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See the massive new music venue rising less than an hour from Boston

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Indian Hill Music, a music school and performance organization in Littleton, knew for years it could benefit from a larger space of its own. It took a generous donation from an anonymous donor to make it happen.



GROTON HILL MUSIC CENTER

Indian Hill — now renamed Groton Hill Music Center — is embarking on a construction project that will add a new destination music venue to the Massachusetts music scene, including a performance space with capacity for 1,000 people.

In all, the music center will span 126,000 square feet in a rural area of the quiet town, with a design by Cambridge-based [Epstein Joslin Architects](#) that includes what Groton Hill says are world-class acoustics befitting the top acts it hopes to draw there.

“It’s been incredible,” [Lisa Fiorentino](#), Groton Hill’s CEO, said of the design and construction process.

Readying for crowds

Groton, a town of 11,000 between Lowell and Fitchburg, is already anticipating an economic boon from visitors seeing performances. The Groton Business Association published a 100-page report in September in an attempt to get ahead of what it expects could be a new opportunity to be a small-town attraction centered around the arts, similar to Tanglewood in Lenox and Stockbridge, Old Sturbridge Village in Sturbridge or the Massachusetts Museum of Modern Art in North Adams.

Groton town and business leaders already see a strong foundation for such tourism, citing two acclaimed private schools — Groton School and Lawrence Academy — a celebrated wedding venue and restaurant at Gibbet Hill, and a boutique hotel in the Groton Inn.

A working group spent 10 months studying the town's potential, issuing a report that stresses the importance of marketing the town, installing new signs around town to help people find their destination, and managing a potential spike in vehicle traffic. Survey respondents said they also don't want Groton to lose its rural character.

Finding room for commercial growth — related to tourism or otherwise — requires additional action on the town's part: Just 3% of the overwhelmingly residential town is zoned for commercial use, the study said. New business and construction will likely require rezoning and, if not granted, the report said surrounding towns could instead take advantage of the rise in new visitors to Groton.

Jeff Gordon, the president of the Groton Business Association, said he's looking forward to the business implications of the new center and seeing the finished look of the architecturally striking building.

"I'm so excited about it, I'm beyond words," he said.

Striking the right balance

The Groton Business Association is among those wanting a proactive response to Groton Hill's new home. One key piece is already in place, Gordon said: A small visitors center that was built as part of a remake of a former school into the Prescott School Community Center. The visitors center, just a few doors down from

the Groton Inn on Main Street, is expected to be expanded as part of the town's plans to accommodate more visitors in the years ahead.

Gordon, the owner and broker of EXIT Assurance Realty in Groton, said he wants Groton to draw more visitors to, say, a music performance venue, but he and others don't want the town's character to change too much.

"We don't ever want to be the size of a Tanglewood," he said of that venue's crowds.

The Groton Hill Music Center already had upwards of 1,400 students before the pandemic, ranging from 1-year-olds to adults taking private lessons and larger classes. Students come from 79 area communities. The center's professional orchestra performs at Littleton High School. The new building is expected to provide a better space not only for those performances, and student performances, but also for touring acts who could draw more patrons from across the region.

Groton Hill, whose capacity will be a bit smaller than its Berkshires counterpart, already has hosted notable artists such as Grammy winner Sullivan Fortner, a jazz pianist.

After receiving its major donation, whose gift amount has not been released, Groton Hill bought 110 acres of open land in Groton and spent another year planning before starting construction in 2017. The building, designed by Epstein Joslin, is slated to open next fall. Plans are already in the works for new partnerships, including one potentially with Lawrence Academy to use that private school's dorms for summer-music programs.

Fiorentino, Groton Hill's CEO, touts the high-quality acoustics and other features in her pitch for the new venue as a draw for talent.

"We want to be a place where people will come," she said.

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