

Masterton District Council Submission

Why pull the Town Hall down now? There are several reasons why it is a very bad idea. Particularly if there is no guarantee it would be replaced by anything, substantial or otherwise. A new Town Hall is a luxury Masterton cannot afford.

Climate change – whatever its causes – is going to have more severe weather repercussions over the next decades. The era of going all out for what we ‘want’ is over; we have to concentrate on what we ‘need’ and make do with what we’ve got. And we’ve already got more than most people in the world. Also, there is going to be pressure, with long-time neglect of infrastructure, for large future rate increases in the coming years without the added burden of paying for a new Town Hall.

Part of living within our means will inevitably lead to the amalgamation of the valley’s councils. With this will come less replication, based on mis-placed, unthinking, very localised ‘pride’. There needs to be one major civic centre or town hall in the Wairarapa. In other countries, much larger than New Zealand, residents think nothing of travelling considerably more kilometres to events or performances they want to attend than would be the case if the newly-renamed Wairarapa Events Centre in Carterton became the valley’s cultural hub.

Surely the Masterton District Council is aware of this – it has, afterall, already said it very well in its stated climate change undertakings – that every effort should be made to repurpose not destroy what’s already here.

There’s already a reprieve for earthquake risk buildings for four or possibly six years and there’s been a surprisingly clear message from Building and Construction Minister Penk, member of a government that usually gives very little away. He said in February that a forthcoming review of the earthquake-prone building legislation could affect whether buildings like the town hall would continue to be classified as earthquake-prone.

Who in their right minds would not, for a number of good reasons, at least pause until there is certainty? To demolish something today because it would be cheaper than doing it later is not a rational argument.

Earthquake experts and engineers will tell you privately that the current earthquake regulations, requiring buildings to meet a minimum of 34% of the New Building Standard (NBS) are more politically than scientifically based. There is a widespread rot at work, acquiesced by successive governments, to provide the construction industry with the work to boost the country's economic performance. This is kept primed by numerous lobbyists – and New Zealand is one of the few countries in the world which doesn't make any attempt to regulate lobbyists.

The special character of Masterton – where 92 buildings are currently rated as earthquake risks – and scores of other small towns are at grave risk of losing historic buildings. We should expect our local representatives to fight for our special character and not lead the charge to destroy it.

Regarding repurposing: some of us remember the Regent Live Theatre and the attempts snuffed out two decades ago to restore the theatre. With its 420 seats and the second-largest stage in the Southern Hemisphere it hosted ice skating extravaganzas, famous comedians and West End plays from the 1930s for nearly 50 years. It's still there and could be in use for a fraction of the costs now being discussed.

Finally, why is the huge disparity between road deaths and the number killed in earthquakes in New Zealand never discussed. More people – 630 – were killed on New Zealand roads in the two 2023-24 years than have been killed in earthquakes since 1840. There have been 500 earthquake deaths – with 90 percent of them in the Napier and Christchurch quakes.

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