

Film Crew Town Hall

July 30, 2024

Location: M5 Creative

Presented by: Seattle Film Commission

Presentations

started at 6:08pm

Kick-off by Sara Nelson

- Gratitude for Seattle Film Commission & Chris Swenson
- Intro moderator Michael Huang

Michael Huang

- Intro, agenda, logistics
- Intro of panel:
 - Amy Lillard, Washington Filmworks
 - Kate Becker, King County Creative
 - Chris Swenson, City of Seattle, Office of Economic Development

Chris Swenson / City of Seattle presentation:

- Seattle Film Office (housed within OED)
- Office of Economic Development
 - Advocate
 - Promote
 - Provide service
 - Create policy
- Central to the work: "If you are an artist, you should be able to make a living with your art in Seattle"
- Role of the Office of Film and Music
 - Coordinate permits
 - One stop shop for all permitting
 - \$25/day
 - Parking pass to scout locations for free
 - Administrate Film Commission
 - Codified City's relationship with film
 - Created accountability
 - Monthly public meeting
 - Advises on workforce development, marketing Seattle, building a diverse and equitable film industry

- 11 positions - 5 appointed by Council, 5 appointed by Mayor, 11th seat appointed by Commission
- 3 priorities identified by the Film Commission
 - Economic development and workforce development
 - Policy initiatives
 - Marketing and branding
- Work on policies and initiatives to support filmmaking
 - Create and advise on policies
 - Ex. Commercial drone filming
 - Ex. 3rd party officer hires
 - Initiatives
 - Commercialize Seattle
 - M5 building - 40k square feet, 96 cubicles, 18 offices
 - Film office production space, short-term
 - Creative production space, short-term tenants
 - Filming locations
 - Creative economy events
 - Reduced rates
- Market Seattle as premier location for film
 - Interagency partnerships
 - King County
 - WA Filmworks
 - Unions
 - Ongoing sales trips & marketing

Kate Becker / King County presentation:

- King County Creative initiative - launched in 2019
 - Highest current investment from this office is in film
 - King County includes 39 cities and large unincorporated area
 - What does the office do?
 - Film permitting in King Co. properties and in unincorporated areas
 - Harbor Island Studios
 - Sound stages for filming
 - Training programs in the space
 - 4 incentives to access reduced rates
 - Local cast and crew
 - Diversity plan
 - Green filmmaking

- Next gen opportunity
- On the horizon:
 - Sound insulate the roof
 - Mill for building sets
 - These projects are already funded by King Co
 - Solar possibility
 - Just finished solar assessment funded by WA Dept of Commerce
 - Comms and marketing strategy
 - Next year: marketing and sales trips
- Policy and initiatives
- EFAB administration (Executive Film Advisory Board)
 - Since 2020, help develop and advise Harbor Island Studios
- Market the region and engage with community
 - Communications plan this fall, with marketing to launch in 2025
- Not a funding office
 - Partner with 4Culture for funding initiatives
 - Doors Open funding now in play (expected \$103M/year)

Amy Lillard / Washington Filmworks presentation:

- Washington Filmworks
 - Legislatively commissioned nonprofit
 - Launched in 2007
 - Economic development in film
 - Board selected by the Governor
 - 6 Board Members are Seattle-based
 - Advised by an Equity Committee and Film Leadership Council
- What does WF do?
 - Film funding
 - Production resources
 - Workforce development
 - Marketing
 - Advocacy
- State of the industry:
 - Current focus on marketing WA to films, commercials, etc.
 - Takeaway: strange time for the industry
 - Consolidation due to streamers fallout
 - Industry contraction - "the great contraction"
 - New IATSE/WGA contracts costing studios \$450M+/year
 - Impact: everyone is fighting to get greenlit
 - Lots of production moving overseas

- Ex. One production company moved from 65% in US > to 35%
 - Commercial
 - Budgets are shrinking
 - Directors as talent, ability to find directors around the world at lower cost
 - Takeaway: incentives continue to drive the market
 - WA incentive is competitive
 - Cash back state
 - Everything is in house, under the WF umbrella (funding assistance support, production resources, etc.)
 - Enhanced incentives
 - Filming in rural communities
 - Telling the story of historically underrepresented community
 - WF has a lot of \$ in the bank currently
- WF Marketing efforts
 - Target market
 - \$3-10M projects, inching toward \$15M
 - Recent and upcoming efforts
 - Sales trips to LA
 - Upcoming national commercial campaign
 - Zeroing in on 100 commercial companies that are a WA good fit
 - New drone footage from across the state to aid in this effort
 - Association of Independent Producers growing possibility
 - Upcoming presentation to LMGI, showcasing WA locations
 - Recent fam tour in Walla Walla
- WF programs
 - Funding Assistance programs
 - PIP (Production Incentive Program)
 - SBPI (Small Budget Production Initiative)
 - Investment in future of film in WA
 - 15 fully funded local projects that have filmed
 - FWD Funding Initiative
 - \$150K investment in workforce development efforts across the state
 - Next round is opening in October
 - Above the Line Education Forum and Mentorship program
 - Education Forum - 12 weeks online, serves 30 people from historically underrepresented communities

- Mentorship - 6 months, matches 5 filmmakers with in-state and out-of-state mentors
 - Next cohort will focus on documentary filmmakers
- Action item for all:
 - Follow WF on social media
 - Create account in the production directory

Q&A Session:

started at 7:13pm

Format: submitted questions and live in audience

Submitted Q: How do we get more productions/work to our region, city, state?

Michael: this was covered in the presentations quite a bit, invite Kate and Chris to share more on next/additional efforts

Kate: at King Co. we complement the state film incentive / upcoming marketing campaign / liaisons throughout the county

Chris: collective effort across city, county, state / keys: location resources, skilled crew, financing

Audience comment/follow-up: Corporate work is what keeps folks working, not narrative and features. The work that usually happens in town and sustains people is not happening right now. It's not about directors going to the UK.

Chris: permitting, etc, is not the whole cost of filmmaking in Seattle. It's also the cost of working in Seattle - lodging, etc.

Amy: the contraction is not uniquely narrative / the commercial market is shifting to different audiences, and younger audiences may not be as discerning / AI is impacting the industry, especially in the commercial space

Chris: we collect data for film permitting in Seattle, which is only a portion of what happens in Seattle, as they don't permit for private locations / fascinating trend: shift 80% of clients previously had location managers, now under 10%

Michael: I feel this as a head of an agency / opportunity to advertise Seattle's post production and VFX capabilities/ how do we signal and attract for our capabilities?

Amy: post production has changed - industry has shared challenge of finding post-production folks in WA / ex. OR is currently bringing in \$4m in post- production work / as individual contractors, can be hard to find - opportunity for folks to be WF production directory

Audience (Clara, indie filmmaker): What can we do to increase collaboration between crew and above the line folks - many operate in silos and cliques. Coming together as a community makes us more competitive regionally. How can we be more united?

Chris: this is why we are here / indicator of the need for coming together and collaboration / during my 15 yrs in film production, largely in commercial/corporate work - then shifted to narrative and found it was a whole new community. Current state is not dissimilar. Upcoming MXR events as opportunity to bring people together.

Michael: as a film commissioner, this can also be mobilized by us / don't always rely on govt agencies/bureaucracies to bring folks together. This is a shared opportunity and responsibility.

Audience (Matt): Creative agencies that exist here are not shooting here. Local companies are generating bids here, but shipping the work elsewhere. How can we address this?

From the audience Melissa Purcell, IATSE: film commission has been talking about this, how to connect with local companies to hire local

Audience: 5-10 of the biggest businesses in the world are headquartered here. How do we keep their corporate video work here?

Michael: I am the conduit for this conversation on the film commission / connect with me

Amy: we have to get smarter

Chris: each agency has advisory boards to help push this conversation / ex. Film commission is talking about this

Audience (Aviana?): What does the Seattle Film Commission do? What is their budget? How do they make impact?

Chris: volunteer group, appointed by electeds, representing different disciplines within the film industry / role is advisory - make recommendations to City of Seattle on investment and policy / they have identified priorities - up to the City to take the work on / City works with other partners to make sure work is aligned across the city/county/state / \$10k budget annually to commission

Michael: commission serves as bridge between industry and City - ex. Supported the Cinerama/SIFF acquisition)

Audience (Lisbeth?): I moved here from the east coast. I am not seeing inspiration in our schools, working with students. Young artists don't know what to do. My school (in South Carolina) was getting students out and working on projects - made a pipeline to work. Does that exist here?

Kate: training programs at Harbor Island, including Film Community Training program / current focus is on ensuring folks stay employed / good things are happening, but there is more opportunity

Amy: OSPI is a barrier to entry through current CTE (career technical education) / there are conversations/strategizing in the works

Kate: local orgs doing good work - 48 hour film project, and NFFTY

Audience (Paul, location manager in WA): Location managers are at the tip of the spear for any project. Running into issues with lots of red tape: WA State Parks, DNR, Fish and Wildlife. Running into red tape in WA can be embarrassing - Oregon is easier. New governor coming soon, are you doing anything in particular to cut red tape, gain influence with gubernatorial candidates?

Amy: as a private nonprofit, WF can lobby and advocate / County and City cannot engage in the same way, by law. I have met with 3 gubernatorial campaigns/ and working through Whipsmart (WF partner organization) and lobbyist to identify champions / more to come after primaries

Audience (Kat Ogden, Seattle Film Commission): I represent crew on the commission, and invite folks to get in touch. Do not email Kat personally - go to website and send an email to the whole commission - it becomes a matter of record. We want to hear from you. We are a very active commission. We are unique - we are a community and an industry. A lot comes back to grassroots efforts - get involved and reach out to commission.

Audience (Peter Barnes, EFAB): We need to throw parties again - networking and fun.

Audience (Lucas): Every high school in Seattle has a digital filmmaking program. When was the last time you went to these schools? Would like to see prioritization of education- ex. WA Filmworks sponsoring festivals or events.

Amy: we are addressing this in a couple different ways / interviews with pros to share with young people - how do we inspire the next generation? Ways to help folks see

themselves in this industry / every opportunity that we can, we grab snippets to inspire to share with young people to get into film / ex. Interviewed filmmakers at SIFF /

Follow-up: young people are already inspired, they need help getting in.

Amy: resources are not the same across the state /Seattle is a largely privileged area in terms of resources and access / we need to balance this as a statewide organization

Audience (Anthony Tackett, Seattle Film Commission): Comment: We need to open our doors and let people in, are you a producer and hiring people? Let people in.

Shared question from someone who could not attend: What about Mayors and other City Councils? What are we doing there and how do we get their support?

Kate: Executive Dow Constantine is in it with us / has stewarded and protected these efforts

Chris: knowledgeable and supportive leadership is really critical / ex. What happened in New Mexico / Councilmember Nelson has been a major supporter of the film industry in Seattle/ individually and collectively it is important to use the channels to talk to electeds and leadership / City and County cannot legally advocate in this way / WA Filmworks, nonprofits, and community members can employ other methods/outreach

Audience (Noah, just moved to Seattle): I have noticed in other markets, there are a lot of mentorship opportunities. As deadlines get tighter and tighter, it is hard to find Mentorship opps. For folks entering, and those at intermediate level. Mentorship can take many forms, can be as simple as speed-dating. What are you doing to expand mentorship opps in Seattle?

Amy: we heard this in statewide survey / ATL Mentorship has launched / Whipsmart will have mentorship opps as well, more than just film

Kate: next gen incentive at Harbor Island helps get folks on set with more experienced folks

Chris: City currently working on what mentorship and workforce opps look like and could look like

Audience (Melissa Purcell, IATSE): We need to be careful of asking too much of film offices. They are about bringing work to the state. We need to think about how we are competitive within the Northwest, with Oregon and Montana.

Session ended at 8:00pm