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Refocusing EIDC Hearings planned to gain public input

By Harrison Sheppard
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Consultants who are restructuring the scandal-plagued Entertainment Industry Development Corp. will hold a series of public hearings in the next month to increase community involvement and may consider adding neighborhood representatives to the agency's executive board, officials said Monday.

A City Council committee weighed a proposal to create a community advisory council on restructuring the EIDC, because of complaints about film shooting that disrupts neighborhoods, but the committee backed off that plan Monday after hearing the EIDC's new head already had proposals to increase neighborhood involvement.

The move came after residents frustrated with location filming in their neighborhoods clashed with entertainment industry officials worried about runaway production at a public hearing before the Education and Neighborhoods committee.

Residents complained about production companies that film late at night, leave trash in neighborhoods and cause excessive noise and traffic.

"I bought a house on a residential street. I didn't buy it on a back lot," said Joseph Montoya of Van Nuys.

The industry, in turn, voiced worries about giving excessive control to neighborhoods, thereby making it more difficult to film, while below-the-line workers said they feared more jobs leaving Los Angeles if that occurs.

"It is incredibly difficult to film in this city -- harder than anywhere else in the country," said Briana Burke, a freelance location manager.

The three-hour hearing was over a proposal from Councilwoman Cindy Miscikowski to create a committee of neighborhood councils and community groups to advise the city as it renegotiates the contract with the EIDC. Industry officials opposed the measure.

Interim EIDC head Keith Comrie said he would make sure the consulting firm studying EIDC restructuring hold public roundtables to get community input as it studies the agency.

Also, he said eventually he expected a recommendation to add neighborhood representatives to the executive board that runs the EIDC, which is now composed mostly of elected officials with some industry officials.

The council committee decided those measures would be sufficient, rather than creating a separate neighborhood advisory group, although Miscikowski's motion will remain pending until Comrie reports back to the committee in 30 days.

The EIDC is in the process of restructuring its management and permit procedures following recent scandals over its lack of spending controls and allegations that its former head, Cody Cluff, misspent the agency's money on extravagant perks for himself and improper political donations to elected officials on the EIDC board.

A District Attorney's investigation into possible wrongdoing is continuing.

The quasi-governmental agency was originally formed to help streamline the film permitting process in the city and county, allowing producers to avoid having to deal with multiple government departments and jurisdictions.

Residents, however, have complained for years that the agency has favored the entertainment industry at the expense of neighborhoods that feel trampled by trailer trucks, spotlights, special effects noise and late-night operations.

City officials said they recognize the important economic role the movie industry plays in Los Angeles and don't want to cede complete control to the neighborhoods, but are seeking a middle ground between the two.

"The key word is balance," said Councilwoman Wendy Greuel, a former DreamWorks SKG executive. "And the importance of open participation and communication."

Some industry employees said they live in Los Angeles neighborhoods as well and are sympathetic to the complaints, but urged residents to work more cooperatively with them.

"I'm sorry if any of my spotlights has made it into your windows," said Roger Lattin, an official with the union for lighting technicians. "Just ask. Most of the time we are very friendly. ... We make mistakes, but we'll work with you. Give us the chance."