

Men's Shed on track

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ALL ABOARD: Whangarei Community Men's Shed members, from left: John Williams, Duncan Sutherland and Mike Mansell are pleased they can soon start restoring the Old Railway Building.

The city's dilapidated Old Railway Building may be sold to a community group to restore.

The Whangarei District Council has decided in principle to sell the category 2 historic building to Whangarei Community Men's Shed for \$1.

The aim is to give the group a permanent home as well as responsibility for restoring the building.

The building is partly used by 2Meke Training which pays for security monitoring, graffiti removal and clearing broken bottles in return for use of it at no cost.

But property manager Mike Hibbert says if the status quo were to continue the building would eventually have to be condemned.

The site was bought by the council in 1997 for a strategic roading link and the council will be given a buy-back option if the site is needed again - however that is considered unlikely because the Porowini Ave extension provides the desired link.

Councillor Merv Williams says the building would be an amazing place if fully restored and believes the Men's Shed is right for the job.

"This group is looking to do this up on their own time, with their own skills. The skills of these retired people are without question."

Mr Williams says the Men's Shed initially showed interest in the railway building about 18 months ago but felt it was too big a project for the emerging group.

Now the group has become more established and was able to return \$1200 of a \$5000 grant back to the council.

But not all councillors are happy about the peppercorn sale. Councillor John Williamson has concerns about the sale of the historical building.

"We want to give it away for \$1 to an organisation that's been established for 18 months? We have no track record, no feasibility, no balance and I'm not even sure if they're registered under the Charities Commission."

Mr Williamson says the public should have a chance to have a say on the sale.

Whangarei Community Men's Shed is one of 40 in New Zealand and has about 45 members. It has been running at the former kiwi house at Heritage Park. It needs a larger building, with only six members being able to work at a time in its current facility.

FACTS

Built in 1924-5 for £8000 to £9000

One of the last large stations overseen by architect George Troup and is a notable surviving example of Troup Type B and C main station building

Listed category 2 historic building by New Zealand Historic Places Trust Reflects the expansion of New Zealand's railway system to outlying provincial centres in the early 20th century and Whangarei's emergence as Northland's largest settlement

Bought by Whangarei District Council in 1997 and considered for demolition

Leased by the Prince of Wales Trust until late 2006

Was to be restored by the Whangarei Railway Station Trust. In 2007 the trust secured a \$40,000 grant to restore the roof, but the council decided not to fund the remaining \$20,000 and not to extend its lease on the building.

Whangarei Leader