

Hope remains for old municipal building



Eltham
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Possible buyers have already inquired about the former municipal building in Eltham, following reports it was facing demolition if it couldn't be sold.

The former Eltham Borough Council headquarters, built in 1911, is a magnificent two-storey structure, but needs an estimated \$1.8 million for earthquake strengthening and extensive repairs – money the South Taranaki District Council is not keen to spend.

At Monday's policy and strategy committee meeting, councillor Steffy Mackay said she had received a call from an Auckland property developer following media reports last week.

"I'm really confident that if we put it up for sale, we have a good chance."

During the open forum ahead of the meeting, Eltham Kaponga Community Board member Lindsay Maindonald made an impassioned plea for further public consultation. "Demolition would be an atrocity."

He said the decision was being made in a 'cloak and dagger' fashion behind closed doors.

However, councillor Celine Filbee said the meetings where the building had been discussed were both open to the public.

"I'm slightly offended by your accusation of 'cloak and dagger' behaviour of us as a council," she said. "I acknowledge and admire your passion, it is a beautiful building, it would be a shame to knock it down, but if we spend \$1.8 million on it, what do you propose we do with it?"

The committee agreed to a

recommendation from the Eltham Kaponga Community Board that the building be offered for sale, with the proviso the buyer has the means and intent to complete the necessary seismic strengthening, repairs and maintenance.

If no buyer is found within 12 months, the building may be demolished, but the recommendation was softened by adding in a requirement for the council to review the decision before any move was made to do that.

"The recommendations are quite pragmatic. I think this is the right thing, it doesn't write it off, it gives opportunity for someone who might want to do it up, and if that doesn't happen, we can have another look," deputy mayor Rob Northcott said.

"I hope we will find some sort of sugar daddy to help us restore the building, or at least the facade," councillor Mark Bellringer added.



The former Eltham Borough Council building, which needs major repairs and earthquake strengthening, is already attracting interest from possible buyers.

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