

Verbal Presentation to Commissioner hearing Resource Consent Application on behalf of MDC to demolish the three buildings comprising a Town Hall, and two office buildings commonly referred to as the Municipal buildings.

I have been living in Masterton for twenty years – but I have lived in, and worked in the tourism and hospitality business, all over the world including London, Johannesburg, Melbourne, Sydney and the three main cities of New Zealand. I have grown in appreciation during these many years of the immense heritage value that historic or older buildings bring to the cities they have helped create.

*MRRA
BASE 1700*

My written submission outlines in more detail my opposition to this Resource Consent application – I am opposed to the Application ^{entirely} as it is presented as I do not consider the MDC have provided for the views and general feelings of the wider community.

*but wish to
see the plan
made!*

In reality I am in favour of demolishing the building that calls itself a town hall but is actually a flea pit - BUT I am strongly in favour of retaining the Municipal Building and specifically the façade that faces the Town Square and Chapel Street.

The community generally has considerable regard for the Municipal buildings, their heritage value and contribution to the landscape of Masterton and the adaptability factors that allow for the three buildings, with one exception, to continue to not only provide value but to add value to the future of the town.

You only have to go back a year or three and look at the protest “Hands Around the Town Hall” when, on one of the most miserable days of the year weather wise, there were over 1000 citizens of this town supporting the retention of these buildings and specifically the façade.

Indeed a number of the numerous reports that MDC have submitted in support of their “demolish everything” application make comprehensive mention of the heritage value of the Municipal building – none of them using this reference as being supportive of consigning the façade to rubble and dust.

It appears to me that MDC’s sole justification for demolishing the whole shebang and creating a wide open space that will ultimately be used as a car park - is cost. They appear to place no value on heritage.

A few years ago – 2021/22 if I recall correctly – there was a lobby group formed by a group of concerned citizens - - the Masterton Action Group – of which I was a co-Chair. One of our strongest members was David Borman, a person for

whom I have considerable respect. He has extensive knowledge in the construction industry – at that time he was stating to anyone who would listen that the cost of retaining the facade was around \$1.2M to 1.5M. Today he is on MDC's Town Hall advisory group that is responsible for this Application, and is stating that the cost will be \$3.6M – how can it have more than doubled in only two and three quarter years?

Of more relevance is the fact that it would appear nobody has actually quantified the heritage value of the Municipal building and specifically the façade – apart from the fact that it is cheaper to demolish it than to retain it. Well, anyone could have told you that!

But, in your considerations of this “Demolish at any cost” application I urge you to look deeply at the impact to this town if the façade of the Municipal building is not retained – the Masterton community will be losing its one substantial historic building – suggesting that utilising some rimu floorboards and some old window frames in a new building carries absolutely no significance, and frankly will be utterly meaningless in comparison to the current status that this existing building holds.

Not only does the Municipal building hold considerable mana in its own right, it is part of a group of buildings that are gathered around the Town Square that collectively have considerable impact and are noticed not just by the local citizens but are also commented on regularly by tourists and through traffic travelling on SHW 2 – Chapel Street as it is to the local community.

It will be said by MDC and its supporters that the relatively small number of submissions to this Resource Consent application reflect the mood of the community in respect to demolition of the Municipal building and specifically its façade. I refute that with the comment that such a conclusion is utter codswallop. The reason there are not more submissions are probably numerous – BUT, firstly and primarily, the community has been fighting the Masterton District Council since 2019 over what has been presented to the citizens of Masterton as options to replace the Town Hall. Primarily by the previous Council, but also in more recent times the obtuseness displayed by the existing Council, in what it has presented to the community for consideration.

The Town Hall and Municipal Building was closed down in mid 2016, albeit it has never been yellow or red stickered. For nearly ten years the community has

watched MDC play with the challenge of replacing these buildings. It has been a turbulent and extraordinarily frustrating ten years for Masterton citizens - with so many consultations that have resulted in nothing except this Demolition application. Kapiti District Council managed to build a beautiful new Entertainment facility, ie an equivalent replacement Town Hall, over the 2016/2019 period for a cost of \$12M. I say no more!

This community has town hall fatigue – it has had a gutsful – and when a community is driven to such a situation it feels powerless to fight back. Hence the small number of submissions I suggest.

Make no mistake – the Town Hall is definitely past its use-by date, it is not a cost-effective option to strengthen and refurbish – and has to go. The Town Hall building itself has no value whatsoever, heritage or in any other context.

But the Municipal Building fronting the Town Square and Chapel Street does have considerable value – to the extent that the Council itself has it registered as a heritage building. But, it can also be strengthened and refurbished. It is my considered view that MDC have discounted any heritage value that the Municipal Building has – in the interests of convenience and economy. Are they shooting themselves in the foot by discounting the heritage value – Yes I say.

In their application they have suggested that the building is simply a ‘snapshot in time’ – what arrogance they display. Reducing a building that they formally acknowledge as having Heritage value to a mere photo reference. To provide some context - Yeah Right!

You will have had presented many consultants and professionals reports to support MDC’s application – let me just make one comment – when one engages professional support inevitably one pays an enormous fee for one consultant’s view and perspective. However, that view and perspective is only one consultant’s and can always be challenged – and should be of course. MDC’s record with professional advisors has not always been particularly successful – you just have to look at the recent hospital situation and the numerous challenges related to recent Masterton Trust Lands Trust building projects for evidence of poor advice. I urge you to look carefully at their support material, to the point that peer review may be justified.

But, at the end of the day we have a Council who wish to demolish the only substantive heritage building in Masterton – and it actually belongs to them. They say they will build a new Town Hall in it’s place, but all they have provided

in support of this statement is a maximum budget figure of \$25M to provide a replacement – no design exists, no construction cost exists, no business case exists – its all pie in the sky. Ask yourself – would you, as the person responsible for contributing to this mythical fantasy be prepared to go down this path. No, of course not. Yet you are being asked to approve the demolition of some existing buildings, one of which has material heritage value, which will simple result in a large open space, and which will have destroyed a highly valuable heritage precinct in Masterton.

I urge you to approve this application subject to retention of the Municipal building – if not then please ensure that the façade of the Municipal building is protected Ensure common sense prevails and allow Masterton's history to live on.

If you are unable to approve this Demolition application in this manner then reject the application in its entirety. The Masterton community deserves respect and recognition.

Thank you