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**MEDIA KIT**

**EMBARGOED UNTIL THURSDAY, OCTOBER 17TH AT 10:00 AM**

**Zilker Summer Musical at Risk of Closing Due to Critical Lack of Funding:****A Call to Save Austin's 65-Year Tradition**

AUSTIN, TX – Zilker Theatre Productions (ZTP), the nonprofit behind the beloved Zilker Summer Musical, is facing a catastrophic funding crisis that threatens the future of Austin's 65-year summer tradition. For the first time in decades, the continuation of the annual free musical is at critical risk due to the lack of city funding, as well as a decrease in grants, corporate sponsorship, and community donations.

After navigating the challenges of funding cuts over the past several years, ZTP is now severely impacted by the recent news that they will not receive any financial support from the City of Austin for its 2025 production.

In response to the inquiry regarding the elimination of ZTP funding, Sylvania Holt Rabb, the director of the city's Economic Development Department, stated: "Our cultural funding programs are designed to support Austin's creative and cultural community through a transparent, competitive, and equitable process. Every year, all eligible applicants, including Zilker Theatre Productions, are encouraged to apply for funding, and applications are evaluated based on [updated criteria developed in consultation with the community.](#)"

Rabb continued, "Unfortunately, the demand for funding often exceeds the amount available, making the process highly competitive. While funding is never guaranteed for all applicants, our purpose is to ensure that our resources are more accessible, particularly to those who have been historically marginalized or underrepresented, or have not previously received City support. If we truly want to uplift those in need, we must prioritize assistance for those who have received little or no help, while also balancing our support for those who have consistently contributed to the community, to ensure Austin's diverse population has an equal opportunity to succeed and thrive."

This news comes as ZTP struggles to cover remaining costs from this summer's production, following several years of financial hardship. Like many arts organizations, ZTP has faced a number of challenges in the post-COVID landscape. The cancellation of the 2020 summer musical led to lost revenue and diminished public engagement, which has been followed in the past few years by reduced funding from sponsors and donors. These issues have made it

difficult to maintain operations, particularly in the interest of keeping the summer musical free and open to all.

"We were honored to win the Uniquely Austin award at the Greater Austin Business Awards last week, but now we find ourselves facing the possibility of not being able to continue operations," said Lisa Muir, ZTP Board President. "We've done everything in our power, but we need the Austin community's support to keep this beloved tradition alive. This is more than just a production – it's a chance for local artists, creative teams, and production crews to bring free, world-class musical theater to our city. Without the necessary funding, we risk losing this cherished experience."

Each year, ZTP employs local actors, artists, creative teams, and production staff who make each summer musical a reality. Their work, along with ZTP's volunteer team, brings joy to 66,000+ audience members annually at the Beverly S. Sheffield Zilker Hillside Theater.

### **Ensuring Accessibility and Equity at the Hillside Theatre**

To ensure the annual musical's audience has free access to the Hillside Theatre during the production run, ZTP allocates a significant portion of their budget to cover essential costs. Muir shared, "ZTP prioritizes community access by covering the cost of nearby parking without city meters, parking attendants, waste disposal and recycling, restroom maintenance—including port-o-potties—and affordable concessions. Additionally, we provide complimentary water stations, reflecting our commitment to a welcoming and accessible experience for all."

ZTP has continuously incorporated community feedback into their operations, in order to ensure it stays equitable and accessible. To better serve a wider range of community members, ZTP has enhanced inclusivity and accessibility on the Hillside by implementing initiatives such as ADA improvements in 2003-2005, ASL (American Sign Language) nights since the early 2000s, neurodivergent/sensory inclusivity nights through a partnership with [ACES Austin](#) since 2022, and has made an intentional effort toward diversity in the summer musical's cast, crew, musicians, production teams, and design teams. Additionally, ZTP's leadership is dedicated to an ongoing operationalization of equity.

In addition to the Zilker Summer Musical, ZTP has produced [free audition workshops](#) throughout the year since 2010. This program invites diverse communities to develop their artistic skills by removing financial barriers, providing a welcoming environment for people of all backgrounds, and empowering participants to explore their creativity. ZTP engages skilled arts volunteers to lead these workshops, providing free professional development for emerging artists.

"As a long-time advocate for diversity, equity, and inclusion, I am deeply impressed by the leadership at Zilker Theatre Productions. Their unwavering commitment since the early 2000s to create an equitable experience for the Austin community speaks volumes about their dedication to accessibility, inclusion, and the continual practice of operationalizing equity. By eliminating ticket prices and reducing financial barriers like parking, they ensure that world-class Broadway performances are accessible to everyone, regardless of economic background," said Kitty McLeod, Chief Solutions Officer of [Illumine Wellness](#) and member of ZTP's advisory board.

She continued, "Moreover, ZTP's initiative to pay performers fairly and offer free audition workshops for aspiring artists is an investment in the future of our city's artistic community. These workshops provide emerging performers with the skills and confidence they need to thrive in an increasingly challenging environment for artists. It's this kind of forward-thinking leadership that we need to support. I encourage our community to continue giving generously to help ZTP expand these essential programs and make sure Austin remains a beacon for the performing arts."

Without immediate financial support, this long-standing institution, which has created numerous artist jobs, produced outreach programs that invite all communities to engage with the arts, and provided free Broadway-style entertainment to Central Texans and visitors since 1959, could be forced to close its doors.

### **A Call to Action: How You Can Help Save the Zilker Summer Musical**

To save the Zilker Summer Musical, ZTP seeks to raise \$300,000 before December 2024. Muir shared, "While the Austin Parks Foundation has provided critical in-kind donations, including thousands of dollars for stage repairs after the pandemic and the Snowpocalypse, the reality is that city funding, which once covered most theater expenses, has significantly declined. We've managed to stay afloat thanks to donors and sponsors. However, now we must restructure our operating model to ensure that Austin locals and visitors can continue enjoying this beloved summer tradition for years to come."

Corporate sponsorships are available at various levels. **For more information about sponsorship, please visit [zilker.org/sponsorztp](https://zilker.org/sponsorztp) or contact [sponsors@zilker.org](mailto:sponsors@zilker.org).**

ZTP is also seeking volunteers and professionals with expertise in grant writing, fundraising, and accounting. Anyone interested in supporting one of Austin's most unique traditions is encouraged to contact ZTP at [info@zilker.org](mailto:info@zilker.org).

Community members are welcome to support ZTP's mission through direct donations at [zilker.org/donate](https://zilker.org/donate).

For more information or to get involved, visit [zilker.org](http://zilker.org) or follow @ZilkerTheatreProductions on social media.

For over 65 years, ZTP has brought free musical theater to the heart of Austin. Now, it's our turn to step up and save this beloved tradition. Let's ensure the show goes on—together, we can save ZTP.

### **About Zilker Theatre Productions**

Zilker Theatre Productions, a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization, has produced award-winning, free-admission musical entertainment in Austin since 1959. Founded as part of the City of Austin's Parks and Recreation Department, ZTP remains dedicated to preserving the Broadway musical art form through large-scale productions at Zilker Park's Hillside Theater. In addition to the summer musicals, ZTP sponsors community outreach and youth training programs, furthering its mission to make high-quality theater accessible to all.

For more information or for interview opportunities, please contact [media@zilker.org](mailto:media@zilker.org).