

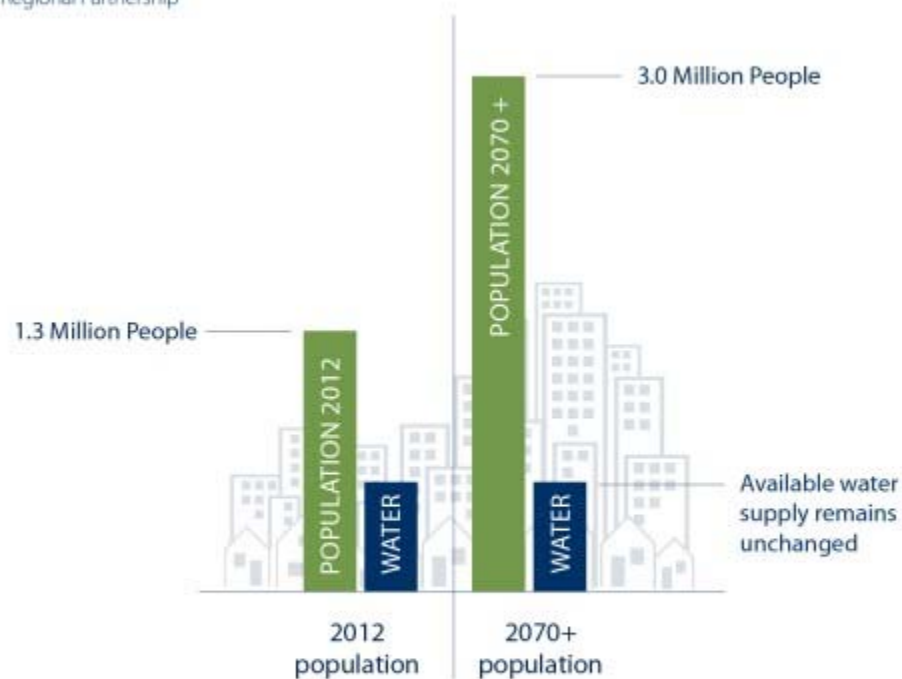
Let's Talk Density

BY [CRPADMIN](#) • FEBRUARY 20, 2013 • [CALGARY METROPOLITAN PLAN, PARTNERSHIP/PLAN](#)

Images that come to mind when people hear the word density are usually high-rise developments including tall condominiums with significant vehicle and pedestrian traffic. True, that is one type which works well for places like Toronto or New York. However, density is like a spectrum not just limited to one specific form. It encompasses everything from a single home on an acreage to a metropolitan city. In the Calgary Region, we are blessed with having a bit of everything on that spectrum such as the bustling City of Calgary or the quieter community of Rocky View; it's what makes us a great place to live. However, density is significant in our Region due to two factors:

1. We are growing and

2. Our water is limited



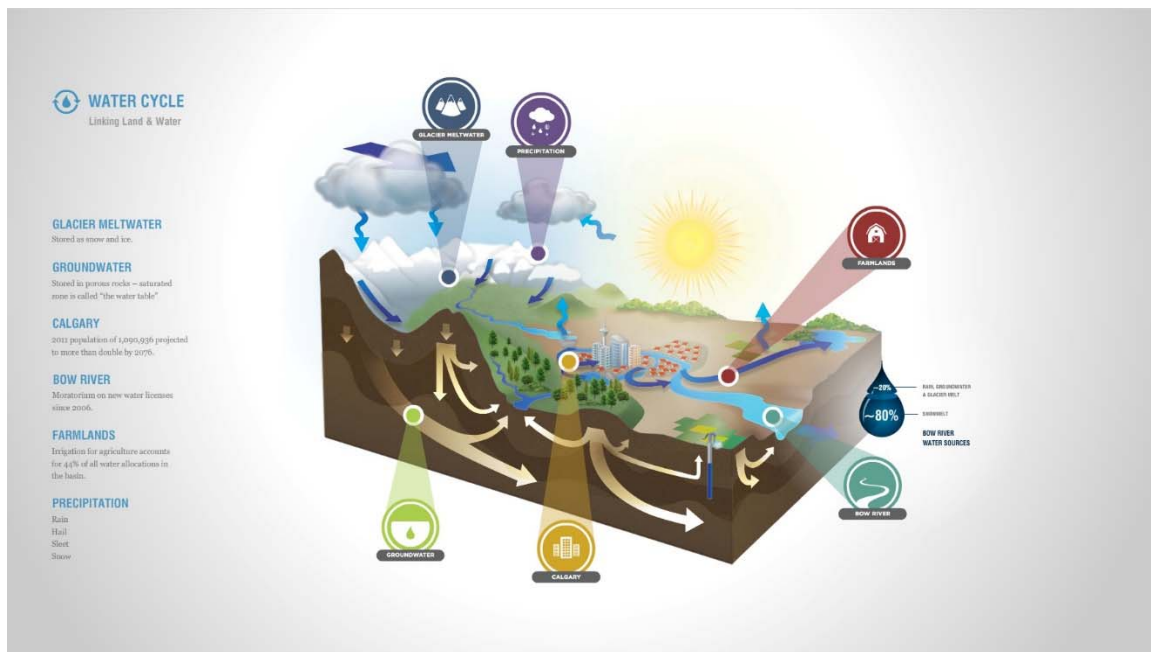
Water – Today and Tomorrow

We want to discuss why increased density is important to the Region. We also want to show how the [Calgary Metropolitan Plan](#) (CMP) can help achieve density without compromising on our unique community identities.

According to the [2012 Urban Futures study](#), the Calgary Region expects more than **3 million people by 2076**, double the number of people present. A major question we mentioned in our [previous post](#) is:

Do we have enough water in the Region to support this growth?

Density is crucial to answering yes. A growing population creates demand for more water therefore stressing current limited water sources.



Water sources in the Calgary Region

Lower density development (think urban sprawl) uses more water and costs more for maintenance than higher density. The [United States Environmental Protection Agency report on water and development](#) states:

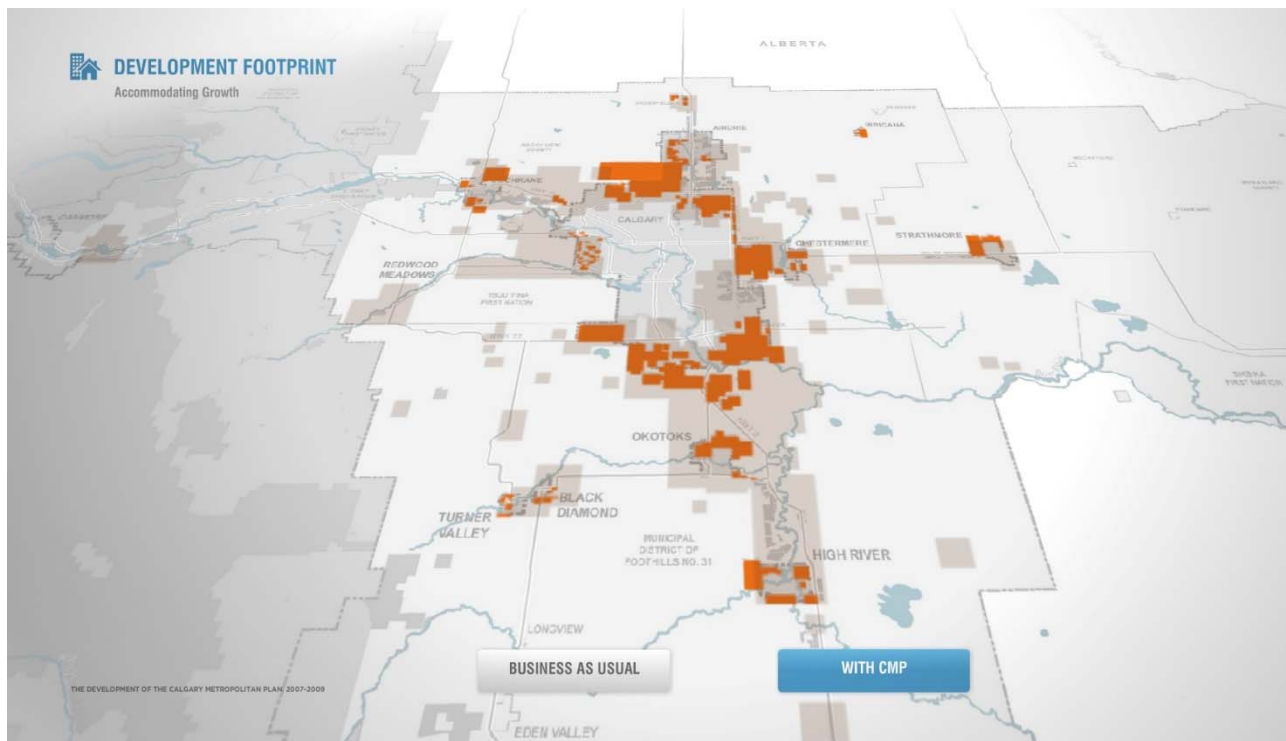
*Low-density, dispersed development requires longer pipes, which lose more water through leakage and raise transmission costs. Infrastructure investments that support water system expansion over the upgrading and maintenance of existing networks can lead to **increasingly inefficient systems, greater waste, and higher capital and operating costs.***

On the other hand, the report states more compact development (high density) will help communities conserve more water and reduce infrastructure costs:

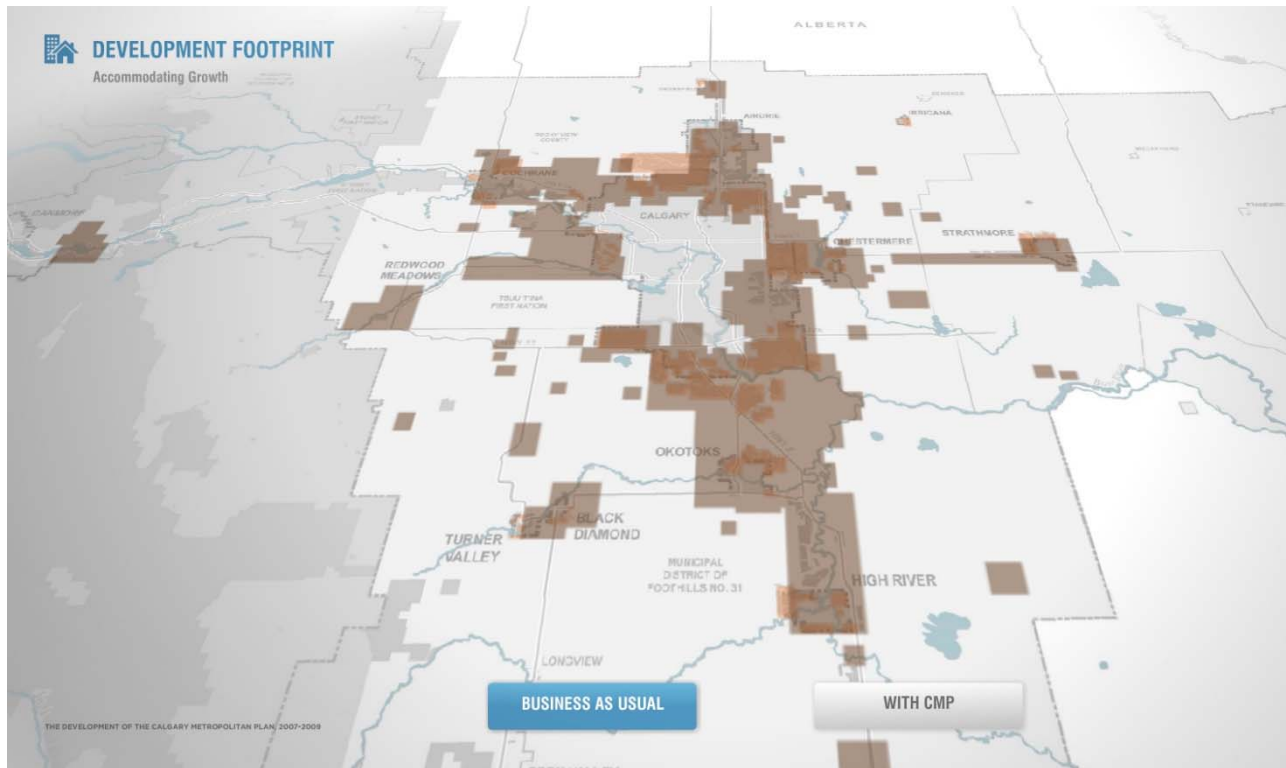
More compact development allows for shorter transmission systems, making them more efficient to operate and less susceptible to water loss through leakage.

Keep in mind, we don't advocate that all future developments be high density because that's contrary to maintaining the diversity of our Region. It's these differences that makes us a unique and attractive place to live or move to. However, we want to highlight the benefits because increased density will help conserve water and keep infrastructure costs manageable as we prepare for more than 3 million people over the next 60 years.

So how does the Calgary Metropolitan Plan fit in? One of the Plan's principles is to increase density in high growth areas identified by the Region's own municipalities. It is an enabling plan by allowing them autonomy on how to implement density over time ([pg: 28-29 of the Plan](#)). Providing flexibility is important because each municipality grows differently. In fact, with the Plan, more than three quarters of the growth anticipated over the next 60 years can be accommodated within the current urban boundaries (lowering sprawl). That means significantly decreased water consumption and infrastructure costs for maintenance/servicing (as mentioned above).



Development footprint with the Calgary Metropolitan Plan



Development footprint without the Calgary Metropolitan Plan

What about the proverbial “Calgary is a bully and will use water as a means to forcing communities to increase their density” as it’s [played out in the media](#). That is simply not true. First, the Plan’s decision-making model prevents Calgary (or any municipality) from forcing communities to do anything related to water without at least two-thirds of the CRP’s regional municipalities and 50% of the region’s population voting in favour ([pg: 48-49 of the Plan](#)). Second, the [Calgary Regional Partnership](#) is voluntary and municipalities are involved by choice not by legislation. Through the Plan, our municipalities are committed to each other to ensure there is water for everyone today and for future generations. One final note is that the Calgary Metropolitan Plan is not just about density. There are many different elements in the Plan such as regional transportation, economic prosperity and resource stewardship. Have a look through the [Plan](#), watch our [videos](#), and visit the [website](#). You’ll be surprised how it prepares our Region for a bright future.

Additional articles about density:

- [Why density matters](#)
- [The changing Municipal – Provincial relationship](#)
- [Why the Calgary Metropolitan Plan is essential to our future](#)