

# New life for 'grand old lady'

## Eltham

Catherine Groenestein

Eltham's "grand old lady" has been saved from possible demolition and will be given new life by a Taranaki businessman.

Pātea-based property developer Dean Martin has bought the 1911 Eltham Municipal Building "for a nominal sum" from the South Taranaki District Council.

The category II listed building has been closed since 2018, after a detailed seismic assessment rated it at just eight per cent of the New Building Standard.

The cost to strengthen and upgrade the building was conservatively estimated to be up to \$1.8 million, but the council was reluctant to demolish it, so put it up for sale in June 2020.

"I want to give it a new life, and another 100 years," Martin said.

"At the end of the day, it will be a labour of love. As a business decision for a return it is a foolish move, but as someone who likes old buildings, it's a wise move."

Martin plans to begin by repairing



The 1911 Eltham Municipal Building has been closed since 2018.

the building's leaking roof and cleaning and painting the outside while awaiting an engineer's report and architectural plans for having it earthquake strengthened.

He expects it will take another two or three years before the earthquake strengthening is complete, and renovation work inside can begin.

He plans to upgrade the flats upstairs but retain the building's character features in the downstairs section.

"I want to try and keep as much of it inside as I can intact downstairs. It's got

some beautiful architraves and skirting, and the doors are amazing. Upstairs is a bit rough and ready, an open canvas," he said.

Martin said he had completed about 40 renovations over the years and has also recently bought another historical building, the 1882 Caplen Building, in Princes St, Hāwera.

Community response to the municipal building sale was very positive.

"I've told a few people in Eltham that I have bought it, and they came up and hugged me," he said.

South Taranaki district councillor Steffy Mackay said she did "a little dance of joy" when she knew the sale had gone through.

"It's fantastic. We're stoked that we have someone to save that grand old lady from demolition, and someone who comes with a proven track record."

Fellow councillor Mark Bellringer, who lives in Eltham, also welcomed news of the sale, particularly as it sits beside the historical Eltham Town Hall.

"It's fantastic. We've got a lot of buildings that are like this, that need to be restored, it's really good to see this one is being restored," he said.