

Council extends its reprieve period for historic hotel

By JOHN MITCHELL

THE countdown has begun for the historic Arcadia Hotel.

The New Plymouth District Council decided yesterday to grant a three-month stay of execution for the building, which has been the centre of controversy since council decided to knock it down.

The rundown Arcadia building and its perpetual lease was bought by the council for \$400,000.

Once demolished, it was intended to use the property for the Taranaki Museum development. However, the plans had since been amended, making the Arcadia surplus to needs. One idea for the vacant property was to use it as a carpark.

But New Plymouth architect Ian Pritchard spearheaded a campaign to save the building — built about 1890 — from destruction.

He filed for an interim enforcement order in the Environment Court to stop a demolition crew from pulling down the building. The order was granted, forcing the council to re-examine the Arcadia's fate.

A special meeting was held yesterday to allow the council to decide whether it would contest the injunction.

In a submission, Mr Pritchard said the council's own officers had identified the Arcadia as a building of significant heritage value and important to the concept of a "cultural precinct" in the city.

"It is absurd to identify a cultural heart in our city then proceed to demolish it."

Mr Pritchard said there had been a proposal to save the building on the table but the council went ahead and ordered its destruction. He urged the council to reconsider its decision.



MIXED FEELINGS: The district council has given the Arcadia Hotel a three month stay of execution — but its fate is still unclear. Photo: ADRIAN MALLOCH

"If the building is demolished now what does the council gain? It gains a barren site."

Councillors Beth Strombom and Kim Gilkison also made pleas to save the building.

"This building is as much a part of our heritage as the ancient Maori artefacts in our museum," Mrs Strombom said. "It's time to stop and take a breath and decide what part of our history we want to protect."

Mrs Gilkison agreed. "It's been there a long time and there's no reason why it shouldn't stay there that little bit longer," she said.

● Continued on Page 3

Council extends hotel reprieve

● Continued from Page 1

But several councillors were against stalling the demolition.

John Andrews said the building was a mess and should be bulldozed. The council had followed the proper consultative procedures, and expecting ratepayers to fund a restoration project was wrong, he said.

Graeme Tilyard and Lynn Bublitz said unless a viable commercial solution to the problem could be found, the building should be demolished.

The three-month grace period would allow the council to form a working party to investigate options for the building.

But the fate of the Arcadia came down to a show of hands.

Peter Tennent said the community now had the chance to "put up or shut up" on the Arcadia issue.

Mr Pritchard had mixed feelings about the result. "On the one hand I'm happy the council is prepared to give the issue more time and fuller discussion.

"But the thrust of the submission was resolving the wider issues and how the Arcadia (and other old buildings) fitted into the District Scheme."

If the council decided to still contest the injunction, Mr Pritchard would continue to fight.