

Beach dangles a film production lure

BY ZACHARY S. FAGENSON

With legislative approval of a five-year, \$242 million transferable tax credit to lure film crews to Florida, the Miami Beach Visitor and Convention Authority is also opening its coffers, dangling a \$75,000 grant to production firms eyeing a Miami Beach location.

This is “for companies that are already planning to be here, because the [application] timeline is pretty short,” said authority Executive Director Grisette Marcos. “I think it will be for people who have decided that they’re going to come here or are on the fence” about shooting in Miami Beach.

The grant appears geared to production companies ready to pull the trigger on their project. Hopeful companies must meet with authority staff before June 14, initially apply by 5 p.m. June 21 and fully apply by noon June 28. An authority panel is to meet the first week of July to discuss applications.

Applicants must qualify for the state’s incentive, book more than 250 room nights in Miami Beach hotels for production and have a Miami Beach production budget of \$120,000 or more.

And the grant could be split between two or more companies.

“The maximum amount requested is a quarter of the actual production budget for production days in Miami Beach up to \$30,000,” according to guidelines Ms. Marcos provided.

Production companies can request money to help cover Miami Beach location fees, equipment rental from Beach businesses, fees for use of such city personnel as off-duty police, fireman or ocean rescue, and private parking lot rental.

The grant buttresses the state’s pending filming incentive.

Though it still needs Gov. Charlie Crist’s signature, tax credits authorized under the bill, according to the governor’s office, are \$53.5 million in fiscal 2010-11, \$74.5 million for 2011-12 and \$38 million in 2012-13, 2013-14 and 2014-15. Digital media projects also qualify.

Credits start at 20% for filming in winter and 25% in summer and hurricane season. An added 5% goes to G-rated films or the equivalent for television and digital-media productions.

The bill sharply shifts state policy. In 2008 Florida slashed its \$25 million cash rebate for filming to \$5 million.

The \$242 million in transferable tax credits is expected to “induce over \$1.2 billion in direct spending by productions choosing Florida for their film, TV and digital media projects,” state Film Commissioner Lucia Fishburne wrote. “The change from the current cash rebate incentive program, which required fighting each year for an annual appropriation,” she wrote, to a five-year transferable tax-credit program gives filmmakers “continuity and certainty.”

If the bill becomes law, supporters say it will be a key part of Florida’s return to competitiveness in attracting film productions.

Even if Gov. Crist strikes the bill down, the Miami Beach authority may still move forward.

The “[visitor and convention authority] is considering even if it doesn’t pass that [we] may still fund the grant for Miami Beach productions,” authority Chair Elsie Howard said in April. “We don’t want a decision by the state to stop our process.”