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ARTS & CULTURE

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## The Avenue of the Arts to break ground on an ambitious \$150 million streetscape to make Broad Street greener

A \$150 million streetscape project will transform South Broad Street's Avenue of the Arts with trees, public art, traffic calming, and redesigned medians and sidewalks, starting this winter.



Both the median strip and sidewalks on South Broad Street will hold landscaping and art under a new streetscape planned to eventually stretch from City Hall south to Washington Avenue. Th ... [Read more](#)  
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by Peter Dobrin

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Lush landscaping and public art will soon line Broad Street, impromptu performances may pop up, and vehicular traffic will be calmed with a new Avenue of the Arts south streetscape about to take shape.

The project — estimated to take \$150 million and a decade to realize — will begin modestly.

The groundbreaking ceremony was held Wednesday morning in front of the Kimmel Center and was attended by more than 200 dignitaries, including Mayor [Cherelle L. Parker](#), City Council President [Kenyatta Johnson](#), and other members of City Council, state representatives, and officials from groups along the Avenue of the Arts.

The actual construction is slated to start at the end of January on a small portion of the project: remaking the median strip between Spruce and Pine Streets. That phase is expected to be completed by June.

In 2027, after the end of an anticipated swell in tourism and street activity during the [Semiquincentennial](#), sidewalk beautification will begin on both the east and west sides of that block.

Eventually, pending funding, all of the blocks between City Hall and Washington Avenue will be remade.



Looking north toward City Hall, a rendering shows the completed first phase of a South Broad Street streetscape project slated to break ground in January 2026.

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The current streetscape of planters, pavers, and retro light fixtures was designed and installed more than three decades ago. In addition to the wear and tear of the existing scheme, the thinking around public space has evolved since then, said Carl Dranoff, board chair of Avenue of the Arts, Inc., which is overseeing the project.

“It’s become somewhat aged and dog-eared,” said Dranoff. “In 1993 you didn’t need to have outdoor cafes. We need to activate the street, not just make it palatable. We have the opportunity to really elevate the Avenue of the Arts into one of the world’s great streets.”

[The project was announced](#) in July 2024 at \$100 million, but inflation and a more detailed cost analysis has now put the total price tag at about \$150 million — \$15 million per block. These numbers include not just the planters, lighting, public art, street furniture, and aesthetic elements, but also infrastructure work beneath the surface, said Dranoff.

“A lot of it is things you don’t see. There’s a lot of underground construction,” he said. “Right now water is leaking from the median strip into the subway concourse. One of the reasons we got support from [SEPTA](#) and PennDot and [the Philadelphia] Streets [Dept.], is as we are building the median strips, we are improving deficiencies in the street in each block.”

In addition, some utilities will have to be moved. One PECO relocation, for instance, will cost the project \$250,000, he said.



Avenue of the Arts, Inc.

The Avenue of the Arts breaks ground in January on the first phase of a new \$150 million streetscape.

Dranoff has a vested interest in the vitality of the Avenue of the Arts. He has led several development projects on South Broad Street, including Arthaus, which is on the same block as the first phase of the new streetscape, and, one block south, Symphony House. He compares the investment in the new streetscape to the ones made in the Pennsylvania Convention Center, Philadelphia Navy Yard, Kimmel Center, and [Schuylkill](#) River Trail.

“If we don’t make investments in the future, which are going to increase revenue and population, we are relegating ourselves to second-place status.”

The new \$15 million streetscape in the block from Spruce to Pine, which includes a \$1 million endowment fund to underwrite maintenance, native-species plants, a rainwater-collection cistern, lighting, curved raised planting beds, public art, seating, way-finding devices, and artist-designed banners.

Of the \$15 million needed, \$5 million has been raised so far: \$3 million from the city over two budget years, \$1 million from the state, and \$1 million from private donors. Other funding requests are pending, which planners call “very promising.”



A sidewalk garden on the east side of Broad Street between Pine and Spruce Streets is planned for installation in 2027 as part of a new Avenue of the Arts streetscape.

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Dranoff says that construction of the median between Spruce and Pine — which is the block occupied by the Kimmel Center and defunct [University of the Arts](#) — won't cause "a lot of disruption. They're only working business hours, not on weekends." Any blocked lanes will be reopened after work is done for the day, he said.

The next block to be redesigned hasn't been decided, but it will likely be north of Spruce Street, Dranoff said. "Part of it will depend on funding. If we get a donor, someone whose offices are near the Academy of Music and is donating \$15 million for that block to be next, we might accommodate that," he said.

Funding for the entire project is expected to be a mix of public money, corporate and individual donations, and foundation support, he said.

The goal isn't to have the mile-plus between City Hall and Washington Avenue end up with a streetscape that looks uniform, Dranoff said. Instead, design firms Gensler and OJB Landscape Architecture may come up with different ideas for different blocks.

"You don't need a master plan that's set for 10 blocks. Every block is different, the institutions are different. It lends itself to block-by-block planning tied together by a common theme."

Dranoff said once the block from Spruce to Pine is done, it will show the potential, which he expects will spur fundraising to complete the streetscape for the entire Avenue of the Arts south.

"The difference between now and the first block being finished is, you're going to be driving down a tree-lined boulevard."

<https://www.inquirer.com/arts/broad-street-avenue-of-the-arts-streetscape-20260114.html>