

REPORT OF GENERAL MANAGER

**APPROVED**  
SEP 06 2006

NO. 06-253

DATE September 6, 2006

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**BOARD OF RECREATION  
AND PARK COMMISSIONERS**

BOARD OF RECREATION AND PARK COMMISSIONERS

SUBJECT: GRIFFITH OBSERVATORY - PERSONAL SERVICES AGREEMENT WITH  
CHRIS SHELTON FOR LIVE PERFORMER DIRECTING IN THE SAMUEL  
OSCHIN PLANETARIUM THEATER

*B. Jensen	_____	H. Fujita	_____
M. Shull	_____	J. Kolb	_____
F. Mok	_____	K. Regan	_____
S. Huntley	_____	J. Combs	_____

*Robert H Jensen (for)*  
\_\_\_\_\_  
General Manager

Approved \_\_\_\_\_ Disapproved \_\_\_\_\_ Withdrawn \_\_\_\_\_

RECOMMENDATION:

That the Board:

1. Approve a personal services agreement, substantially as on file in the Board Office, with Chris Shelton for five months and an amount not to exceed \$50,000.00, for specialized services in connection with all performer casting, direction, and related production responsibilities, for the live performer portion of operation of the Samuel Oschin Planetarium theater in the renovated Griffith Observatory, subject to approval of the Mayor and of the City Attorney as to form;
2. Find that the services to be performed by Chris Shelton require specialized technical expertise for which competitive bidding is not practicable or advantageous;
3. Find, pursuant to Charter Section 1022, that the Department does not have personnel available in its employ with sufficient expertise to undertake these specialized professional tasks in a timely manner, and that these services can be performed more feasibly by qualified independent contractors than by a City employee;
4. Direct the Board Secretary to transmit the proposed agreement to the Mayor in accordance with Executive Directive No. 3, and concurrently to the City Attorney for review as to form; and,
5. Authorize the Board President and Secretary to execute the agreement upon approval by the Mayor and City Attorney.

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### SUMMARY:

The Griffith Observatory will reopen in 2006 with the new state-of-the-art Samuel Oschin Planetarium theater. A laser-projected, all-dome video system with the capability to show high-definition 3-D video will replace the antiquated 35 mm slide system removed in 2002, and will be used in conjunction with the new Zeiss Mark IX Universarium star projector, and high quality theater sound and lighting systems, to afford the most technically superior planetarium experience in the country. The Board previously approved equipment purchases and personal services agreements for graphics specialists, 3-D animators, composers, modelers, and production staff who are finalizing the production of the premiere show, *Centered in the Universe*. Friends Of The Observatory (FOTO), in addition to funding the refurbishment and new equipment in the Samuel Oschin Planetarium theater, have contributed significantly to production expenses, including development of an original musical score. At this time, with the production of the show itself in the final stages, attention can now be given to another unique element of the planned operation of the Samuel Oschin Planetarium: casting and training live performers to execute the script for the show, in place of a recorded voice-over narration. This goal of bringing the show to life and sustaining human interaction with the audiences in the planetarium is the next logical step in Griffith Observatory's long tradition of sharing astronomy through interaction of lecturers, telescope demonstrators, and museum guides. However, the state-of-the-art theater systems and the demands of casting and preparing performers requires expert assistance in the form of a director who will oversee and orchestrate the performance of *Centered in the Universe* by integrating and unifying various aspects of production. The director will work with the key individuals on the Observatory team coordinating stagecraft, costumes, lighting design, acting, and sound design for the show, and will have responsibility for achieving the expected quality.

The skills required to seamlessly integrate the technological elements and ensure both stylistic and scientific integrity are beyond City staff's abilities or experience, and therefore, staff recommends a personal services agreement with an experienced director who can work immediately to meet the late October deadline for show completion. The need for a science-oriented director who has a focus on live theater and is able to work for the required short period of time to mount and nurture the premiere show led the Observatory to immediately contact known talent.

Mr. Chris Shelton is an experienced director in television, film, and live theater. As a stage director, Mr. Shelton's Los Angeles productions earned two Best Director Awards from Dramalogue (*Tartuffe* and *Candida* at the Bank Playhouse) and a Los Angeles Drama Critics Circle Award (*Mysteries and Miracles* at the Hillside Repertory Theater). His production of *Our Town* at Hillside Repertory was featured in the Los Angeles Times' Best Theater of 1999. Chris was one of the principal directors of the Hillside Repertory from 1997 to 2000. Before that he was a festival director and principal actor with the Occidental Summer Theater Festival. As a professional actor Chris has also appeared in leading roles with the Old Globe National Shakespeare Festival (San Diego), the Inner City

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Repertory Company (Los Angeles), and the Mummens Theater (Oklahoma City). He adds to his live theater experience many years of directing television, with a focus on historic re-enactments and science programming; he is currently directing segments of two new programs for National Geographic: *Science of Summer* and *Science of Winter*. In addition to television and movies, Mr. Shelton has written, produced, and directed travel, documentary, educational, promotional, industrial, and sports films all over the world. His films and videos have earned numerous Telly and Cine Golden Eagle awards.

The proposed agreement will be for five months, including a ratification clause for planning work undertaken to prepare for casting in September. This term will allow the director to monitor the show through the first eight weeks or so of public performances after opening of the Observatory. Mr. Shelton will be compensated \$62.50 per hour, typically \$2500.00 per week, for a maximum of \$50,000.00, which is modest for an experienced director in the Los Angeles market. Staff recommends approval of this engagement and has confidence that Mr. Shelton's participation will be key in achieving excellence in the performance element of the Observatory's reopening.

### FISCAL IMPACT STATEMENT:

The Department's Budget for Fiscal Year 2006-2007 includes \$289,000.00 in contractual services funds for planetarium show production at the Observatory (Department 88, Fund 302, Contractual Services Account 3040, Activity Code 7800, under the line item entitled, "Observatory Planetarium Graphics Design Services"). The Department is under no obligation to expend more funds or utilize Mr. Shelton's services to the maximum amount; use of his services under this contract is on an as-needed basis, however, we expect to expend the full amount.

Report prepared by Linda Barth, Senior Management Analyst II, Observatory Reopening Project Manager.