

Neighborhoods battling EIDC

By Rick Orlov

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Wednesday, May 07, 2003

Entertainment industry leaders are flooding the City Council with letters of protest over a plan to involve neighborhood councils and other civic groups in developing a new policy governing filming in Los Angeles.

The plan by Councilwoman Cindy Miscikowski, to be considered by a council committee Monday, would establish a citywide panel of neighborhood councils, community organizations and industry representatives to address concerns about disruptive location shoots in the entertainment capital of the world.

"I've been getting letters from all over -- from unions, from the Directors Guild -- who are saying the same thing I'm proposing, but they are against what I've suggested," Miscikowski said Tuesday.

"I'm trying to come up with something that both sides can live with. We all know about the problems of runaway productions, but people who live in neighborhoods are entitled to some concern as well."

The tension between the industry and neighborhoods has been an issue for years and grew recently when financial and operational questions were raised about the semi-governmental Entertainment Industry Development Corp.

Complaints about film location work have spread from Sherman Oaks -- where dozens of residents signed a petition protesting commercial shoots on Addison Street -- to Pacific Palisades, Hancock Park and downtown Los Angeles.

Addison Street resident John Palance said the EIDC routinely ignores neighbors' complaints about homes that are used repeatedly for film shoots. The agency is supposed to limit how much filming takes place in one location.

"With an elementary school one block away, school buses have difficulty getting through and the children have to walk in the middle of the street," Palance said in a letter to city officials.

"Our complaints about this situation have gone unanswered. We feel that the film office is taking advantage."

EIDC officials said they were studying Miscikowski's plan, which is aimed at developing new guidelines as part of the city's contract with the film-permitting agency.

Melissa Patack of the Motion Picture Association of America wrote to Miscikowski, asking her to hold off on her proposal and allow negotiators for the city and the EIDC to resolve the differences.

"The committee you propose would be one-sided, comprised only of neighborhood and community organizations, with no representation from the motion picture industry," Patack said.

"We recognize the concerns about filming that have been raised by some residents and believe their concerns need to be addressed."

Patack said the problems should be resolved by a community liaison within the EIDC, not by a citywide panel.

Patack and others said the city needs to remain friendly to the entertainment industry to keep filmmakers from taking their productions elsewhere.

"The city can't offer tax incentives, but we have the best work force and best facilities in the world," said Councilman Tom LaBonge, whose Hollywood district includes many studios.

"The entertainment industry is important to all of us, but I'm also pro-neighborhood. I think we can work out a middle ground."

LaBonge said he hopes to hold a meeting this week with the entertainment industry representatives to discuss a compromise.

Councilwoman Janice Hahn, who chairs the Education and Neighborhood Committee and was one of the boosters of neighborhood councils, said the dispute is an offshoot of the increased power felt by neighborhood councils.

"I think we need to closely watch these issues about whether we should put another layer of government in above neighborhood councils with these task forces," Hahn said. "At the same time, I recognize there are some citywide issues that need to be addressed and can't be done by one or two neighborhood councils."

A spokesman for Mayor James Hahn, the councilwoman's brother, said he would support whatever the Education and Neighborhood Committee agreed to.

Janice Hahn said the neighborhood councils are only beginning to realize their power -- such as with the burglar alarm task force, in which neighborhood

leaders joined with other representatives and developed an alternative to the Police Commission's policy to respond only to verified alarms.

"As neighborhood councils become more active, they are going to demand more," Hahn said.

Greg Nelson, general manager of the Department of Neighborhood Empowerment, said a clash between the entertainment industry and neighborhoods was inevitable.

"The industry long has been concerned that there would be a NIMBY syndrome and they would need the approval of every neighborhood council," Nelson said. "We understand their concerns, but they also have to realize that residents have some concerns, as well, about their lives being disrupted."

Councilwoman Wendy Greuel, a former studio executive with DreamWorks SKG, said the city needs to find a balance between the competing interests.

"The entertainment industry is an economic engine for Los Angeles," Greuel said. "We have to keep them here, but we have to find a way they can work with the neighborhoods so it isn't disruptive."