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Vote set on downtown Aurora music venue

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The Old Town School of Folk Music meets the [Rock and Roll Hall of Fame](#) meets Austin City Limits.

That was how Steve Warrenfeltz, president of the Fox Valley Music Foundation, this week described what the organization has planned for the former Woolworth Building at 19-21 S. Broadway in the heart of downtown [Aurora](#).

That's because the proposed venue would include about a 250-seat stage area for live music, the ability to record in the space, a museum and even a retail area dedicated to current music, as well as to what Warrenfeltz called "the rich history of music, not only in Aurora, but in the Fox Valley."

Warrenfeltz made his pitch to Aurora aldermen meeting as a Committee of the Whole. They agreed to send the proposal for a lease and a development agreement to the full City Council for a vote on Nov. 14.

Both Warrenfeltz and Ald. Robert O'Connor, at large, pointed out that it was ironic and fortuitous the proposal came before aldermen the same night as an update to the Aurora downtown master plan that calls for, among other things, a downtown targeting entertainment and cultural destinations.

"This is an excellent opportunity, a win-win for everybody," O'Connor said.

The foundation was formed in 2014 out of the non-profit group that once ran the Blues on the Fox Festival in Aurora. When the Paramount took over administering that event, and moved it permanently to RiverEdge Park, the

group found itself seeking a new direction and mission, Warrenfeltz told aldermen.



Fox Valley Music Foundation executive director Steve Warrenfeltz said the group has big plans for the former Woolworth Building at 19-21 S. Broadway in downtown Aurora. (Sean King/The Beacon-News)

The organization wants to educate people in Aurora about the rich history of the city's music, based largely around the 320 songs recorded over about a 20-month period during 1937 and 1938 in the former Sky Club in the Leland Hotel.

The facility planned for the venue would include information on those recordings and much more. Foundation members want to have as many as 200 shows a year featuring local, regional and national acts. There also would be kids' shows and educational events.

"It's been difficult to effect all these things without a base," Warrenfeltz said. "We have shown that we can do this. We have been successful and managing and marketing music events."

The agreement between the city and the foundation would include a five-year lease that does give the city a chance for an early out, if it wants to do something else with the building, said Kevin Drendel, a foundation board member and attorney.

The city now owns almost every building in the block between Downer Place, Broadway, Galena Boulevard and the Fox River, which it has dubbed the Broadway Redevelopment Zone.

As part of the deal, the city would grant the foundation \$125,000 in downtown tax increment financing money to renovate the interior of the building. That grant does not include specific foundation items such as the stage, the sound system, seating and other such items, said Bill Wiet, of the city. He said the foundation would likely spend another \$50,000, apart from the TIF money, on the inside of the building.

Wiet pointed out the city once considered demolishing the building, which would have cost about \$400,000, or more than three times what the city would spend from the TIF to fix the building..

"To be clear, this was going to be demolished," said Mayor Richard Irvin.

But foundation members said they would rather build something lasting in the long-time downtown building.

"There is a lot of synergy, a lot of buzz going on with downtown," said Drendel.
"We want to be part of it."

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