

# Town likes police in main street

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Eltham's business community say they will not let their "highly visible" police station vanish down a back street without a fight.

Business leaders say the current station location works as a deterrent to crime and they fear the possible move is the first step towards axing the town's police force entirely.

Last week, it was revealed authorities were considering moving the station to the old station building in Burke St amid concerns the existing building on State Highway 3 is an earthquake risk.

But the possible plan has been met with scepticism from the town's business owners, who say the existing station should be brought up to standard and kept where it is.

Police say no decision will be made until August, at the earliest.

Rhubarb Cafe owner Annette McGregor said it was unacceptable they were even considering

moving the police station. She said its position next to the town centre worked as a deterrent for both petty criminals and speeding drivers.

"When there's a cop car parked outside the traffic slows, the whole community feels safe.

"A lot of community pride and effort went into that place.

"I feel that it's a starter to get rid of the [permanent] police presence here."

United Travel's Glennys Price said she would do everything she could to keep the station in place.

"It won't be going anywhere," she said.

"It's in a prominent, eye-catching place where everyone knows where it is.

"We are a small town striving to move forward, why would we want to take a bloody step backwards."

Carac Couplings managing director John Burling said the community had taken a lot of positive steps, with a series of safety initiatives, in the wake of two serious assaults on Eltham men in 2006 and 2007.



**Eltham's angels:** Eltham business women, from left, Annette McGregor, Laura Lowe and Glennys Price say they will not let their police station be moved. Photo: LAIRD HARPER/FAIRFAX NZ

But the possible move of the station "felt like a backward step".

Mr Burling said at times he felt uneasy leaving his building late at night and losing any visible police presence would only make it worse.

Yesterday, Taranaki rural area police commander Inspector

Frank Grant moved to reassure residents that the Burke St move was far from a done deal.

"It might end up that we do stay where we are and we do come to some sort of understanding.

"But the reality is this is something we have to look into.

"Once we have a firm idea on

what is going to happen we will tell the appropriate groups."

He said he was yet to hear from the community about their concerns and welcomed feedback.

The possible move also raised a question over where the town's newly-installed \$29,000 security cameras would be monitored

from. Currently the recordings are stored in a computer database at the station but a move would put the system out of range of its four cameras.

The *Taranaki Daily News* understands both community leaders and police are currently working on finding a new location.