

1903 building comes down

By Mail reporters

Contractors demolished Nelson's historic 1903 building this morning.

Starting at dawn, they made short work of the building. By 10am the back, sides and facade had all been knocked down.

By late morning there was little sign of the promised protest by those seeking to preserve the building.

As a parapet fell a woman let out a high-pitched wail. "It's a shame. It's appalling. It's disgusting," others said.

Some shouts from a passing car and placard waving by Mr David Haig of the Friends of Nelson were the extent of the protest by 10am.

Mr Eelco Boswijk lowered to half-mast the Nelson city flag on his cafe across the street.

He was "appalled" at the demolition, he said. The next step now was to oppose the council's new building.

"I would rather have it empty there for the next five years than have the building that is proposed," he said.

Cr Mike Cotton, who favoured the demolition, asked where were the protesters who pledged they would chain themselves to the building.

When a digger pulled over the facade, Deputy Mayor Mr Seddon Marshall said the ease with which it fell showed the council had made the right decision.

"See. The parts of the wall weren't even tied together."

However, Mr Haig said the comment was "complete rubbish".

"Buildings have been strengthened before. The methods for retaining these types of buildings are nothing new," he said.

"A frame could have been attached in behind the facade. It's just like holding up a garden wall.

"As it was it was an earthquake risk, but it could easily have been brought up to standard."

Mr Haig said the speed of the demolition had taken those seeking to save the building by surprise.

A nearby resident said demolition work began last night and was under way again at six this morning.

A Tasman Howie demolition worker said he was not told until this morning he would be working on the building.

A male passer-by who declined to be named said the political processes involved gave him a sick feeling in the stomach. A woman said it was ironic to see bright flags on the adjacent building while this one was being knocked down.

Three out of about 10 people spoken to at the scene said they were pleased the building was going.

Nelson businessman Mr Nigel Price said the demolition was an "indictment (of city councillors) and a disgrace".

"They just ignored the wishes of the community and the processes of democracy."

He said the minority of councillors who took a stand and called for an investigation of alternatives were to be congratulated.

Mr Richard Halliwell of the Friends of Nelson, said there had been a quick phone around the group to try to organise a protest for 10.30am.

Ms Janice Gill was ready with signs for a protest march. Her sign read: "Demolishing this historical part of Nelson is the ultimate vandalism."

She said Friends of Nelson should claim the \$900 reward being offered by the council for information about vandalism around the city.

"I could name some vandals," she said. "We should get the money."

Several people who were at the scene said they accepted the demolition because the building was an earthquake risk, although they were sad to lose such a nicely-decorated building.

"I wouldn't have wanted to be in the building in an



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