

# Outdoor Music Guide

**City of Madison**



For general questions about this guide, please contact City of Madison Planning Division,  
Angela Puerta at [madisonarts@cityofmadison.com](mailto:madisonarts@cityofmadison.com)

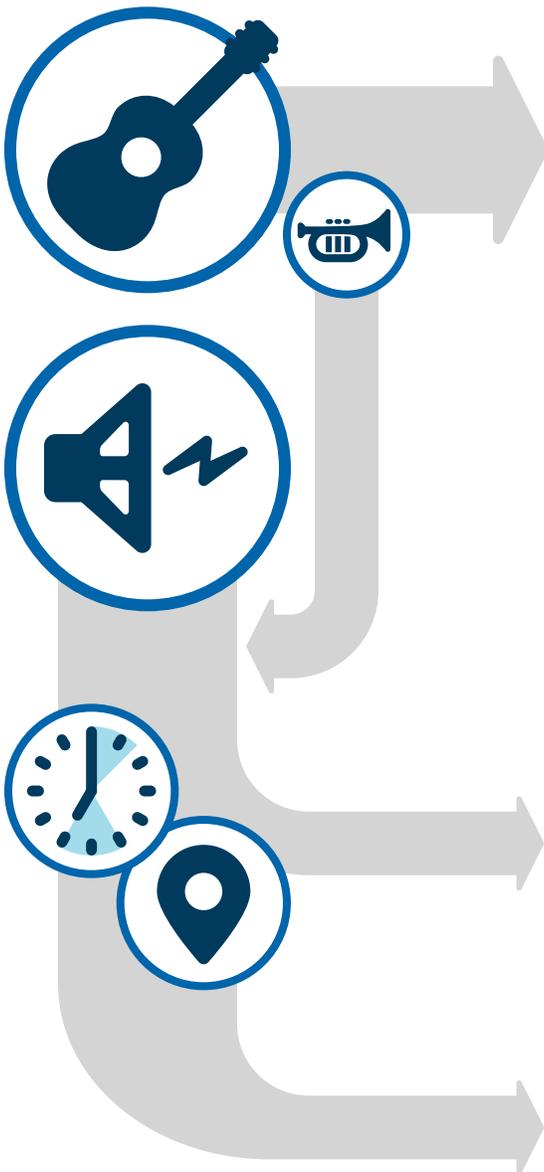
# Outdoor Music Guide

## City of Madison



This guide aims to help you understand what you **CAN** successfully do outdoors to deliver music-related activities within the City of Madison.

Please note that if you have a Sidewalk Cafe license or a Roadway Cafe Expansion License, these do NOT allow you to provide outdoor music in those spaces. Sidewalk Cafes and Roadway Cafes are for food and beverage service only, not performance or entertainment, unless you qualify for one of the permits listed in this guide.



### Unamplified

The City allows **unamplified** music in most right-of-ways. Sidewalk performances may require a permit if taking up too much space, drawing a crowd, or placing a lot of equipment.

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### Amplified

**Amplified** sound includes battery-operated amps and other equipment that amplifies voice, instruments or recorded sound, whether or not plugged into a power source.

This also includes other loud acoustic instruments such as brass instruments and percussion.

The City allows amplified sound (voice, instruments, and recordings) from a street or sidewalk during the following hours in most parts of the City without a permit: 12 pm to 1:30 pm and 5 pm to 7 pm, daily. However, that does not apply to areas along State Street or Rotary Plaza in front of the Children's Museum (see Public Right-of-Way, Downtown Performance Permit below).

If you are planning to have amplified sound outdoors during other hours, you **MUST** obtain City approval.

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NOTE: This guide answers some of the most frequent questions about outdoor music, but every activity is unique and other City ordinances may apply.



## Amplified sound In any location, or outside specified hours



### On Private Property

1. I have an approved outdoor eating area on my business's private property. Can I have outdoor amplified music?
2. I do not have an approved outdoor eating area on my business's private property. Can I have outdoor amplified music on my business's private property for a special, temporary event?
3. I currently have a conditional use permit for live amplified music and would like to expand it outdoors, how can I do that?

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### Within a Public Right-of-Way

4. How can I host an organized event with outdoor amplified music on a City street or sidewalk?
5. I am a solo performer and want to do an impromptu performance outdoors on a City street or sidewalk. How could I do that?

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### At a City Park

6. How can I apply for a temporary outdoor amplified music permit for a Madison City park?

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### At a big public venue like Breese Stevens or Mallards Stadium at Warner Park

7. The City of Madison does not have the capacity to coordinate and fully maintain such sites. Therefore, The City of Madison signed an agreement with Big Top Events LLC for the management of concessions, alcohol, events and facility operations.

For these two public venues you must contact the following representatives:

**Breese Stevens event requests**  
Tristan Straub  
[tristan@breesestevensfield.com](mailto:tristan@breesestevensfield.com)

**Mallards Stadium at Warner Park event requests**  
Vern Stenman  
[vern@bigtopbaseball.com](mailto:vern@bigtopbaseball.com)

## On Private Property



If you want to have live music and your business has an alcohol license, you must have an entertainment license. In addition to the zoning approvals for your outdoor eating area that will be described later, for liquor licenses offering entertainment, the following are required:

**i. I want to have temporary outdoor live music or a DJ\*.**

- a. You must apply for a temporary entertainment license for \$50 each. Maximum of 5 times per year.

**ii. I want to have outdoor live music or a DJ year-round.**

- a. You must apply for a permanent [Entertainment License](#) for \$300 annually. Note that you can have an Entertainment License ONLY if you already have an Alcohol Liquor License. A Class B Beer is \$100 annually, a Class C Wine License would be an additional \$100 per year, or a Class B Combination Liquor & Beer license is \$600 annually. For more information: <https://www.cityofmadison.com/clerk/documents/licensing/LicensingFeeSchedule.pdf>. See application [here](#).

\* An Entertainment License must be acquired if an establishment has a liquor license and any of the following activities are offered, permitted or allowed: live music performances; disc jockeys; and/or the establishment has a designated dance floor area.

Live entertainment does **not** include non-amplified or acoustic music performed by a single artist, or performances where an uncompensated patron sings along with a machine that plays pre-recorded music, commonly known as “karaoke.”

**1. I have an approved outdoor eating area on my business’s private property. Can I have outdoor live music?**

- Yes, if it is non-amplified acoustic music performed by a single artist. Otherwise you will need a [Conditional Use Approval](#) from the Plan Commission. To apply for a conditional use, contact Zoning at [zoning@cityofmadison.com](mailto:zoning@cityofmadison.com) or 608-266-4551.

**2. Can I have outdoor music on my business’s private property for a special, temporary event?**

A Temporary Use Permit is required. For more information, contact Zoning at [zoning@cityofmadison.com](mailto:zoning@cityofmadison.com) or 608-266-4551.

**3. I currently have a conditional use permit for live music and would like to expand it outdoors, how can I do that?**

- a. Contact Zoning at [zoning@cityofmadison.com](mailto:zoning@cityofmadison.com) or 608-266-4551 and the Clerk’s Office at [jverbick@cityofmadison.com](mailto:jverbick@cityofmadison.com) or 608-266-4601

For all general inquiries, contact [madisonevents@cityofmadison.com](mailto:madisonevents@cityofmadison.com)

**4. How can I host an organized event with outdoor amplified music on a City street or sidewalk?**

**a. I would like to host an event on a public street or sidewalk. This requires a [Street Use Permit](#).**

Organizations, community groups or individuals can apply for a Street Use Permit if the event/activity would close or reserve any portion of a Madison street, sidewalk, terrace, parking lane or space with people or equipment. If an applicant wants to request a series of Street Use events, the maximum number of dates is 15 per location and not more than one per week. There is an additional fee for sound amplification with a Street Use Permit and notification/petition of residents is needed for sound amplification before 8 a.m. or after 11 p.m.

Applications are decided by the Street Use Staff Commission at biweekly meetings and you must apply in advance. <https://www.cityofmadison.com/specialevents/streetEvents/>

Cost? Fees vary depending on location, setup, and activities.

1 day permits are typically \$100 for the application fee

Sound amplification permits are typically \$100

Please see [Street Use fee schedule](#).

**b. A group of neighbors want to host an informal event along a neighborhood block and at least 75% of residents will be willing to sign in favor of closing the street.**

You could apply for a [Block Party](#) permit as long as the event is under 100 people, there is no disruption of a Metro bus route, and there will be minimal impact to traffic.

Cost? Typically \$50 per event

NOTE: If you are planning to sell or give away beer or wine, you must acquire a [Temporary B Picnic Beer or Wine License](#). See these [FAQ](#) to see if you qualify. Temporary Picnic beer/wine applications for Street Use events on public right-of-way must be submitted at least 60 days prior to the event.

**c. I want to perform or host a performance on State Street or downtown in one of the designated performance spaces.**

You could apply for a specific [Downtown Performance Space Permit](#), which is often used for music, speakers, rallies or performances. They include Confluence at Library Mall, Peace Park, The Forum, Rotary Plaza and Concrete Park/Frances Plaza. Locations cannot be reserved more than 3 weeks in advance. These areas have access to electrical outlets. Amplification is allowed during specific timeframes and vary per location. Any setup or teardown time may not interfere with other designated permit times.

**Online** - Click [here](#) to complete your reservation.

**Call** - Phone the Madison Parks Administration office, Monday - Friday, 8:00 am to 4:15 pm at (608) 264-9289 to check on time availability and make a reservation.

Cost? Typically \$15 per event

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## Within the Public Right-of-Way (Street or Sidewalk)



### 5. I am a solo performer and want to do an impromptu performance outdoors on a City street or sidewalk.

As mentioned at the beginning of this guide, if you are planning to do an acoustic solo show, you are able to perform most places in the City. The City allows **amplified** sound (voice, instruments, recordings) from a City street or sidewalk during the following hours in most parts of the City without a permit: 12 pm to 1:30 pm and 5 pm to 7 pm, daily. However, that does not apply for areas along State Street or Rotary Plaza in front of the Children’s Museum (see 4.c., Public Right-of-Way, Downtown Performance Space Permit).

Note: taking up too much space, so that pedestrians or vehicles are blocked from using the street or sidewalk in the usual way, or placing equipment on the street or sidewalk could violate [MGO 9.54](#), or require a Street Use Permit (see 4.a.)

For all general inquiries, contact [madisonevents@cityofmadison.com](mailto:madisonevents@cityofmadison.com)

### 6. How can I apply for a temporary outdoor amplified music permit for a Madison City park?

#### a. I am planning an organized public event or gathering in a City Park.

##### i. I qualify as an established community group or Neighborhood Association who wants to host a small event (less than 250 participants)

If the event is a neighborhood or community focused event to be held in a City park, with less than 250 people in attendance, the event may qualify for our [Community Group/Neighborhood Park Event Permit](#). An artist could also collaborate with a Neighborhood Association, Community Group, or Neighborhood Resource Team (NRT) to be able to apply. This permit has waived and reduced fees.

First event of the year

No application fee

No shelter reservation fee

½ price [permit fees](#) (amplification, temporary structure, etc.)

Subsequent events in the calendar year

\$50 application fee

½ price [Shelter reservation fees](#)

½ price [permit fees](#)

No limit for # of events

Cost? Cost is dependent on location, setup and activities – see fee schedule

##### ii. I qualify as an established community group or Neighborhood Association but I want to host a large event (250+ participants)

Under regulated circumstances, a [park event permit](#) can be used to reserve park space for a special event. Depending on the details of your event, additional permits may be required (i.e. amplification, alcohol, temporary structures, etc.). Organizers must obtain permits for events if any of the following are planned:

- Large number of participants (250+ participants)
- Promoted to the general public,
- Admission is charged,
- Vending will occur,
- Event is a fundraiser and will use extensive space in the park.

Cost? Cost is dependent on location, setup and activities – see [fee schedule](#)

##### iii. I do not qualify as a Community Group or Neighborhood Association and I want to host a small event

- Same as ii, regardless of size of the event

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## At a City Park



- b. I want to host a private event with amplified music in a City Park, I will host 200 or fewer people, and I will not sell anything or charge admission.
- i. If requesting the use of a Madison Park for a private concert (not advertised to the public) here are the ways to request park space and an amplification permit:
- [Open Space Permit](#) – if requesting the use of a specific open space in a park, without reserving a shelter.  
Cost? Typically \$85-\$300 - fees dependent on activities, setup, other Madison Park's [permits](#) that may be needed.
  - [Picnic Shelter](#) – if requesting to reserve a picnic shelter (smaller, open-air shelters / some have electrical outlets / some have restrooms)  
Cost? Typically \$25 - \$260 – fees are dependent on location, full-day/half-day, and other Madison Park's [permits](#) that may be needed.
  - [Large Shelter](#) – if requesting to reserve a “large” shelter in a Madison Park (all have electrical outlets and restrooms.)  
Cost? \$70-\$1000 - fees are dependent on location, full-day/half-day, and other Madison Park's [permits](#) that may be needed.

If your reservation will have amplified sound you will need to purchase a P.A. Permit at least 10-business days in advance or at the time of making your online reservation. PA Permits have a 6-hour limit and must end by 9:00 pm. Sound Limit: 75 dB, 150 ft. from the source. Compliance may be monitored by rangers. Cost: \$60 per reservation