment, the amending agreement to the PSA with LEDC to reflect the continuation of the Film London program and establish the required funding would come forward in January 2025.

Conclusion

In conclusion, Film London's dedicated efforts are helping to transform the city into a thriving hub for filmmakers, content developers, and the broader creative industries. The initiatives undertaken by Film London have enhanced London's reputation as a film-friendly city. Overall, Film London is positioning the city as an attractive destination for filmmakers and is helping to foster creativity in the industry.

On December 20, 2023, Municipal Council approved \$300,000 with one-time funding to support Film London for 2024. A review of Film London suggests it has been successful. Civic Administration recommends continuing the program permanently and therefore seeks direction to bring forward a budget amendment with the 2025 Budget Update, and pending approval of the budget amendment, bring forward an amended agreement with LEDC to continue the program.

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