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City to launch filming incentives

Program will offer three levels of incentives for local filming

Locally based filming productions will get a break starting July 1 when Santa Clarita launches its film incentive program.

The three-pronged approach is part of the 21-point economic development plan OK'd by the City Council on April 28.

Last Friday, letters were sent to studios and locally based productions regarding the incentive program, which will redirect \$150,000 from the city's general fund to the city's film office. The lion's share of the funding will be used by the film office to subsidize filming permits.

"We know that filming is very important here," Economic Development Associate Jessica Freude said.

The program recognizes three tiers of eligibility.

The first level of the incentive program will eliminate nearly all permit fees for Santa Clarita-based productions that do at least 65 percent of their principal photography in Santa Clarita, Freude said. The list of current productions includes "NCIS" and HBO's "Big Love."

A production company in the first tier could save up to \$20,000 annually through the incentive program, she said.

In the second level of the program, the city will subsidize basic permit fees for production companies that film more than six times a year in Santa Clarita. For example, Freude said NBC frequently films "Heroes" here, and Jack in the Box has filmed commercials locally.

Companies in the second level would still have to pay for permits, including those for neighborhood notifications, road usage and property usage, she said.

The third level of the plan will rebate half the transient occupancy tax collected when productions require local hotel stays. Within city limits, the tax is 10 percent.

While the tax rebate component would likely result in about a \$50,000 loss in revenue over a year, expected additions to the roughly \$20 million the city sees annually in filming-related revenue would help balance things out, Jason Crawford, the city's economic development and marketing manager said last month.

Freude said Santa Clarita is the first L.A.-area city to implement a film incentive program. She said several cities are eyeing the prospect, or already using similar components.

Santa Clarita's 21-point plan can be reviewed at www.santa-clarita.com/recovery/local.asp.