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New outdoor music spot in downtown Orlando moves forward



A "listening garden" is set to join the other venues at the Dr. Phillips Center for the Performing Arts in downtown Orlando. (Matthew J. Palm/Orlando Sentinel)



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Orlando city commissioners on Monday approved a legal agreement that keeps a planned downtown outdoor music spot on track.

The [Dr. Phillips Center for the Performing Arts](#) is planning to construct a “listening garden” along South Street, outside its Judson’s Live venue. The idea, according to the city’s documentation, is to “allow more accessibility to the arts for people walking through downtown Orlando who may not be paying for a ticketed event.”

When musical acts are booked at Judson’s Live or Steinmetz Hall, their performances will be played on outdoor LED screens so that onlookers can enjoy the concerts. Judson’s Live hosts musical performances in a variety of genres most nights of the week. Steinmetz Hall is best known for world-class classical music, but it also hosts performers in other genres.

The “listening garden” has been under discussion for several years. The Florida Department of State has granted \$500,000 toward the project, and Monday’s action by commissioners was required by the state to receive that money.

Commissioners approved a restrictive covenant, guaranteeing to the Department of State that the grant money would be used for its intended purpose of making improvements to the arts center to benefit citizens.

City commissioners are involved because, although the nonprofit Orlando Performing Arts Center Corporation runs the Dr. Phillips Center, the city owns the building and the land on which it sits.

No timeline has been announced for the creation of the listening garden, which is expected to sell food and drink to those enjoying the free music, but an arts-center official said that the public may know what the space will look like early this summer.

“As part of this process, the arts center’s goal is to complete the design and have the general contractor selected by June,” wrote Alexis Jackson, vice president of development.

The city will review and have final approval on all plans.



The Dr. Phillips Center for the Performing Arts plans to create a "listening garden," where patrons can hear music being performed inside the venue, in the space near Judson's Live along South Street in downtown Orlando. (Matthew J. Palm/Orlando Sentinel)

The addition of the listening garden isn't the only way in which the arts center is growing. In August, leaders announced the [purchase of 43,948 square feet of property](#) across South Street from the current facility, stretching from Magnolia Avenue to the Grand Bohemian hotel. That land will be owned by the nonprofit, not the city.

And the arts center has been actively using the open space around the building, with its free monthlong [Frontyard Holiday Festival](#) wrapping up at the beginning of the month. That event saw live music performed on an outdoor stage, games and activities for children, and the sale of food, drink and merchandise.

The restrictive-covenant agreement was part of the City Council's consent agenda, which passed unanimously on Monday. Before the vote, Commissioner Patty Sheehan spoke in favor of the listening garden.

“I’m very excited about the fact that people will be able to see those performances outside without having to buy a ticket because I think that’s really good for our community,” she said. “So kudos on that. Glad to see that very much.”

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