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## **Backing the arts in Broward: Your first look at a new ‘metaverse,’ a \$1 million fund and more festivals**



Japanese taiko drumming ensemble Fushu Daiko closes out the Broward County Cultural Division’s 2nd Annual State of the Arts Address at the Broward Center for the Performing Arts on Thursday, October 24, 2024. They announced the unveiling of the world’s first public art metaverse, a historic budget increase for the Cultural Division, a major expansion of the annual IGNITE Broward festival, and the launch of a new \$1 million fund for community arts and cultural festivals. (Mike Stocker/South Florida Sun Sentinel)

The arts and creativity took center stage Thursday as Broward County made a range of big announcements to bolster a thriving community full of artwork, culture, festivals and entertainment.

The arts projects — which were unveiled during the county’s annual “State of the Arts Address” event — included a new \$1 million fund in support of festivals, a new “metaverse” portal that lets people visit Broward landmarks virtually, as well as updates on a planned new cultural center in Davie.

“The state of our arts is strong, and getting stronger,” Phillip Dunlap, director of the Broward County Cultural Division, declared, drawing applause from an audience. “The goal is to bring cultural opportunities to every corner of the county.”

Here’s a look at the plans.

### **A \$1 million initiative**

Broward County will create a new \$1 million fund to sponsor community arts and cultural festivals. It will help fund arts and special events for new neighborhood and city festivals.

“Our goal is to bring cultural opportunities to every corner of the county ensuring equitable access to funding and fostering a resilient arts ecosystem,” Dunlap said.

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The move will “not only elevate the arts” but support local artists. “We believe this program will make a profound impact creating lasting cultural legacies throughout Broward County,” he said.



**(Mike Stocker/South Florida Sun Sentinel)**

Phillip Dunlap, the Broward Cultural Division's director, speaks at the State of the Arts Address at the Broward Center for the Performing Arts on Thursday. "The state of our arts is strong, and getting stronger," he said. (Mike Stocker/South Florida Sun Sentinel)

Within a week, the county will announce the details including deadlines and applications.

The county also has created a new arts data portal at [www.Broward.org/Arts](http://www.Broward.org/Arts) to be a "one-stop shop" for information on grants.

### **A virtual visit to landmarks**

The county also unveiled what it called the "world's first" public "Broward Arts Metaverse," which lets people use computers to experience the county's vast art collection using virtual reality. It's like the internet brought to life.

"Sure you can look at pictures on the website but we started to look for ways that through technology we can create an immersive and engaging gateway to discover public art in Broward County," Dunlap said.

From anywhere, using the web, anyone can be transported to "key locations" in the county, such as parks, the airport and the seaport, to "experience public art in ways that cannot be done in real life, or as they say IRL."

"Now we are the first in the world to put a public art collection in the metaverse," he said.

Over the next year the county will be adding 30 pieces into the metaverse collection so "start dressing your avatar," Dunlap said.

A free profile can be created at <https://bam.imx3.art/>.

### **A cultural arts center**

Plans for the [West Broward Cultural Center](#) are moving forward, and the design phase has started and an architect has been chosen. Commissioner Steve Geller said it will be an "incubator of creativity," will be opening on State Road 84 east of Flamingo Road in Davie in the space of a closed art museum, but larger. Commissioner Steve Geller said it "will change the cultural landscape."

"A lot of people were saying, 'Let's make offices out of that or sell it.' No. It had to be retained as a community cultural facility," Geller said. "It's not just a local achievement, it's a regional milestone for west Broward."

"The strength of a community's cultural landscape is a mirror reflecting its very soul," he said.

## **A Broward festival**

The annual IGNITE Broward festival, now 10 nights scheduled in February, will be expanded to a larger footprint in Fort Lauderdale, Dania Beach and now next year Hollywood.

The [festival is billed](#) as a festival of “interactive light and sound-based experiences created by top national and international artists and designers using the most innovative digital technologies.”

## **A nighttime display**

In early 2025, a lighting display will be unveiled at the Andrews Avenue bridge as a downtown [showpiece with lights](#) that will change colors throughout the day.

The lighting art project transforms the drawbridge that spans the New River between Las Olas Boulevard and South Fifth Street. Documents show the display will be a lively one, featuring an “ever-changing” presentation whose lights will shimmer across the New River’s surface.



rendering shows proposed lighting project for the Andrews Avenue bridge in Fort Lauderdale. (Broward County/Courtesy)

County commissioners hailed all of the efforts as contributing to the “livability” of Broward and the desire to want to be here. The County Commission poured an extra \$1.7 million into the cultural arts budget, bringing it to about \$10 million, officials said.

“The arts give back immensely, our investment in them is an investment in our residents, visitors, businesses and in all of you,” said County Commissioner Michael Udine.

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