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Chatham considering fee for filmmakers

Education, nonprofit uses would be exempt

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CHATHAM -- The mayor of Chatham has proposed an ordinance that would charge filmmakers \$500 a day to film in the borough, but he said he believes it will encourage movie and television shoots.

"It's like driving down the highway," Mayor V. Nelson Vaughan III said about the proposed regulations. "Who wants to drive down the highway with no rules? They want someone who will be cognizant of their business."

The need for such regulations first arose in December 2008 when the New Jersey Lottery Commission decided to film a commercial in Chatham, Vaughan said. "They said, 'What are your rules and what should we pay?' And we said we don't have any."

The ordinance, which would also restrict the number of days a company can film to five, was first read at a meeting in July, and if it passes at the Sept. 14 meeting, the restrictions would be permanently written into the town's code. The ordinance provides for the fee to be waived if the filming is for an educational or not-for-profit purpose.

The question of regulations came up again in July, when producers approached the borough about filming a scene in the upcoming movie "Eat, Pray, Love," Vaughan said. No filming was ever done because the filmmakers cut the particular scene that they planned to film in Chatham.

"Sadly we will not have Julia Roberts here," Vaughan said.

Janice Piccolo, administrative assistant for the town, handles the details involved in hosting a film company. Piccolo said the film company is responsible for disposing of their own trash and is responsible for paying borough employees overtime if that is called for. For example, a film company might want the town to adjust the time on a borough clock to match with a scene they are shooting and the filmmakers would be responsible for paying the workers overtime, she said.

There is concern the \$500 per day fee could discourage smaller film companies from shooting in the borough.

Adam Chinoy, owner of Green Gecko Films, a New Jersey-based independent film company paid Mendham Borough \$1,500 for permits required to shoot his 25-minute film over the course of three days. He said he would not do it again.

Chinoy said that it took time to obtain the money for the fees, and that the extra security the town provided, although appreciated, was unnecessary because they were filming indoors.

"If you want to close off a whole street to film a car chase or shooting, it's helpful," Chinoy said about security.

Steve Gorlick, executive director for the New Jersey Motion Picture and Television Commission, said

filming fees might dissuade independent filmmakers from going to a particular town. Still, he has spoken with Vaughan and approved of Chatham's ordinance with what he called a few minor modifications that the town has put in place.

However, Gorlick also said that in an ideal situation, the town would not charge filmmakers any fees. A real benefit to having large film companies in a place like Chatham is the business it generates for the town.

"We've had feature films spend over \$5 million dollars in New Jersey for one project alone." He said, "They will buy hardware, lumber, paint, stationery, food, and all of that can amount to a great amount of money."
