

UCF downtown Orlando campus escapes Gov. Rick Scott's veto



A rendering of the proposed downtown UCF Orlando campus.

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UCF's downtown Orlando campus project survived Gov. **Rick Scott's** veto pen Tuesday, completing the final funding piece of a plan considered one of the university's top priorities.

The news came when Scott announced Tuesday that he plans to sign the \$82.3 billion budget approved by lawmakers on Friday. In an unusual move, he revealed his line-item vetoes ahead of time, before the budget actually reached his desk.

Scott said he would veto \$256.1 million in projects from the spending plan, but \$20 million for the UCF campus was not on the list.

“This is one of the most important milestones in UCF’s history,” UCF President **John Hitt** said in a statement. “UCF, Orlando and the state will benefit from this decision for decades to come.”

Scott had vetoed funding for the downtown campus last year in June.

This year, the University of Central Florida scaled back the project. It sought the state funds to help build the campus on land where the old Orlando Arena once stood, with plans to open in fall 2018.

The school cannot access the state money until it raises \$20 million in donations to pay for part of the \$60 million academic building that will serve as the campus' centerpiece, school lobbyist Dan Holsenbeck said.

So far, UCF says it has garnered \$16 million in donation pledges. The final \$20 million will come from the school's budget.

"We are just delighted the outcome was favorable," Holsenbeck said.

In recent months, the campus faced several hurdles, from the governor's veto to questions raised about the project by the Florida Board of Governors, which oversees public universities.

UCF officials vowed to raise donations to show community support and to focus on building the main academic building instead of a more expensive multistep plan. After doing so, it won approval from the Board of Governors.

The school, which expects enrollment of 7,700 students in the first year, will immediately move to downtown several degrees, including social work, legal studies and human communication. Journalism, advertising/public relations and other degrees could potentially move in the future.

Valencia College also will be heavily involved in the campus, housing its hospitality and culinary management programs there.

A key part of the campus will be private development as officials hope to jump-start the project known as Creative Village. For example, the university won't build a dormitory with public money and instead look to developers for student housing.

Orlando Mayor **Buddy Dyer** predicted Tuesday's news will have a "catalyzing" effect on Creative Village as a whole.

"The bottom line is, the stars are starting to align," Dyer said.

Senate President Andy Gardiner, R-Orlando, a major backer of the project, called the campus an economic "game-changer" with its power to pull students downtown.

Scott's list of vetoes this year was relatively light compared with \$461 million of cuts last year that angered

many lawmakers.

This year's vetoes came after much of his economic and tax-cutting agenda was ignored by lawmakers, prompting fears that he again would kill many local projects.

But in a statement Tuesday, Scott said, "We had a great legislative session this year ... I look forward to another great year in the Sunshine State as we continue our mission to make Florida first in the world for jobs, education and safe communities."

Gardiner said the governor's list of vetoes this year was fair.

Though funding for the campus survived, other local projects were not as lucky, including two others at UCF. Here are some vetoed by Scott:

\$4.7 million for UCF's planned Interdisciplinary Research and Incubator Facility.

\$3.6 million to renovate UCF's Engineering Building 1.

\$750,000 to expand a wastewater plant in Eustis.

\$500,000 for the Franklin Street Trail in Ocoee.

\$500,000 for the Hungerford Amphitheater in Eatonville.

\$300,000 in grants for Kids House of Seminole.

\$300,000 for a livestock pavilion at the Central Florida Fair.

\$250,000 for the Wells Built Museum in Orlando.

Scott also reversed his position on funding for the Florida Association of Free and Charitable Clinics, which lost \$9.5 million to his veto pen last year, prompting outcry from clinic directors across the state. This year, the governor approved \$10 million for the association.

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