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State Approves \$1.3M To Bring Infinity Music Hall To Hartford

By JENNA CARLESSO and KENNETH R. GOSSELIN, jcarlesso@courant.com The Hartford Courant
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HARTFORD —

When Dan Hincks got the idea to open a high-quality, intimate music hall some six years ago, he set his sights on Hartford.

"I was traveling around the country researching venues, trying to find out what people loved and what really worked," Hincks recalled Wednesday. "The whole time I felt strongly that Hartford had a really great variety of arts organizations, and that there was a need for an intimate space for popular music."

A location in Norfolk proved at the time to be a better fit for what would become Infinity Music Hall & Bistro, however, and Hincks dropped his plans to build in Hartford.

But the idea to open a venue there never went away.

"All the time we were building and operating in Norfolk I looked at

Hartford and felt the way I originally did," Hincks said. "I never lost sight of wanting to do it in Hartford."

Hincks, president and owner of Infinity Hall, got the push he needed Wednesday when the State Bond Commission approved \$1.3 million for a new, 600-seat concert hall and restaurant in the city's downtown. The money will serve as the foundation for Infinity Hall's expansion to Hartford's Front Street.

Hincks said the company plans to break ground by December. The project will cost about \$5.2 million and is expected to be completed by the end of 2013.

In addition to the state money, the new hall will be funded through private investments and contributions from the developer, H.B. Nitkin Group, which will assist with the build-out, Hincks

said. The concert hall and restaurant is planned for Front Street's northwest corner.

The new Infinity Hall will join a four-screen movie theater on Front Street, which is expected to open early next month. The movie theater is almost 19,000 square feet.

Helen Nitkin, co-founder and chairwoman of H.B. Nitkin Group, said Wednesday that the combination of Infinity, the movie theater and a third, as-yet-unnamed restaurant will be a strong catalyst for further leasing.

"I think we really have the traction and momentum to make the project a success," Nitkin said. "We're really excited about Infinity coming. We're on our way to fulfilling our goal to make this a vibrant area downtown and to the city of Hartford and the state capital."

Nitkin confirmed that her company has kicked in money to help tenants develop their spaces, but she declined to comment on specifics. [ESPN](#), which at one point considered building an upscale sports bar on Front Street but later decided against it, has contributed \$5 million for development in the district. The money is also being used to attract tenants, she said.

Hartford's Infinity project calls for 9,100 square feet on a main level, with a mezzanine adding about 4,000 square feet, and a bistro serving what Hincks described as "creative American fare." The venue would accommodate about 250 performances a year.

The 300-seat Infinity Hall in [Norfolk](#) has hosted more than 900 shows and served more than 100,000 patrons since opening in 2008.

"We went to Norfolk and did the best job we could and the response from the public was so positive it reaffirmed my feelings that this was something that would work in Hartford as well," Hincks said.

The Hartford venue will have a similar feel as the Norfolk location, officials have said, with an intimate setting, top-notch acoustics and friendly service.

Just as the Norfolk venue draws people from northwestern Connecticut, western Massachusetts and eastern and central New York, the company's goal for the Hartford location is to attract people from surrounding cities such as Springfield, [New Haven](#) as well as such communities as [Vernon](#), Manchester and [West Hartford](#).

"There'll be some people who will choose to go to one [location] or the other, but I think there's enough music lovers to go around," said Mary Ann Clerkin, Infinity Hall's marketing manager. "Hartford will draw from east of the river, Springfield and New Haven, whereas in Norfolk, we don't draw from a lot of those areas.

"It allows us to bring bigger acts and more shows."

The project is expected to bring 35 full-time jobs to

the area, plus construction work, Hincks said.

Infinity is in the first phase of Front Street's development, a \$30 million project paid for with \$10 million in direct public subsidies and loans along with \$20 million in private investment. That doesn't include \$32 million in federal funding for two parking garages. Subsequent phases are planned, including apartments and more commercial space.

Initially, it was hoped that Front Street would open in 2005, at the same time as the Connecticut Convention Center. But changes in developers — Nitkin being the third on the project — delayed construction. The scope of project also was downsized. The shell of the first phase was completed in 2010, but the first tenant, Spotlight Theatres Inc., did not start construction until earlier this year.

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