

# 8 Central Florida arts projects in works

Efforts may redefine  
cultural landscape

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Orlando's Dr. Phillips Center for the Performing Arts has at last broken ground on its final hall — but the downtown venue is far from the only major Central Florida arts institution eyeing construction, renovation, or in some cases, relocation.

Cultural organizations like to dream big — in recent years, the Polasek Museum in Winter Park floated an entire historic house across a lake to save it.

The Osceola County Historical Society took it a step further — relocating multiple old buildings in 2014 to create its Pioneer Village.

Here's a look at the plans of eight of Central Florida's premiere arts organizations that could redefine our cultural landscape for the future.

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# ARTS

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## Art & History Museums — Maitland

In 2015, the organization submitted a conceptual plan to the city on how to re-incorporate 1.5 acres adjacent to the Maitland Art Center. That land was once part of the original complex, when the center was known as The Research Studio.

But developing the site is now on hold until newly hired executive director Mark S. Harmon starts later this spring, said interim leader Rae Ward. Because the concept plan is “very preliminary,” Harmon could significantly change how the land is ultimately used, she said.

## Cornell Fine Arts Museum

The Rollins College museum is considering an off-campus move to better serve Winter Park residents, as well as students.

“We are in early concept development for a future museum complex and are now in the midst of discussing program, curriculum and outreach — and what each of those means for a future space,” said museum director Ena Heller. “We will know more about the scope, scale and location of a space by late summer.”

## Enzian

The independent Maitland cinema plans to go from one to three screens

in a \$6 million expansion. The art house has reached a parking agreement with the city, said executive director David Schillhammer. The hope is to break ground on the 18-month project this year, but that depends on finding funds. So far, about \$4.7 million has been raised.

## Mennello Museum of American Art

The city-owned museum in Orlando's Loch Haven Park wants more space for exhibits, programming and educational experiences. In the first phase of its Strategic Vision for Advancement plan, which is winding down, surveys and interviews are being used to evaluate the community's vision for the museum.

The plan specifically mentions “renovation and construction” — executive director Shannon Fitzgerald said improving facilities is “a primary goal.”

## Winter Park Playhouse

In 2014, the venue announced plans to expand its lobby, add restrooms and enlarge the theater's stage while increasing seating from 123 to 175. The lobby and restroom work took place the following year, but the performance-area project has been on hold while the troupe works on financing to buy its building on Orange Avenue.

“We always run in the black, and we're proud of that,” said Lisa Melillo, director of marketing and

public relations. “We're not going to do anything that would jeopardize that.” It could be a year before the theater is ready to start work, she said.

## Orlando Ballet

When the city allowed the ballet to turn the Loch Haven Neighborhood Center into its new home, the 2014 deal called for the dance troupe to invest \$5.5 million in renovating the 50-year-old building and constructing an adjacent school. Since then, the ballet has undergone leadership changes and suffered a financial crisis.

Caroline Miller, who became executive director last fall, said she is still developing a new five-year business plan, “a key pillar of which is the renovation and expansion of its home at the Loch Haven Neighborhood Center.”

Part of that plan, expected soon, will be a fundraising campaign, she said. Philanthropist Harriett Lake already got that ball rolling with a \$2 million donation.

## Orlando Museum of Art

In September 2015, the Orlando Museum of Art floated the idea of moving from Loch Haven Park to downtown Orlando. The relocation was part of a strategic plan looking toward its 100th anniversary in 2024.

“The museum has been actively reviewing numerous downtown properties over the course of the past 14 months,” said director Glen Gentele. “These are due-diligence steps. It's not

something that's simple.”

As reported by GrowthSpotter.com, one site under consideration is along Orange Avenue, on a 1-acre lot adjacent to the Dr. Phillips Center for the Performing Arts. Museum officials declined to comment on any specific location.

## University of Central Florida

In 2010, officials said they hoped to complement new performing-arts classrooms with a 520-seat theater, a smaller theater, a 600-seat concert hall and a small recital hall. The UCF Foundation, which raises money for the university, set out to solicit \$65 million.

But now the university is regrouping.

“It wasn't resonating with donors at the time,” said Anne Botteri, associate vice president for communications and donor relations with the UCF Foundation. “There was a pause on it for a while.”

Pressure to add performance spaces is coming from students. At a campus forum in February, UCF junior Alex Storer said it was an “embarrassment” to be without an arts center.

University president John Hitt responded that it was “a top priority.”

Jeff Moore, who was named Arts & Humanities dean in 2016, and the school's faculty have been re-evaluating what sort of performance spaces would serve students best, a spokeswoman said. So far, there is no timetable or price tag.

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