



**BOARD OF SUPERVISORS
AGENDA LETTER**

Agenda Number:

Clerk of the Board of Supervisors
105 E. Anapamu Street, Suite 407
Santa Barbara, CA 93101
(805) 568-2240

Submitted on:
(COB Stamp)

Department Name: Board of Supervisors
Department No.: 011
Agenda Date: April 7, 2026
Placement: Departmental Agenda
Estimated Time:
Continued Item: Choose an item.
If Yes, date from: <Insert Date>
Vote Required: Majority

TO: Board of Supervisors
FROM: 1st District Supervisor Roy Lee
Contact: Wade Stewart Cowper email: wcowper@countyofsb.org
SUBJECT: Informational Presentation regarding Establishment of a Santa Barbara County Film Commissioner

County Counsel Concurrence

As to form: Yes

Other Concurrence: CEO Budget

As to form: Yes

Auditor-Controller Concurrence

As to form: Yes

RECOMMENDED ACTIONS

That the Board of Supervisors:

- A. Receive an informational presentation regarding the creation of a Santa Barbara County Film Commissioner, including potential operating model, scope of services, and measurable outcomes;
- B. Provide direction to staff to return ahead of Budget Hearings with options for establishing a Film Commissioner, including potential structures and funding sources; and
- C. Find that the recommended actions are not a “project” under the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) pursuant to CEQA Guidelines Section 15378(b)(5) because they consist of organizational or administrative activities of government that will not result in direct or indirect physical changes in the environment.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Santa Barbara County is a world-class filming location, but we do not currently have a single, countywide “front door” that actively markets our locations and provides coordinated support to productions navigating multiple jurisdictions, departments, and requirements. A film commissioner is a proven economic development tool that drives tax revenue, improves customer service, increases local filming activity, expands local hiring, spending at local businesses, and creates clear, reportable

performance metrics. The mission is simple: to inspire and facilitate film and media production throughout Santa Barbara County, creating positive economic impact.

Now is the time to act (pun intended). According to the County's own recent Economic Forecast Project released in February 2026, the Creative Economy drove \$3.82 billion in economic activity in Santa Barbara County – up \$366 million in 6 years. On July 10, 2025, Governor Newsom signed into law California SB 132, increasing the aggregate amount of the motion picture tax credits that may be allocated by the California Film Commission from \$330 million to \$750 million per year. This law has created a unique opportunity for our County to take advantage of a changing business climate and draw more filming opportunities to Santa Barbara County. Our proximity to the Los Angeles film industry gives us ample opportunities and a leg up on more distant areas of California.

This Board Letter is a public, informational presentation ahead of Budget Hearings to evaluate creating a Santa Barbara County Film Commissioner and to provide the Board with options and a recommended model for consideration during the budget process.

BACKGROUND

Multiple California jurisdictions have shown the economic benefits of film and media production in their cities and counties. There is direct correlation between productions and increased spending on local hotels, restaurants, rentals, construction, transportation, and professional services— both during production and as a tourism boost that can last for years. Counties and regions that have established Film Commissioners typically focus on two core functions to streamline the process:

- **Marketing and location development** (promoting local locations, businesses, and workforces); and
- **Production support and coordination** (helping productions navigate permitting pathways, requirements, timelines, and cost recovery expectations).

A Santa Barbara County Film Commissioner would aim to complement our existing County operations to support filming as a robust economic development opportunity while maintaining appropriate safeguards for neighborhoods, sensitive environmental resources, and public safety.

DISCUSSION

The model for our new Santa Barbara County Film Commissioner should be designed around three goals:

1. One-stop service and predictability

Productions benefit from a single point of contact that can provide clear and professional guidance on permitting pathways, requirements, timelines, insurance needs, and cost recovery—reducing confusion and last-minute issues while helping permitting operations run more smoothly.

2. Economic development with measurable outcomes

The office would be performance-driven, with metrics such as: Tax revenues generated, inquiries handled and permitting fees, productions supported, filming days, estimated local spend, local hire, and partnerships that expand workforce opportunities. A film commissioner would also allow our county to work proactively with state groups on acquiring data and implementing incentive programs.

3. Raising the profile of Santa Barbara County and our cities

A countywide Film Commissioner can serve as an outward-facing platform to **promote Santa Barbara County's locations and assets**—from our coastline and wineries to our downtowns, neighborhoods, and rural landscapes—while also highlighting the unique character of our cities. By proactively

marketing the region and providing a consistent point of contact for productions, the County can help attract projects that bring jobs and local spending. This will strengthen our reputation as a premier filming destination, and support tourism and small businesses across multiple communities.

We recommend establishing a **Film Commissioner position within an Arts and Culture framework**, ideally in partnership with the City of Santa Barbara as a co-funded, collaborative model. This approach allows the County to stand up a single, accountable point of contact quickly while leveraging existing infrastructure and regional coordination. As additional cities choose to participate, the model can scale—adding part-time support or expanded capacity over time—ultimately building toward a fully resourced, countywide film office that is competitive with peer regions.

Another option is a public-private or nonprofit partnership model that emphasizes regional marketing and industry-facing outreach, paired with County-defined standards for transparency, accountability, and consistent customer service. Finally, a hybrid approach could separate functions—for example, keeping the official intake/coordination role within the County while contracting out marketing and location development—to ensure both strong accountability and strong external-facing promotion.

CONCLUSION

A Santa Barbara County Film Commissioner could be a practical and cost-effective economic development initiative—improving coordination, increasing local filming activity, local spending, and driving tax revenue—while also elevating Santa Barbara County and its cities as a premier filming destination. For these reasons, I request the Board receive an informational presentation ahead of Budget Hearings and provide direction to staff on implementation options.

FISCAL IMPACT

The cost of creating a position is to be determined. Revenue from film permits could offset the cost. Staff time to research the issue and provide information to the Board should not be significant but could exceed 8 hours.

Attachments:

Attachment A – PowerPoint Presentation

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