



Caring for Our Coast

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TO: Supervisor Hilda L. Solis, Chair
Supervisor Holly J. Mitchell
Supervisor Lindsey P. Horvath
Supervisor Janice Hahn
Supervisor Kathryn Barger

From: Gary Jones, Director 

SUBJECT: **Drone Pilot Program for Filming at Venice Beach - 60-DAY REPORT
(ITEM 66-G, AGENDA OF APRIL 14, 2026)**

On April 14, 2026, your Board took several actions to attract and retain filming in Los Angeles County (County), approving the motion (Motion), "Drone Pilot Program for Filming at Venice Beach." Amongst the various directives in the motion, your Board directed the Department of Beaches and Harbors (DBH), in collaboration with the County Department of Economic Opportunity (DEO), the County Film Office, FilmLA, and the Office of the County Counsel (County Counsel) to create a Drone Pilot Program (Pilot Program) at Venice Beach to: a) Allow drone use exclusively for permitted film and television productions, while protecting public safety and natural resources; b) Develop and make the Pilot Program available within seven business days of the approved Motion and remain in effect through July 31, 2026; c) Require the County's film permit coordination contractor FilmLA to administer the Pilot Program with conditions described in the Motion; and d) Report back to the Board within 60 days of the conclusion of the Pilot Program with a comprehensive evaluation of the Pilot Program's outcomes, including its effectiveness, operational impacts, feedback from production permittee(s) and the public, any public safety or environmental considerations, and recommendations for a permanent program at County-managed beaches.

Pilot Program Analysis

DBH coordinated with the Film Office, FilmLA, and County Counsel, and reached out to another coastal agency that has a drone program to develop a three-month Pilot Program to govern the use of drones for filming activities (see enclosed Unmanned Aircraft Systems (UAS) Filming Pilot Program). Following the adoption of the Motion,



the Pilot Program was expanded to allow permits for drone filming activities in the unincorporated area of Marina del Rey, along with Venice Beach, due to the production needs of a film permittee. The goal was to develop a drone filming policy to establish requirements, conditions, and restrictions to use drones while also protecting public safety, County property, and maintaining public access.

The Pilot Program required film and television productions to have a valid film permit issued through FilmLA to, among other conditions, fully disclose all proposed drone activity including a flight map, location, dimensions of the launch/landing zones; develop an action plan in the event of flight failure over land or water within County jurisdiction; maintain specified aviation liability insurance; and comply with all requirements of the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA). This required documentation, known as the “drone packet,” must be submitted three days prior to filming. If the application is approved, permittees are required to display adequate signage notifying the public of film activities and the flight path and make reasonable efforts to remove or obscure identifiable members of the public from the captured footage.

The Pilot Program was in effect from April 27, 2026 through July 31, 2026. During this period, Fremantle Productions North America, Inc. (Permittee) was the only permittee that received film permits pursuant to the Pilot Program, as its recurring filming specifically at Venice Beach and Marina del Rey for the *Baywatch* production offered the most consistent data on the ability to utilize drones on the beach.

To ensure smooth permit processing, DBH, the Film Office, FilmLA, and the Permittee held weekly meetings throughout the filming season to discuss concerns that arose during past filming dates and to prepare for upcoming filming needs. Over 400 hours of DBH staff time was invested, without cost recovery, to create an effective partnership and to streamline permitting requests in a manner that responded quickly to the fluidity of the film production. At least 100 of those hours were specifically related to the usage of drones.

At the conclusion of the Pilot Program, neither the Permittee nor FilmLA received any concerns or complaints from members of the public related to drone operations, safety, or access. However, the Permittee did report the loss of one drone due to water spray, though it did not fall into the water and was returned safely to the landing area. Due to the Permittee’s filming schedule, only four drone packets across five filming dates were submitted and approved for Venice Beach.

Considerations for Permanent Drone Policy

As coastal stewards, DBH operates and maintains the County’s beaches and Marina del Rey, for and in coordination with other agencies, in a manner that complies with safety, environmental, and land use regulations established by those agencies. DBH also considers each beach location’s varying topography, proximity to homes and sensitive marine habitats and species, coastal erosion, visitation rates, public access,

and operational needs. The public's ability to access these vital assets are continuously evaluated as DBH maintains an active partnership with community stakeholders, residents, business owners, and beach visitors.

Further, DBH policies often reflect rules and regulations that are enacted by local safety and access partners (city and county public works, fire, lifeguard, sheriff, and police departments), local jurisdictions (including the cities of Malibu, Los Angeles, Manhattan Beach, Hermosa Beach, Redondo Beach, and Torrance), state agencies (California Coastal Commission, State Parks, and the Film Commission), and federal agencies (the FAA and U.S. Coast Guard). In addition, DBH often receives requests to use drones from private individuals, businesses, educational institutions, non-profit organizations, and other government agencies. Therefore, to evaluate the feasibility of a permanent drone policy that is equitable and inclusive across one or more County-managed beaches, extensive research, stakeholder engagement, and coordination among multiple agencies is needed.

Conclusion

DBH, the Film Office, and FilmLA continued to enhance coordination with the Permittee, and DBH further expanded access to filming locations, which allowed for a successful Pilot Program. While DBH remains committed to continued collaboration with the film industry to further evaluate the use of drones at the County's iconic beaches and Marina del Rey, a permanent drone policy requires further research and additional resources. Accordingly, DBH is requesting an Assistant Division Chief position in the next budget cycle to lead efforts related to film coordination, special projects (e.g., 2028 Olympics and Paralympics), and Board initiatives.

DBH plans to take the following actions: 1) Extend the Pilot Program period through December 31, 2027, to allow the Permittee to utilize drones at Venice Beach and Marina del Rey and provide more data for evaluation; 2) Work with the Chief Executive Office and partner agencies to secure funding for a specialized consultant to study the use of drones along the coastline, coordinate with partner agencies and neighboring jurisdictions, and conduct outreach to community stakeholders; and 3) Continue to provide updates to your Board regarding the Pilot Program, consultant's work, and final recommendations for the policy.

GJ:LA:CML:ss

c: Beach Board Deputies
Marina Board Deputies
Executive Office of the Board of Supervisors
Chief Executive Officer

Enclosure