



FREE SPRING 2026 SEMINAR SERIES

The Future of Cities

Palmerston North Central Library
4 The Square, Palmerston North



Wednesdays 1:30pm – 2.45pm

This seminar series is organised by U3A Manawātū. It is open to the public. After the presentations, audio recordings and PowerPoint presentations will be made available on the Manawātū U3A website. See: <https://www.u3amanawatu.org.nz/seminars/>

We are living in a time of economic and social change. There are concerns about ageing populations, housing costs, transport requirements, environmental issues, social attitudes, the influence of artificial intelligence and many other issues. Cities are facing many challenges trying to respond to these concerns. This series will look at some of these issues, highlighting the state of play in academia and some of the impacts on the policy environment. You may be familiar with the term, “Age-Friendly Cities”. This is just one of many areas in which councils are adapting. See what our speakers have to say about this and other matters over these four seminars.

October 28th: A place for nature in the city

Dr Aisling Gallagher, School of People, Environment and Planning, Massey University

Cities are fundamentally human made spaces requiring the taming of nature. From manicured lawns to curated parks, selectively bred companion animals to the suppression of 'pests', huge amounts of time, money and effort are put into maintaining a particular version of nature in cities. This seminar will discuss the place of nature within urban Aotearoa given pressing environmental challenges, outlining why we might need to change how we accommodate and work with nature for our mutual benefit.

November 4th: Infrastructures of Care

Professor Kelly Dombroski, School of People, Environment and Planning, Massey University

Infrastructure in cities is often thought of as structures such as roading, sewerage, lighting and more. These are important for our collective wellbeing. However, recently urban researchers have started researching 'infrastructures of care', often less tangible infrastructures but important for our collective wellbeing: community groups, spaces such as public libraries, organisations such as churches or environmental groups and many more. This talk will introduce this concept, explaining why it might be important for us when planning for future cities.

November 11th: The future of planning: values, technology and change

*Dr Joanna Ross, School of People, Environment and Planning, Massey University / PNCC
& Tiwene Roberts, PNCC*

Urban planning is at a turning point. The Planning Act 2026 signals a shift from the RMA's focus on sustainable management, towards greater recognition of private property rights. Combined with political pressure for faster decision-making, the introduction of standardised land-use zones/rules, and the potential of AI to transform the way we work and communicate, this shift is set to profoundly reshape planning practice. This seminar explores the future of planning in this context.

November 18th: Age-Friendly Cities

Professor Imran Muhammad, School of People, Environment and Planning, Massey University

This presentation explores the concept of Age-Friendly Cities and its interconnected domains, drawing on international and New Zealand case studies. It will also examine Palmerston North as a local case, highlighting Council's Age-Friendly Action Plan and projects, while considering opportunities and challenges for creating a more inclusive, accessible and age-friendly city.