

\$105m civic HQ approved

Council and iwi in deal

Charlie Gates

Plans for a new \$105 million civic building in Christchurch have been approved in a last-minute decision by the city's outgoing councillors.

The NZ Post building in Hereford Street, opposite the police headquarters, was chosen yesterday as the site for the new home for the city council.

A joint venture between Ngai Tahu Property and the Christchurch City Council will see each contribute \$52.2m towards a major revamp of the 1970s concrete building.

Councillors voted 12 to one in favour of the site in a closed session at the council's final meeting yesterday.

Cr Helen Broughton was the only councillor to vote against the deal, because she felt it was "poor decision-making".

The new building will be owned by a joint Ngai Tahu-City Council venture called Tuam2 Ltd.

The council will lease back the building, which is due for completion in 2010 for \$8.4m a year under a lease reviewed every three years.

The deal has been hailed by outgoing Christchurch Mayor Garry Moore as saving ratepayers \$52.5m and undercutting the original budget for the annual lease.

He was delighted the deal had been signed off before he ended his nine-year run as mayor.

"I am very happy. It is the last thing on my list. I always go right to the wire on everything," he said.

Ngai Tahu chairman Mark Solomon said he was "very



Worcester Boulevard frontage



BÖTZDIGITAL



Images by BÖTZDIGITAL

New home: artists' impressions of how the new council building will look, together with an aerial photograph of its location.

INSIDE

- ▶▶ Moore exits **A5**
- ▶▶ Red-letter day **A11**
- ▶▶ To see footage click on www.press.co.nz

cism the decision was sprung on councillors. They were given little more than 13 hours' notice that the huge project would be on the agenda of their final meeting and then not given any details until the closed session of yesterday's council meeting began.

Moore dismissed suggestions the decision was delayed to the last meeting to push the project through before his departure.

"I find that (suggestion) questions my ethics and I find it quite offensive... I am not into this scumball politics. I am interested in politics that moves the game on," he said.

Christchurch mayoral candidate Megan Woods, who has campaigned against a proposed \$100m for a new civic building, attacked the process.

"This was a hard decision and councillors did not have adequate time to assess the key questions. This is not robust decision making," she said.

She said mayoral rival Cr Bob Parker had broken his promise to defer a decision on the building until after the election.

"He gave his word to the people of Christchurch, which should raise the question of whether people want him as

mayor. It is the first broken promise, even before the votes are counted," she said.

Parker said the deal had to be taken or it would be lost.

"This was a use-it or lose-it deal," he said.

"It became very clear when we listened to the facts yesterday that deferring a decision would potentially cost the ratepayer \$50m... The argument for the site was simple, compelling and positive," he said.

The new Hereford Street site was one of the three shortlisted for the new civic building. The concrete building, built by the Ministry of Works in the

1970s, is large enough to take all council staff and facilities. It is also strong enough to support two new floors if the council needs more space.

It will have a public cafe and a walkway from which people can see the council chamber.

Ian Athfield, of Athfield Architects, the design firm behind the AMI Stadium and the new Selwyn District Council headquarters, was commissioned by Ngai Tahu Property in June.

The current Tuam Street headquarters is cramped, has leaky windows and requires expensive maintenance.