

**FLORIDA FILM AND ENTERTAINMENT ADVISORY COUNCIL**

3<sup>rd</sup> Quarter Meeting

September 30, 2021

10 a.m. – 12 p.m.

**107 East Madison St.**

**Tallahassee, FL 32399**

**MINUTES**

**CALL TO ORDER AND WELCOME**

Administrative (Interim Chair Ana Siegel)

Call to Order by Interim Chair Siegel at 10:00 a.m.

Roll Call:

*Councilmembers:*

Interim Chair Ana Siegel

Kevin Ambler

Sandy Lighterman

Durand Adams

Ryan Neves

Marc Meisel

Lisa Scott Founds

Aaron Bellamy

*Ex-Officio Members*

Dani DeStafney, VISIT FLORIDA

Jonas Marquez, Enterprise FL, Inc.

*Members of the Public:*

Meagan Happel, Space Coast Film Commission

Gail Morgan, Film Florida

John Lux, Film Florida

Tyler Martinolich, Tampa Bay Film Commission

Michael Viera, SAG-AFTRA

*Office of Film and Entertainment (OFE) Staff:*

Commissioner Niki Welge

Susan Simms

Donyelle Marshall

Xavier Torres

## **WELCOME**

Interim Chair Ana Siegel welcomed everyone and confirmed future meetings would be scheduled via email.

## **OLD BUSINESS**

### 2021 2nd Quarter Meeting Minutes

Councilmember Lisa Scott Founds asked for a minor revision to the minutes. She noted that the Broward County Administrator had been selected, not hired, and that they will take over when the current Administrator retires next year.

Councilmember Sandy Lighterman made a motion to approve the minutes as amended.

Councilmember Scott Founds seconded the motion.

The minutes were adopted unanimously.

## **NEW BUSINESS**

### Legislative Update (Commissioner Welge)

Commissioner Welge stated that the 2022 legislative session will start on January 11<sup>th</sup> and go through March 11<sup>th</sup>, 2022. Committee weeks started earlier this month. No bills have been filed yet relating to industry, but we anticipate Film Florida's Targeted Rebate bills to be filed soon. Gail Morgan is on the call today and can provide us with an update from their organization. Another version of the CITC bill from last year may be filed as well. This year the legislature will be handling redistricting during legislative session, which takes place every 10 years, and will potentially complicate things.

Commissioner Welge asked Councilmember Ambler for his suggested strategy for this session.

Councilmember Ambler started by saying he participated in Film Florida's Legislative Committee meeting and their lobbyists provided an update on the status of their legislation. Both bills are in Bill Drafting and are being tweaked in the House and Senate. Senate leadership looks good for support. The new Senate President, Wilton Simpson, has a good grasp on how this industry is beneficial to the state, but there continues to be resistance in the House. Primarily some issues with Chairman Blaise Ingoglia who still has the philosophical belief that incentive programs are corporate welfare. It could be difficult to get the bill calendared in the House, and the focus right now should be on Speaker Sprowls and Designate Renner to get them on board.

An important talking point this year is economic recovery and a good example of that is a story Susan Simms told about a \$100M series Florida lost to Georgia because we didn't have an incentive to offer them. When we can demonstrate the loss of specific large-scale projects, it's

hard to deny the industry needs help. A rebuttal to corporate welfare is simple, the structure of the bill has evolved. There may also be a backdoor option to bypass a committee blockage by putting the language in an amendment to a larger package.

The purpose of the incentive is to make Florida more competitive. We need to understand what our competitors are doing to attract large scale projects here. Neighboring states like Georgia offering major incentives with similar locations, studios, etc. will encourage a production to go there instead. The idea is to compete, but we don't need to have the sweetest deal in town.

There is a growing platform of educated cosponsors of the bill that will hit critical mass when legislators on both sides of the isle put pressure on the Speaker. We can utilize the press also to put more pressure on leadership.

Local counties have embraced the idea of incentives and they can make a difference. Tyler from Hillsborough County has done a marvelous job embracing the industry and creating a local incentive. They also have a proposal to build a studio at the county level to bring in projects to the area. The local incentives make a difference and we can use the data to show the impact and how other areas would benefit. The atmosphere is improving with more cosponsors, but more work must be done in the House.

#### Office of Film and Entertainment Team Report

#### Office Updates (Commissioner Niki Welge)

Commissioner Welge recognized their fantastic Marketing and Outreach Intern, Xavier Torres, who has been working for the office for the past month. Xavier graduated with his Masters in Entertainment Business from Full Sail University and has been handling social media, web updates, and graphic design for the office. She thanked him for his fantastic work and help during his internship.

The OFE finally got the thumbs up to start traveling, marketing, and to hire a full-time employee to fill the Marketing and Outreach Coordinator position that has been vacant since April 2020. She hopes to have an announcement soon. She expressed her gratitude to Secretary Eagle for his support of the office and is hopeful this will lead to support in other ways down the road.

The OFE is currently working with the Department of Environmental Protection to update their film permitting system for the 175 state parks in Florida. The award-winning state parks have some of the most beautiful and diverse filming locations in the state and are a huge asset. We are working to ensure their permitting system is easy to navigate. She reminded everyone that the OFE can assist with filming on state property.

She provided an update on FFEAC appointments, stating there has been no movement in the EOG or House at this time. DEO leadership has been encouraging the EOG to make appointments.

At the end of every fiscal year, OFE staff work to put together their performance measures which requires staff to reach out to every project worked during the fiscal year to determine whether the project filmed here in the state. While this process is time consuming, it gives staff a great excuse to touch base with clients and keep Florida top of mind. The data was just reported to the EOG along with DEO's legislative budget request.

- The total number of Sales Tax Exemption applications approved by OFE during the reporting period: 962
- The number of productions assisted by OFE during the year: 2,160
- The number of productions assisted by OFE resulting in business during the year: 1,785
- The percentage of productions assisted by OFE resulting in business and employment in Florida: 83%

She pointed out the success of the Sales Tax Exemption program. Last fiscal year, Donyelle approved 962 applications for the program, which is almost at pre-pandemic levels. She approved nearly 100 more applications during the first quarter of this fiscal year in comparison to last year at this time.

She thanked the Tampa Film Commission for including information about the Sales Tax Exemption program in their office monthly newsletter.

Commissioner Welge asked Councilmember Lisa Scott-Founds to provide an update on the Broward Film Commission.

Councilmember Scott-Founds said they closed the job posting and hope to have someone in the spot in the next 60 days. They are planning a three-person office under the economic development arena in the county and they know it's important.

#### Future Business Development (Susan Simms)

Susan Simms started by saying the performance measure numbers are really staggering, especially with COVID, and this doesn't take into consideration the projects that don't contact us and were handled at the local level. It can be difficult to explain how busy we are and then tell people we don't have enough business at the same time. Trying to increase the close rate of 83% might be difficult, but we can try to change the type of projects, from a smaller to a larger project. The network of local film offices are so responsive and take great care of clients and service is so important. This is why it's so important to fill the holes as quickly as possible with vacancies in local film offices, otherwise they lose business. Commercials are plentiful and local incentives are making the low budget feature popular again in Florida. Many local offices are looking at increasing funding on local incentives. We have the crew base, expertise, contacts, and history to be successful. We identified TV as the one to chase for the biggest return. When we first had an incentive, TV was the focus and everyone followed suit. Billions of dollars are spent on TV content and 80% of all pitches are for TV content, thanks to the streamers.

We worked with Film Florida and the local film commissions on their lost business map, which can be a painful exercise. The new series “Florida Man” for Netflix is shooting in North Carolina. There are at least three other “Florida Man” projects, one in New Orleans, one in Savannah, and Sony’s has been renamed “Panhandle Man.” Barry Jenkins “Underground Railroad” series didn’t even make the lost business map because we didn’t work on it because they knew we didn’t have an incentive. Projects on the map are projects we worked on. Next week we will start tracking down where some of these projects have gone. At least Florida is a popular setting and if we can raise the percentage of projects set in Florida, we can make a significant impact on tourism as well. Demand is enormous and the local incentives are gone in short order.

Fox Television filmed 13 seasons here in Florida and people used to say Fox was going to get all our incentive money. “Burn Notice’s” last day of filming was nine years ago. The new cool kids in Florida are Warner Media who produce “David Makes Man.” They are partnering with Universal Studios and had a fabulous experience there. The show came in on time and under budget, so they decided to film “The Right Stuff” there too. Now Issa Rea’s new HBO/Warner Media show is filming in Miami and another Warner Bros series for Apple+ is coming to Miami too. The newest series is called “Bad Monkey” from producer Bill Lawrence (Ted Lasso’s producer). It’s based on a Carl Hiaasen book. Bill wants to film here, and he has the juice to do that. It’s important we do a good job and make sure they have a good experience because people will notice projects are filming here on time and under budget without a state incentive.

Today and tomorrow, starts the IATSE authorization to strike. The COVID protocols expire today so the next 120 hours will be very important. Everyone needs to be working but working safely and we are hoping for a fair resolution.

#### Sales Tax Exemption (Donyelle Marshall)

Donyelle Marshall provided an update on the Entertainment Industry Sales Tax Exemption program. She stated that she has approved 309 applications so far this fiscal year, which is a 43% increase in comparison to last year at this time and she is expecting big numbers for this fiscal year. She is also expecting an increase in overall expenditures because production costs have increased. Companies are switching to a more hybrid environment and investing in more technology.

#### LATAM Update (Donyelle Marshall)

Donyelle also provided an update on the Latin American market. She went to Miami for the first time since January 2020 and attended Billboard Latin Music Week, which was a good representation of the diverse business footprint that Latin music has in south Florida. Lots of Florida based businesses were represented and most of the artists who she spoke with are Miami residents. She also met with several of our clients, including Univision. Their strategy is to focus on streaming service content and the relocation of jobs to Florida from LA, NY, and NJ.

Wade Davis, their new CEO, was Viacom's CFO and he has brought over staff from Viacom to Univision. She also met with Viacom who relocated their offices and are now downsizing because of remote working. Their goal is to create content for Paramount+ their new rebranded streaming service. She spoke with them regarding their content production and they don't plan to film here due to the lack of incentive. She also visited Cachita Studios, which is the old Telemundo studios with 70K square feet of studio space.

Donyelle didn't have a chance to meet with Interim Chair Ana Siegel while she was down there because Ana was traveling.

Ana said that Telemundo staff are returning to the office on October 18<sup>th</sup>, but they are not requiring them to come back full time until January.

#### Association Updates: (Film Florida, SAG-AFTRA, IATSE, etc.)

Commissioner Welge provided an update on behalf of Chris Ranung, President of IATSE Local 477 regarding their position on the potential IATSE strike. Not all production types will be affected as it wouldn't hit premium cable because their agreement is still in effect until 12/31/2022, while Netflix and network shows are under the "Basic Agreement" which has already expired. This means that the pay TV, music video, one-off single production, low-budget theatrical and AICP commercials will continue. This will impact production nationwide if it happens. There is a lot of support for the strike, so it seems likely to happen if a deal can't be struck quickly. The main issue of the strike is work hours and the safety issues and mental health issues the grueling hours create.

Commissioner Welge invited Gail Morgan to give an update on Film Florida's activities.

Gail Morgan, President, provided an update on Film Florida. She discussed the next Film Florida Friday with Jennelle and Michael Jordan and said all past episodes are available on Facebook and on the website. The new season of the podcast is available and new episodes will be released every other week through Memorial Day.

Film Florida hosted their quarterly meeting in September virtually and will continue to hold them virtually through December. Legislative committee weeks started last week and Senator Gruters and Representative Trubulsky will sponsor the bills again. They expect strong support for the bills but expect leadership to be an issue again in the House. They will have members speaking at legislative delegation meetings as well. They sent out 44 Legislative Star awards to all cosponsors from last year to show appreciation to those who support their efforts.

Film Florida's Emerging Filmmakers Fund is now open for another round of submissions. A film that received the first round of funding just recently opened at the Fort Lauderdale film festival.

Ex-Officio Updates: (Enterprise Florida, Inc., VISIT FLORIDA, and CareerSource Florida)

Commissioner Welge asked if any Ex-Officio members had an update.

Dani DeStafney with VISIT FLORIDA provided an update. She shared that they produced “Life’s Rewards,” an 8 episode “entertainment first” show in conjunction with Miles Media and the St. Pete/Clearwater Film Commission. The show is streaming on Amazon Prime and Youtube and debuted at the Sunscreen Film Festival in May. It was their first dabble into episodic content promoting a state destination marketing organization. Building on the success of this, VISIT FLORIDA has included content production in their approved marketing plan for the year, which she will share with all of us. The plan includes details about how people consume video content and how often they are exposed to ads. They plan to continue producing content and they are considering another season of the series. They are also in development on other opportunities with different stories, for different audiences, but still entertainment first concepts. They are reaching out to destination marketing organizations now for potential partnership.

Commissioner Welge mentioned that she will be meeting with VISIT FLORIDA President Dana Young to discuss other partnership opportunities.

Dani said this strategy is really data driven and they are really excited about the future possibilities.

Susan Simms added that Jay Roewe from HBO was on a panel at MMFM in Miami last week talking about people showing up at the homes they used to film the series, “Mare of Eastown” and that The Four Seasons in Maui is fully booked because of the “White Lotus” series. This is more data to add to the impact of film induced tourism.

Dani added that they included film induced tourism research from the series “Bloodline” and “Field of Dreams,” in the marketing plan as well. This is great info to keep flooding the legislature with to make sure it’s a priority.

Commissioner Welge mentioned the tremendous impact that the filming of “Dolphin Tale” had on the Clearwater Marine Aquarium and on Pinellas County.

Jonas Marquez provided an update from Enterprise Florida, Inc. He said they are getting ready for legislative session and an upcoming meeting. Their legislative priorities are to obtain recurring funding for the organization as well as some other items to be determined.

Public Comment

There was no public comment.

**ADJOURN 11:35 A.M.**