

# Quake rules could create 'ghost town'

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Waitara's main street could resemble a ghost town if business owners cannot afford to earthquake-proof their buildings.

Similar concerns were raised by Stratford business owners in January regarding the impact of new earthquake regulations on their town.

Waitara woman Thelma Luxton said she remained undecided about the future of her building, the old Waitara Post Office, after it was assessed as being earthquake-prone. "Like all these old buildings it doesn't meet the top of the code."

Mrs Luxton said last week NZ Post moved the post boxes and mail sorting room moved from the building because of its non-compliance.

The post boxes have been relocated to the neighbouring Waitara PostShop and the mail sorting room at another site in the township.

Mrs Luxton said that despite the uncertainty there was one thing she was clear about regarding her building's fate. "I'm not pulling it down."

Although she agreed with the need for buildings to be assessed, a lot of other businesses in the town would not be able to afford the required upgrades. "The majority of those effected will not be able to do anything about it," she said.

One already counting the cost is Laine Cummings, owner of The Naki Butcher and Fruit Bowl. He said he is in limbo at the moment after his building failed its assessment. "We don't really know what to do next."

He said his building was given an "E" rating by council. "That's the worst one," he said.

He said the cost to fund his own engineer's report would be around \$4500. He said he could not afford that let alone any repair costs required to bring the building up to standard.

Mr Cummings said both the business and building had been on the market before the earthquake assessment but he had now decided against selling the dwelling.

"The building's worth nothing."

Peter Budden, who owns several properties in the town, said he needed to consider his options as well as the tenants who occupied his buildings.

He said the cost involved would be a factor.

"It's certainly going to be expensive."

The possible impact on the town as a result of the earthquake assessments was raised by Andrew Larsen at last week's Waitara community board meeting.

"It's going to decimate the Waitara main street," he said.

Councillor Craig McFarlane, who owns a business in the town, said although it was an issue for towns across New Zealand after the Christchurch earthquakes, there would be a definite impact in Waitara.

To date, 87 per cent of buildings identified as requiring assessment in New Plymouth, Inglewood and Waitara have been assessed.



**In limbo:** Waitara woman Thelma Luxton has yet to make a decision about the fate of her building, the old Waitara Post Office on McLean St, after it failed to come up to code following a recent earthquake assessment. Photo: DEENA COSTER/FAIRFAX NZ

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