

Uncertain future for building

By DELWYN MASTERS

ELTHAM ratepayers face a decision this month — whether to take over the responsibility for an historic building in the town, or whether to sell it.

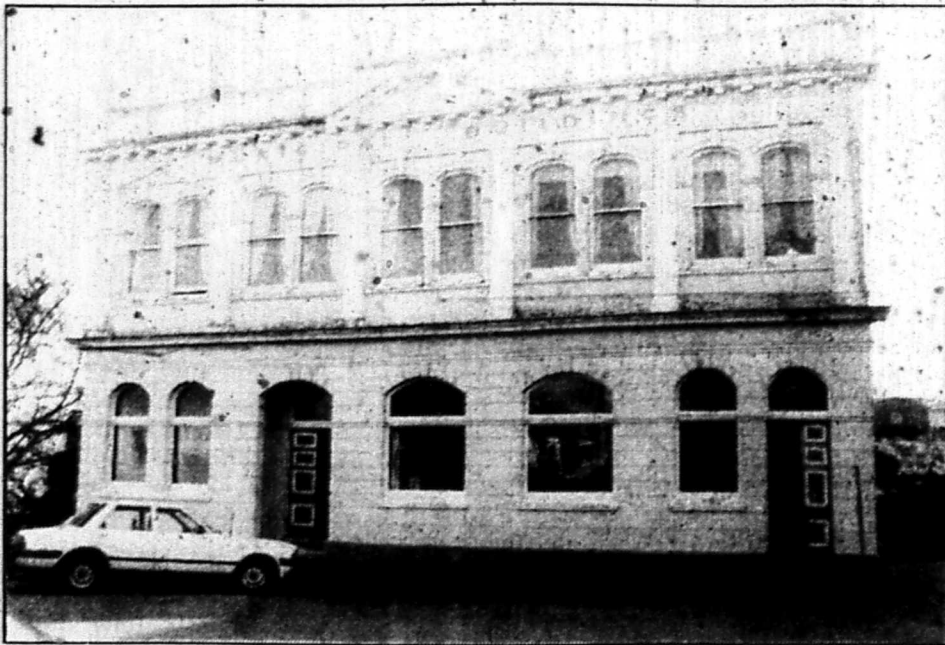
The town's community board would be conducting a survey in the Eltham ward from June 12 to find out if the ratepayers were prepared to face a rate rise to keep a piece of the town's history in public ownership.

The building at the centre of the survey is the 82-year-old Municipal Chambers, deemed surplus to requirements after the borough council amalgamated with the South Taranaki District Council four years ago.

The decision to canvass public opinion came after a suggestion at the community board's April meeting that the building be sold, and the proceeds go toward upgrading the adjacent town hall.

Eltham's Historical Society president Janet Old said it was of prime importance that the municipal building remain in public hands.

"We feel it's the only building of



TOWN PLANS: Eltham residents will decide a future for the municipal building — and possible resident ghost. — in a survey.

interest in the town, and it should be preserved from an historical point of view. It should be kept for the use of the people of Eltham," she said.

Eltham Community Board mem-

ber Jan Busch said a number of people had voiced their support for keeping the building.

"Those people who've expressed some sort of opinion are those who

are interested in it, and want the building retained," said Mrs Busch.

"It's one of the few buildings the community board owns which was built out of permanent materials, and it has historic and architectural qualities."

Beside its use as a council building, Mrs Busch said in the early years it was also used as the town's mortuary — and she would not rule out the possibility of a resident ghost.

Current occupiers of the building included the historical society, Young Farmers Club, and possibly the Assembly of God in the near future.

But Mrs Busch warned that keeping the building in public hands would mean the public would have to take financial responsibility for maintaining it.

"Some of the money will come out of the reserve fund, like the (initial) painting, but it would affect the rates — the actual amount is yet unknown."

Mrs Busch said the survey would be conducted through the town's newspaper.