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EDITORIAL

Theater, Music Hall Put Front Street On The Map

Hartford Project Getting Two Great Tenants

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When buildings for the first phase of Hartford's Front Street project were completed two years ago and not immediately filled, the critics were out in force, calling the project a white elephant and a waste of money.

The criticism reflects an attitude that has pervaded Hartford for the past 60 years, usually to its detriment. The city has viewed empty or underused buildings as a nuisance or obstacle, an opportunity for more surface parking lots. The city has torn down way too many buildings; not for nothing is there a "Welcome to Hartford" sign in a parking lot where a hotel once stood.

But much of the time empty buildings are an opportunity; it is usually possible to do more with a building than with an empty lot.

Look at Front Street. Spotlight Theatres is

opening a four-theater complex in early November. The facility will have party rooms and a restaurant.

Also, the highly regarded Infinity Music Hall and Bistro of Norfolk is expected to open a 600-seat live music and restaurant venue at downtown Hartford's Front Street next year. The \$5.2 million project is contingent on \$1.3 million in state aid, which is expected to be voted on today by the State Bond Commission.

The two projects together will use nearly half of the commercial space available at Front Street. Hopefully more businesses will follow, opening the door for the second phase of Front Street, which will be dedicated to housing.

Front Street — named for the street and neighborhood on the city's East Side that was removed by 1960s urban

renewal — is the last major piece of the Adriaen's Landing development, and an important one. When completed it will add density to downtown and connect the riverfront developments to Prospect Street and the rest of downtown, creating a larger downtown.

If the city is able to bridge I-84 to the north and complete renovations of the former Colt and Capewell factories on the southern fringe, Hartford will again have a downtown that befits a metropolitan region of 1.2 million souls.

Key to this revival will be careful attention to buildings — preserving historic structures and carefully filling empty spaces with new structures. If they are not filled right away, be patient. Good things can happen.

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