

# High-tech remedy for urban planning headaches

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Big cities everywhere grapple with similar issues: what is the best way to reduce urban sprawl, revitalize aging neighbourhoods and create more sustainable communities? Urban problems are complex for planners and often frustrating for residents who may feel their suggestions aren't being heard.

The answer could be an interactive, web-based platform to simplify the [urban planning](#) process and provide a better way to visualize various scenarios and predict the outcomes of decisions. Engineers and urban design experts at the University of Calgary are leading the development of Canada's first such system, a research initiative called PlanYourPlace.

“We intend to develop a simple, interactive planning tool that can be used at regional levels all the way down to local neighbourhood levels,” says Dr. Andrew Hunter, project manager and geomatics engineering professor at the Schulich School of Engineering. “This is possible because of recent advancements in technology such as geographic information systems (GIS) and cyber infrastructure.”

The PlanYourPlace project involves software development to enable the visualization of proposals and sketching of alternatives. The package will include geospatial components such as imaging and mapping along with algorithms to calculate the outcomes of various scenarios. The end result will be a planning tool that can be used anywhere.

“Our goal is to improve planning practices and promote interactive and participatory approaches that result in economic, environmental, social

and cultural development that is sustainable,” explains project co-manager Dr. Bev Sandalack, research leader of the Faculty of Environmental Design Urban Lab at the University of Calgary. “The system will enable users to understand more clearly the implications and benefits of various planning and development objectives and to participate in meaningful ways.”

While the system will be applicable anywhere, the researchers will focus on a specific area of Calgary in order to develop the various components. Their test bed is a collection of [neighbourhoods](#) that were constructed during the building boom of the 1950s through the 1970s. They form Calgary’s “middle ring” and are poised to undergo redevelopment.

Provided by University of Calgary

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