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With La Vista's buy-in, proposal could bring indoor-outdoor club, amphitheater to City Centre

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A rendering of the front of the proposed building.

CITY VENTURES

Music fans in these parts have their clubs and dimly lit bars. They have their concert halls, standalone amphitheaters and — if you know where to go — private house shows. For the big stuff, they have their arenas.

Now two well-known booking companies have joined with a local developer to promote a concept that's unlike anything local concertgoers frequent today — an indoor-outdoor club and amphitheater.

First they have to convince La Vista.

Omaha-based 1% Productions and Kansas-based Mammoth Inc., along with Omaha developer City Ventures, want to build the club in the \$235 million City Centre project in the works on 84th Street.

Their plan, in its infancy, depends largely on La Vista leaders getting on board with building and owning the outdoor component. The city would also assume financial liability for the amphitheater, something leaders expressed a reluctance to do earlier this year after a study determined a standalone amphitheater would likely lose money. Even with La Vista's commitment, the earliest it would open is about two years from now. Nevertheless, organizers are excited.

"I'm thrilled," said Josh Hunt, co-owner of Mammoth. "It's exactly what Omaha needs." The yet-to-be-named venue, should it garner approval, would be the first major tenant announced for City Centre, which broke ground in September. It's also an unusual venue in its early design, featuring a 52,000-square-foot indoor club as well as the outdoor amphitheater.

"There are not many places like this in the country," said Jim Johnson, co-owner of 1% Productions.

Johnson and other 1% co-owner Marc Leibowitz have already opened the Waiting Room, which celebrated its 10th anniversary this year, and Reverb Lounge, both in Benson. Mammoth owns three venues in Kansas. The two companies are the largest independent bookers in Omaha.

Their plan: The indoor club, estimated to cost about \$15 million, would be privately funded by the booking companies and City Ventures. The amphitheater would be funded by the City of La Vista as part of its transformation of La Vista Falls Golf Course into a city park.

La Vista spokesman Mitch Beaumont said the city hasn't committed to anything yet and has no cost estimate for an amphitheater. "Any decisions regarding design, construction or operation of a potential amphitheater will be made at public council meetings," he said.

But the prospect of the venue is exciting for La Vista, Beaumont said.

"This type of project matches the city's vision for 84th Street, which is to create a dynamic, urban, mixed-use central city center that will transform the heart of our community," he said.

An amphitheater was part of initial plans for the park, which the city is using an increase in the local sales tax to fund. But in April, the results of a feasibility study presented to the La Vista City Council said a standalone amphitheater would be expensive and would operate at an annual deficit. It would struggle to compete, the report said, and events there may create too much noise. [Hunden Strategic Partners](#), who conducted the study, did, however, suggest an indoor facility could work.

Leibowitz said he hopes the indoor club, which would operate 12 months a year and host 90 percent of the venue's shows, would help an amphitheater succeed. They've proposed that La Vista own the amphitheater and assume the financial risk associated with it. But it would benefit from being so close to the club, Erickson said.

Erickson said he'd be working with La Vista leaders in the coming months to nail down the details, including how to handle operations, in hopes of securing the city's approval. The zoning is already in place for a facility like this, he said, but the city will have to approve updated plats. Construction could start as early as May, with the venue opening in fall 2019. Once open, 1% and Mammoth would manage the facility.

The hope would be for the indoor club to seat about 2,000 and the amphitheater to seat about 4,500. While there are other indoor venues that seat around that many people, there are no other places in the area that pair that size of an indoor space with a sizable outdoor amphitheater. Also, many existing venues of that size in town are hard to get into because they book up so fast, Leibowitz said.

Hunt said he expects the venue to compete for "theater level" shows the area hasn't been able to compete for in the past. He pointed to Lauryn Hill, Arcade Fire, David Byrne and LCD Soundsystem — all artists that have skipped Omaha at some point because there wasn't a venue that met their needs, he said.

Another factor: When an artist is playing for a couple thousand people, there may be some added production components they expect to be able to bring. Extra lights, extra sounds, something that raises the drummer up 10 feet. They can't do some of those things in older facilities, Leibowitz said. The new venue would be able to accommodate them.

Hunt, Johnson and Leibowitz said they've wanted a place like this in Omaha for decades. But in the last five years, they started thinking, "Maybe we should be the ones that do this theater."

There are benefits to building it in La Vista, he said. There's more space for parking. The planned city park will provide a buffer between the outdoor amphitheater and the neighboring residential area. And the shops, restaurants and bars planned for City Centre will provide pre- and post-show entertainment.

The venue wouldn't be limited to a specific genre or genres, Leibowitz said.

"Whatever they want to see is what we'll bring in."

And that could be events, too, like weddings or community or corporate gatherings. The club and amphitheater should attract about 150 shows and "a couple hundred thousand people" a year, Erickson said.

