

Toronto Film, Television and Digital Media Board: Actions and Accomplishments for the 2019-2022 Term

Date: May 20, 2022

To: Toronto Film, Television and Digital Media Board

From: Interim General Manager, Economic Development and Culture

Wards: All

SUMMARY

As the Toronto Film, Television and Digital Media Board (TFTDMB) approaches the completion of its 2019-2022 term, it is required, as a Council Advisory Committee, to submit a report on its actions and accomplishments during the term.

During the 2019-2022 term, the TFTDMB focused its work on supporting and advising the advancement of the strategic pillars contained in Spotlight on Toronto: A Strategic Action Plan for the Film, Television and Digital Media Industry, a five-year strategy which was conceived and created in 2017 by the TFTDMB, and adopted by City Council in July 2017.

In November 2021, the TFTDMB initiated a review of the progress made on Spotlight on Toronto. Several new actions were added within existing strategic pillars, and the additions were approved by City Council.

This report details the progress the TFTDMB and the Toronto Film Office have made to advance each of the strategic pillars.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Interim General Manager, Economic Development and Culture, recommends that:

1. The Economic and Community Development Committee receive this report for information.

FINANCIAL IMPACT

There are no immediate financial implications arising from this report.

The Chief Financial Officer and Treasurer has reviewed this report and agrees with the information as presented in the Financial Impact Section.

DECISION HISTORY

At its meeting on December 15, 2021, City Council approved updates to "Spotlight on Toronto: A Strategic Action Plan for the Film, Television and Digital Media Industry", which included ensuring that a film friendly lens is incorporated in new developments in the City of Toronto.

<http://app.toronto.ca/tmmis/viewAgendaItemHistory.do?item=2021.EC26.13>

At its meeting on October 1, 2021, City Council adopted new film permit fees and amendments to City of Toronto Municipal Code Chapter 441.

<http://app.toronto.ca/tmmis/viewAgendaItemHistory.do?item=2021.EC24.5>

At its meeting on May 5, 2021, City Council directed the General Manager, Economic Development and Culture, in collaboration with the General Manager, Transportation Services and the General Manager, Parks, Forestry and Recreation, to develop a business and operational case for a pilot project to install power drops at popular filming locations for consideration as part of the 2022 Budget process or wherever possible.

<http://app.toronto.ca/tmmis/viewAgendaItemHistory.do?item=2021.EC21.14>

At its meeting on March 29, 2021, the Film, Television, and Digital Media Advisory Board received a presentation on Toronto Workforce Study, which analyzed screen industry workforce landscape in the Greater Toronto and Hamilton Area and benchmarked growth requirements to meet the jurisdiction's growing market demand.

<http://app.toronto.ca/tmmis/viewAgendaItemHistory.do?item=2021.FB7.2>

At its meeting on September 25, 2019, the Film, Television, and Digital Media Advisory Board received a [presentation](#) from Nordicity and CreateTO regarding Soundstage Market Sound Assessment for information.

<http://app.toronto.ca/tmmis/viewAgendaItemHistory.do?item=2019.FB2.1>

At its meeting on April 24, 2018, City Council adopted a report on options for film studio infrastructure and film studio capacity replacement and future growth.

<http://app.toronto.ca/tmmis/viewAgendaItemHistory.do?item=2018.ED28.4>

At its meeting on March 26, 2018, City Council requested the General Manager, Economic Development and Culture to provide a further update on the results of the Option for Film Studio Infrastructure report.

<http://app.toronto.ca/tmmis/viewAgendaItemHistory.do?item=2018.ED27.8>

At its meeting on October 2, 2017, City Council authorized a loan to the Toronto Port Lands Company for the acquisition of lands based on the [study of film and screen industry studios in the Port Lands and the South of Eastern Employment District](#)

<http://app.toronto.ca/tmmis/viewAgendaItemHistory.do?item=2017.ED23.7>

At its meeting on July 4, 2017, City Council adopted "[Spotlight on Toronto: A Strategic Plan for the Film, Television and Digital Media Industry](#)" identifying goals and actions to enhance the partnership between the City of Toronto and the film, television and digital media industry.

<http://app.toronto.ca/tmmis/viewAgendaItemHistory.do?item=2017.ED22.4>

COMMENTS

In 2021, Toronto's screen industry contributed \$2.5 billion to the local economy, and employed over 35,000 Torontonians. It is set for remarkable growth for the next five years. Physical production infrastructure is set to expand by 63% to capitalize on global production volumes in live action, post-production, VFX and Animation. Toronto is widely recognized as a preeminent centre of excellence for its creative talent, expansive infrastructure (soundstages, post-production studios, virtual production facilities), the variety of its locations, its gold-standard level of customer service, the booming sectors adjacent to entertainment like tech, tourism, sports and culture, for the advantageous financial incentives in the province and for the overall cosmopolitan and inclusive nature of the city.

Over the course of the 2019-2022 term, the TFTDMB has focused its work on the five strategic pillars in Spotlight on Toronto: A Strategic Plan for the Film, Television, and Digital Media Industry. This report summarizes actions taken by the TFTDMB and the City of Toronto Film Office related to each strategic pillar.

Accomplishments on Strategic Goals

1. Active Advocacy

Actions:

- Acted as government partner to the industry throughout the extraordinary circumstances created by the COVID-19 pandemic to help ensure the industry continued working safely.
- Engaged all levels of government to respond to new and emerging issues impacting the screen industry, and continued advocacy for stability in tax incentives and promotion of incentives as jurisdictional advantage.
- Ensured the industry was recognized for its active and successful response to the pandemic and that both the public and elected officials were made aware.
- Ensured ongoing informational film-activity touchpoints between Film Office and Councillors: sharing of film shoot statistics, production footprint, employment levels, issues management and local donations (xoTO Givebacks).
- Fostered collaboration with industry and with City divisions on inserting a film-friendly lens to City Planning frameworks, including Transportation, Parks, Forestry and Recreation, Corporate Real Estate Management, the Environment and Energy Office and Toronto Public Health.

- Gathered and shared data on economic impact of the industry, both internally and externally.
- Participated in drafting and advocating for the implementation of strict COVID-19 related health and safety protocols (Section 21 Film and Television Health and Safety Advisory Committee of the Ontario Ministry of Labour, Training and Skills Development).

2. Strong Fundamentals in Physical Infrastructure and Workforce Development

2.1 Physical Infrastructure:

The City of Toronto is now home to over 2.5 million sq. ft. of production space. Despite the challenges of COVID-19, the space footprint grew by over 500,000 sq. ft. across 13 stages in 2020 and 2021, and the GTHA at large is expecting a 68% increase from today's capacity by 2026.

Actions:

- Actively investigated City-owned properties and land for additional production/post-production use.
- Two power drops will be installed in June 2022 in high-usage locations for film production, removing 400 tonnes of GHGs per year.
- Established a mechanism, with no financial impact to the City, to finance and subsequently repay the costs of the installation of two power drops per year, until the most popular locations for film have been serviced.
- Assisted studio developers on sites search (land and buildings for permanent or temporary use) and promotion of IMIT / Gold Star Program.
- Assisted to studio developers to fast-track building permit applications
- Built messaging to encourage major screen industry players to expand and/or establish themselves in the GTA. Recent additions and expansions include Pixomondo, Ubisoft, Netflix, CBS, Amazon, Stoopid Buddy Studios, Folks VFX and DNEG.
- Worked with Transportation Services to allow and permit road closures for film productions as well as film-related public and industry events.
- Renewed agreement with xoTO Schools to simplify access for location shoots at TDSB facilities and permitted the school board to rent all its parking lots to film productions regardless of location use.
- Initiated and received critical reports on studio space loss, replacement and expansion options:
 - Report on Film and Screen Industry Studios in the Port Lands and South of Eastern Employment District (Report – July 2017)
 - Report on Options for Film Studio Infrastructure (Report – February 2018)
 - Soundstage Market Sounding Assessment (Report – August 2019)
- Supported the acquisition of Showline Studios by City of Toronto and subsequent RFP by CreateTO for new studio operator to maximize the future of the site as a production space. Studio City was awarded the site and new jumbo stage has been built and is now occupied.

- Supported the RFP by [CreateTO for a film studio developer/operator for the Basin Media Hub](#) to add up to 300,000 sq. ft. of purpose-built production/post-production space.
- Council adoption of film policy directions as part of TOCore (inclusion of Film Precinct p.62), Port Lands Planning Framework and its PIC Core (Production, Interactive and Creativity Core Urban Design Guidelines) and East Harbour.
- Secured film industry interest protection as part of King Street pilot model, Yonge Street rejuvenation and bike lanes installation across busy film streets including University Avenue, Adelaide Avenue and Shuter Street.
- Ensured participation in City-Wide Parking Strategy Working Group.
- Film Office Staff and CREM staff are currently working together to ease production at City-owned facilities.

2.2 Workforce Development:

Growing and diversifying the workforce pool in Toronto has been a prime aspect of addressing the global market demand and opportunities for job creation in Toronto. xoTO Screen Industry Pathways are a set of activities conceived to educate and train new workers into the field. Over 35,000 Torontonians are employed in the screen sector and with the expected infrastructure expansions announced for the next five years, the sector will need over 10,000 additional workers.

Actions:

- Initiated and received the Toronto Screen Industry Workforce Study to benchmark the growth requirements and opportunities for the screen industry workforce in order to respond to the jurisdiction's growing market demand.
- Identified training gaps and barriers to access for underrepresented groups, and co-designed ground-breaking training programs to bring on diverse Torontonians in key in-demand roles with major scaling in 2022 to include the expansion and launch of programs for Indigenous, Black and racialized youth for in-demand roles in Production Assisting, Production Accounting, Trades (construction, grip, electric), VFX, Art Direction, Editing and Virtual Production (over 100 participants). All programs are designed and implemented with social services and community media groups, unions and guilds.
- Connected film companies and productions seeking to hire crew who are Black, Indigenous and racialized, and tapped into the strong network of training programs across the city.
- Partnered with Toronto Employment & Social Services (TESS) and obtained funding from other levels of government to scale up the above programs
- [Launched xoTO Schools program](#) to educate high-school students at the Toronto District School Board about careers in film, which includes: Co-Op Placements on sets for 15 students, four experiential learning events at town hall events, Career Talks online during stay-at-home orders with over 1,000 students between January and May 2021.
- 2018-2021: 4514 co-op hours and 44 co-op credits earned and 1000 students in virtual learning sessions (due to pandemic and set to continue monthly even when in-person co-ops can resume).

- An additional 118 students enrolled in High Skills Major (SHSM) did experiential learning sessions to obtain certificate required for graduation.
- Recent virtual sessions include DGC-ON talks, Animation workshop by Switch Animation, The Expanse production presentation, VIACOMCBS characters sales talk, Paramount Pictures presentation and more.
- Upcoming launch of the Online Film Career Toolkit in Fall 2022 to assist aspiring film workers in understanding the various jobs in pre-production, production and post-production, VFX and Animation, the many training pathways, and the industry hubs that can assist individuals and connect them to the greater ecosystem.

3. Exceptional Customer Service Enhancements

Toronto Film Office is widely recognized internationally amongst Film Offices as the gold-standard in customer service. As one example, our service standard for issuing film permits is the fastest in North America. Ensuring seamless processes are in place to produce and post-produce in Toronto as well as fostering a sense of pride in Torontonians have been a core principles of the work stemming from Spotlight.

Actions:

- The Economic Development and Culture (EDC) division worked to ensure that the Film Office is appropriately staffed to offer the highest level of customer service excellence, proportionate to sector expansion, aligned with and based on industry feedback and requirements.
- Launched xoTO Givebacks in 2018 to encourage productions to give back to neighborhoods they shoot in, and to celebrate these actions with the public. This activity supports public acceptance of film production on city streets, which is a critical asset as the production industry grows. Examples include a free Shazam! screening, a Unions & Guilds Spring Cleanup of city parks, and monthly donations by productions to local not-for-profits.
- xoTO Schools: Toronto District School Board (TDSB) sites identified and made available for streamlined permitting, with a standard rate card. TDSB parking lots are now permitted by the City of Toronto to be rented out for production vehicles regardless of whether the school is used as a location, to reduce parking on local streets.
- Film permit turnaround time is a guaranteed for 48 hours, which is the fastest in North America, made possible by the team of Film Permit Coordinators and the City divisions with which they work.
- The film permitting system is now fully online and going through its second revamp to address any enhancements for a streamlined service (FilmPal 2.0).
- To ensure the Film Office will have resources to respond to the rapid growth of the industry and the increased demands that accompany it, the Film Office received Council authority in 2022 to charge fees for film permits. The Film Office provided advanced notice of over six months to stakeholders, and the charges will come into effect in June 2022. This revenue will support the scaling of workforce development initiatives and xoTO Givebacks and will offer short-term support to facilitate adequate staffing, to protect Toronto's advantage as the fastest Film Permitting office in North America.

4. Globally-Recognized, Innovative Digital Media Sector

The growth of the post-production, VFX and Animation sector has been tremendous in the past years and Toronto's increasing presence as a centre of excellence internationally expands the opportunities presented by this fast-growing and nimble sector of the industry.

Actions:

- The TFTDMB was a critical support to staff as they investigated digital bandwidth infrastructure and researched top-end data-sharing products and services.
- The TFTDMB committed to focus on VFX, post-production and animation, within the broader digital media umbrella, in order to deliver on priority strategic actions relevant to and benefit the film and television production sector.
- The TFTDMB supported ongoing conversations with internet providers, cloud services and data-sharing entities, on creating industry-specific products and incentives.
- When complementarities arose in sector development work within Economic Development and Culture regarding the tech sector or interactive media, collaboration was pursued, specifically resulting in a presentation at the Collision Conference.
- The Film Office participated in CASO (Computer Animation Studios of Ontario) as full member and supported CASO studies like Report: Business Intelligence: Ontario's Computer Animation and Visual Effects Companies, 2018.
- Yearly support and attendance at the TAAFI Job Fair (Toronto Animation Arts Fair International).

5. Dynamic Branding and Strong International and Business Partnerships

The xoTO brand has become strongly associated, internationally, with Toronto as a film production jurisdiction. It was attached to all film-related news, programs and marketing assets, and its strong brand identity helped to celebrate and promote the Toronto screen industry.

Actions:

- Marketed Toronto talent, infrastructure and expertise for service productions through the Mayor's Mission to LA, which took place in 2018, 2019 and 2022 and involved large, cross-sectoral delegations, taking up to fifty meetings with LA-based clients during the Mission.
- Increased year-round, city-wide branding and events to Torontonians, to continually make the case for the industry as a strong contributor and welcomed feature of living in Toronto.
- Promoted the growth of virtual production facilities in Toronto.
- Successfully marketed Toronto to Netflix, winning the first Canadian Netflix office for Toronto.

- Co-funded the Toronto/Ontario LA Office with Province to attract business year-round in Los Angeles.
- Published monthly-to-quarterly xoTO Newsletters to international stakeholders to update them on industry developments.
- Produced xoTO House at TIFF in September to welcome local and international industry, welcoming over 400 guests.
- Developed partnerships with numerous local film events, including award shows, Festivals and training institutions to advance workforce development goals and earn visibility for the Toronto Film Office.
- Participated in the province-wide Ontario Green Screen committee.
- Supported bi-annual TTC bus shelters, billboards and social media "Toronto Loves Film" campaigns to celebrate projects made in Toronto (emphasis on local talent, recognisability of projects and Givebacks).
- Year-round press/public announcements orchestrated around studio expansions, industry launches, set visits and workforce development initiatives.
- Leveraged partnerships and City communications to advance economic and cultural contribution of both the domestic and international production industry in Toronto
- Tracked and highlighted the successes of workforce development groups across the film industry.
- The Film Office is developing more consistent means of reporting back to the TFTDMB on the impact of xoTO brand promotions.

CONCLUSION

The 2019-2022 Toronto Film, Television and Digital Media Board was comprised of the following members, who are to be thanked for their contributions of time, expertise and support. The work undertaken by the Toronto Film Office, and the impact and benefits created for the industry and the city would not have been possible without their partnership and support.

Chair: Councillor Paula Fletcher
 Co-Chair: Neishaw Ali
 Past Co-Chair: Jonathan Ahee

Council Members:

Councillor Shelley Carrol
 Councillor James Pasternak
 Councillor Jennifer McKelvie (past member)
 Councillor Jaye Robinson (past member)

Industry Members:

Peter Apostolopoulos
 Hartley Gorenstein
 Geoff Grant

Victoria Harding
David Hardy
Kenneth Rogers
Warren Ross
Jennifer Stewart
Christa Tazzeo Morson
Samantha Traub
Alistair Hepburn
Chris Hope
Cynthia Lynch
Jim Mirkopoulos
Monty Montgomerie
Jayson Mosek
Wendy Noss
Caitlin O'Leary
Jinder Oujla-Chalmers
Alma Parvizian
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SIGNATURE

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ATTACHMENTS

Attachment 1: Spotlight on Toronto: A Strategic Plan for the Film, Television and Digital Media Industry