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The Regional Municipality of Durham Report

To: Planning and Economic Development Committee
From: Commissioner of Planning and Economic Development
Report: #2024-EDT-8
Date: May 7, 2024

Subject:

Film and Television Sector Development, 2012 to 2022, and Future Plans

Recommendation:

That the Planning and Economic Development Committee recommends:

That this report be received for information.

Report:

1. Purpose

1.1 The purpose of this report is to provide an update on the development of the film and television sector in Durham Region and an overview of activities since the inception of the Durham Region Film Commission.

1.2 This report will be accompanied by a staff presentation from Eileen Kennedy, Creative Industries Program Specialist.

2. Background

2.1 Prior to 2012, the Region of Durham had no formal processes for managing film-related investment inquiries, facilitating productions and permits, statistical reporting, or a sector development budget and programming.

2.2 In 2012, the Region of Durham established a film office, known as the Durham Region Film Commission (Film Durham) with support from external stakeholders

such as [Ontario Creates](#), industry unions and guilds, post-secondary institutions, and area municipalities.

- 2.3 The establishment of Film Durham allowed for a formalization of processes and enabled a strategic focus on the film and television industry in Durham Region.
- 2.4 In 2014 Film Durham became a member of the Association of Film Commissions International which provided global access, valuable resources, educational opportunities, and other benefits as a film commission.
- 2.5 In 2015, MDB Insights, a consulting group, completed a film sector analysis and strategy to provide a solid perspective on Durham's value proposition and prospects in the film sector.
- 2.6 The MDB report included an action plan with three areas to enhance Film Durham's resources and profile in the Greater Toronto Hamilton Area (GTHA) film and television sector:
 - a. Strengthen and develop the existing internal structures and systems to encourage greater promotion and development of the sector;
 - b. Identify sector-building activities and infrastructure investments, leveraging external resources where possible to extend the reach of Film Durham;
 - c. Engage with existing regional networks and coordinate internal resources to strengthen industry networking and collaboration opportunities.

3. Action Plan outcomes and achievements

- 3.1 Several achievements resulted from the MDB strategy and its associated action plan. These achievements include:
 - a. Film Durham became the official central point of contact for film and television production companies seeking filming locations;
 - b. A dedicated sector profile web page was created on the [Investdurham.ca website](https://investdurham.ca), and other digital promotional activities were launched to grow Durham's film and television industry;
 - c. The Durham Film and Television Advisory Committee was formed to provide direction to Film Durham and assist with building key industry relationships;
 - d. Comprehensive reporting began to highlight economic impact, sector growth, and encourage partnerships;
 - e. A budget was created to deliver sector development programming, dedicate staff resources, and conduct investment attraction activities;

- f. A film liaison role was identified in each municipality and processes were streamlined to manage productions, permits and supporting resources;
- g. Promotion of Durham locations began through digital locations libraries, familiarizations tours, domestic and international industry conferences and trade shows, marketing materials and trade magazines.

4. Growth of the Film and Television Industry in Durham Region

- 4.1 Since 2012, most productions filming in Durham have changed from low-budget independent projects to high-budget foreign and domestic television shows, feature films, movies of the week and commercials.
- 4.2 In the past ten years, the film and television industry in Durham Region has experienced strong growth. Production value realized an annualized 15 per cent growth rate from \$19.7M in 2012 to \$76.9M in 2022, and production days grew at an annualized rate of 10 per rate from 224 to 598.
- 4.3 Major domestic and foreign studios bringing their projects to Durham are Disney, CBS, Paramount, Amazon, Netflix, Shaftesbury, CBC, Apple TV, and MGM. High profile productions have included *Anne with an E*, *Murdoch Mysteries*, *Reacher*, *Schitt's Creek*, *Star Trek: Strange New Worlds*, *Thanksgiving*, *The Handmaid's Tale*, *The Umbrella Academy*, *The Way Home*, and the Oscar-winning film *Women Talking*.

5. Investment Highlights

- 5.1 As an outcome of continued growth in the Region's film and television sector, being a welcoming host community to film, and successful efforts of area municipal teams, the Region has welcomed two successful film sector investments:
 - a. [William F. White International Inc.'s](#) backlot opened in 2021 in the City of Pickering. The 23-acre, modern day small town is situated on a 90-acre plot of land leased from the City of Pickering, and was built for feature films, TV series, and commercials. It is the largest of its kind in Canada.
 - b. [TriBro Sandy Beach Studios](#) opened May 2022 in City of Pickering. The facility is a 180,000 square foot studio with three soundstages, shops, 30,000 square foot production offices, and ancillary space. They also offer virtual reality (VR) services with a mobile volume wall.

6. Sector Development Highlights

- 6.1 Film Durham undertakes numerous regular sector development initiatives to grow the local film and television industry. These include annual and reoccurring events and programs. Examples include:
- a. Initiatives to identify new potential filming locations, documenting them through photography and descriptions, to increase Durham's presence on the Ontario Creates Digital Location Library. Currently there are more than 370 sites listed covering a variety of time periods and geographies;
 - b. The annual Durham Region International Film Festival (DRIFF), which is supported through sponsorship and in-kind commitment of staff time. These events feature three days of events, film screenings, awards, and industry workshops in venues in Ajax, Oshawa, and Whitby;
 - c. Film tourism projects such as the Fannibal Fest film tours in 2017 (54 tourists) and 2018 (204 tourists) taking *Hannibal* fans from thirteen countries to locations in Durham where scenes were filmed;
 - d. The production of the Guide to Filming in Durham, which advertises Durham's businesses, locations, and industry-related resources to film industry professionals;
 - e. Regular Film and Television Industry Career Fairs, which support workforce development. Past events have seen between 550 and 1000 attendees;
 - f. Ongoing participation in the Advisory Committee and Ambassador program for the [Ontario Green Screen](#) (OGS) initiative which provide screen-based industries and government agencies with a green plan for sustainable film and television production in Ontario;
 - g. Promoting the 2022 and 2024 Emerging Filmmaker Incubator where local filmmakers compete to win cash plus equipment grants and resources to produce a short film screened at DRIFF;
 - h. Co-hosting events such as the How to Do Business with the Film and Television Industry (240 registrants), to provide local businesses with the information required to access film production opportunities;
 - i. A partnership with Parkwood National Historic Site, one of Canada's top ten filming locations, to promote the region's film and television industry.

7. Updated strategy

- 7.1 In December 2022, Regional council approved Ready Set Future: A PLACE Blueprint for Durham, the new Economic Development and Tourism strategy and action plan.

- 7.2 Ready Set Future identifies goals to strengthen Quality of Place, including an action item to enable growth in the film industry through a refreshed region-wide film sector plan.
- 7.3 Staff are beginning work to develop this refreshed plan to further propel growth in the film and television industry in Durham Region.

8. Relationship to Strategic Plan

- 8.1 This report aligns with/addresses the following strategic goals and priorities in the Durham region Strategic Plan:
- a. Priority 3.1 - Position Durham Region as the location of choice for business.
 - b. Priority 3.2 - Leverage Durham's prime geography, social infrastructure, and strong partnerships to foster economic growth.

9. Conclusion

- 9.1 Durham Region's film sector creates significant economic impact in the region, creating jobs, spill over spending, and attracting investment. Economic Development and Tourism Division staff efforts have strongly contributed to the significant growth of this industry in Durham and staff will continue to undertake various initiatives to leverage the opportunity of growing the film and television industry.
- 9.2 Staff are beginning work on a refreshed Film and Television Sector plan in 2024.

Respectfully submitted,

Original signed by

Brian Bridgeman, MCIP, RPP, PLE
Commissioner of Planning and
Economic Development

Recommended for Presentation to Committee

Original signed by

Elaine C. Baxter-Trahair
Chief Administrative Officer