Film production in White Plains has proliferated in recent years, just as content being produced has increased because of the advances in technology that has changed the way consumers are entertained. Think of how you get your content: Apple TV, Netflix, and traditional TV! This has created opportunities for municipalities to encourage film production, because there is a lot to go around!

Once we created a streamlined process for permitting films, we found that production companies appreciated that we take the time to hear about their film day and troubleshoot the issues that they face. Flexibility in dealing with timelines and inevitable changes is very much appreciated. After all, films are stories that are driven by a creative process, and that process naturally evolves as the story unfolds. Once a scout has a good experience working in your municipality, they are apt to come back when they are on other jobs. There are also many blogs within the industry that are closely followed and word travels fast. The opposite can also happen, where a production has a negative experience in your municipality and word gets out, and it snowballs.

Over the course of a few days we had both Stevens working here - that is Spielberg who was working on The Post, and Soderbergh who was working on his ground breaking movie, Unsane, that was shot with iPhones. Streep, Hanks, Dinero, Pacino, have all come to work in White Plains and so has Giamatti, Roberts, Bacon and Foy, Rhys and Russell! White Plains has been dressed as Montreal, Los Angeles, Washington DC, and New England in both present and past time periods. Film crews have brought in fake snow and removed real snow, have switched out street lights, and have blown up cars and houses!

Attracting film productions to your municipality has a myriad of economic benefits that include city permit and location fees for local businesses, non profits, and residents. Additionally, productions spend money in your municipality; they patronize local restaurants when they bring directors for tech scouts, occupy hotels when filming takes place over multiple days, and request whatever else they might need locally sourced. We have had requests for a local dentist for a producer that needed an emergency root canal, hardware stores for set building, and even an ice cream truck that visited a set!

The challenge of the municipality is balancing the economic benefit with the impact on the city, and structuring the fee schedule accordingly. It is helpful to ask as many questions as possible to gain an understanding of the scale and scope of the film day. Covering logistics including what your municipality will tolerate in terms of impacts on residents, workers and stakeholders is of key importance. This can mean anything from limiting the parking footprint in public parking spaces to curtailing filming during busy times like rush hour. Residents are a priority, and the challenge is managing the process so that the film work can be accomplished while at the same time weighing the impact on residents and stakeholders.

We have found that production companies appreciate having a point of contact who can be a gatekeeper of the process. It is also important that this person understands the
timeliness of responses to film inquiries and has a flexible approach to changing scenarios. Location scouts are under pressure to anticipate requests from producers so they try to manage under tight timelines which sometimes change unexpectedly. Input from key departments is helpful so that there are no surprises come film day. Our team involves input from all key city departments: DPW, traffic, parking, building and importantly public safety. Anything from bus and sanitation routes to street work schedules can be important to the film day. Arming the production company with as much information as possible is important and it goes both ways. The city does not want to find out that day that LED streetlights have to be switched out for high pressure sodium, or that the production needs access to a fire hydrant for a wetdown. As many details as possible need to be addressed in the information exchange between the location scout and the municipality.

It is also helpful to know all aspects of your municipality and what you have in terms of locations. The City of White Plains keeps a database of homes that are film friendly. Using that, we point scouts in the right direction of what they are looking for, and they have found it quite helpful. When people email us to let us know that they are film friendly we ask about certain features about their property that you might not see from a Google Map. This could be anything from an original kitchen, to wood paneling, or an open floor plan. Include any little nugget of information that might help a scout or save them some time. We have it organized by neighborhood and by architectural details. Pointing scouts in the direction of particular housing stock helps them narrow down their search. Productions are often looking for schools, hospital rooms, courtrooms, and places that they can use as precincts. Know your spaces and think creatively about how they can be used by productions.

Permits for all types of film projects should be considered. The City of White Plains has found that a scout might be working on a small project one month, but later will be on a large notable project. If they have a positive experience in your municipality, then they will consider you for the larger project. The opposite also holds true. It is also nice to diversify your film business so that you might possibly have more than one project filming on a given day. This is possible if you are open to allowing and encouraging all types of filming.

Finally, there is a cool factor involved when you see your own home or hometown on the screen! It is really exciting to see spaces you know through the creative eyes of talented film professionals. Overwhelmingly our residents have had positive experiences with productions. Productions enjoy the ease of filming outside of NYC where it is easier to get things done. It’s really all about being flexible, and managing the expectations of homeowners and stakeholders and ensuring that the productions companies are good neighbors while they are in your community.

Sit back and enjoy the show, oh and pass the pop corn!