



DRIVING QUESTION

A neighborhood is about to change whether anyone likes it or not. Who gets a say — and who pays for it?

Seven stakeholder roles, a city council hearing, and a live model that shows students who paid for the vote they just cast.

WHAT THIS IS

The Warehouse District — old brick, empty lots, longtime renters, a few small shops — is up for redevelopment. A developer wants fifty luxury condos: \$5M in new tax revenue, or a wrecked neighborhood. Seven groups want seven different things.

Days 1–3 build the case on paper. **Day 4 is the payoff:** the council votes, then the class projects the **Boomtown Sandbox**, enters the ordinances that passed, and every group's meters move at once. Students compare that to the meters they tracked by hand.

The simulation is the argument. The sandbox is the consequence.

AT A GLANCE

FITS	Geography, civics, government, US history, economics, sociology
GRADES	8–12. No prior vocabulary needed; the handouts teach the terms.
LENGTH	4 periods (~50 min) or 2 blocks
GROUPS	7 roles · 3–5 students each
TECH	Days 3–4 need one projected browser. Student devices optional.
SANDBOX	witsooth.com/games/boomtown_sandbox.html
PREP	Print the four handout packs below. Nothing else.

MATERIALS — WHAT TO PRINT AND HOW MANY

HANDOUT	USED ON	COPIES	WHAT IT DOES
Stakeholder Sheets	Day 1–4	1 per student, by role	Who you are, your 3 meters, your key numbers, how each ordinance moves you, and a scorecard to shade in. The student's home base all four days.
POV Sheets	Day 2	1 per student, by role	Word bank, hashtags, phrases, and image prompts for the social-media post.
Council Sheets	Day 3–4	1 per student, by role	The 5-minute speech scaffold. The City Official version is a chair-and-vote sheet instead.
Capstone Reflection	After Day 4	1 per student	Four prompts + a 20-point rubric. Written for a longer unit — see page 5 if you are running Boomtown standalone.
Student Deck (8 slides)	Day 1–4	Project	Scenario and roles, then one agenda slide per day.

Assigning roles: let students rank their top three on an exit slip the day before. Keep **City Official** to 2–3 strong facilitators — they run Day 4. Under 21 students: fold **Senior Citizen** into the Renter group and run six presenting groups. Over 32: split Renter into two districts that must agree on one ask before they speak.

DAY 1 Become your role.

~50 MIN • SLIDE 4

LEARNING TARGET

I can apply push and pull factors to explain why people move into or out of a changing community.

TIME	WHO	WHAT HAPPENS
0-12	WHOLE CLASS	Project slides 2-3. Read the scenario and the seven roles. Ask two questions and take three answers each — <i>Who benefits when a neighborhood gets nicer? Who pays for it?</i> Do not resolve the tension. Hand out stakeholder sheets; students move to their group's table.
12-22	INDIVIDUAL	Read sections 01-03. Highlight one sentence in "Who You Are" that makes the role a person, not a category. Then set all three meters to 5 in section 05 — the starting line for every group.
22-36	INDIVIDUAL	Research — make it your town. Each student pulls one real number about the place they actually live and writes it on the back of the sheet with the source. Use the lookup table on page 5. These numbers replace the placeholders on the handout.
36-46	GROUPS	Rank your three meters — which one can you <i>not</i> compromise on? Circle it. That becomes the group's non-negotiable and decides their ask on Day 3.
46-50	EXIT	Three sentences: <i>Name one push factor and one pull factor acting on your character. If the condos are approved, which one gets stronger?</i>

CHECK FOR UNDERSTANDING

- Exit ticket uses "push" and "pull" correctly, with a factor specific to the role.
- Three meters set to 5, one circled, and a sourced number about their own city.

WATCH FOR

- ! The Developer played as a cartoon villain — their sheet says a community fight can kill the project. Say so out loud.
- ! "Gentrification is bad" as the whole answer. Push for who specifically, losing what specifically.
- ! City Officials finishing early — give them the Council Sheet and let them draft opening remarks.

DAY 2 Speak in your voice.

~50 MIN • SLIDE 5

LEARNING TARGET

I can identify how neighborhood change creates winners and losers among different groups in the same place.

TIME	WHO	WHAT HAPPENS
0-12	WHOLE CLASS	Project the "Weak POV vs. Strong POV" box. Read both, then ask why the second works — it names a number, a moment, and something you can picture. Hand out POV sheets; each student circles one feeling in section 01. One only.
12-28	INDIVIDUAL	Draft the caption. First person, one concrete image, one number from the stakeholder sheet, and a stake — what happens if nothing changes.
28-42	INDIVIDUAL	Make the visual — drawn, photographed, or designed. Section 05 lists five image ideas per role for students who freeze.
42-48	WHOLE CLASS	Post to the class slideshow. Silent gallery walk. Each student comments on a post from a group that is <i>not</i> theirs.
48-50	EXIT	One sentence: <i>Which group's post made their side make the most sense, and what detail did it?</i>

CHECK FOR UNDERSTANDING

- The post is in character — a senior does not sound like a developer. Voice is the assessment here.
- The caption contains a number the student can source back to their sheet.

WATCH FOR

- ! Slogans instead of specifics. "Stop gentrification" is a hashtag, not a post — send them back to section 04.
- ! Time sinking into the artwork. Cap it at 14 minutes; the caption is the graded part.

DAY 3 Build your case.

~50 MIN • SLIDE 6

LEARNING TARGET

I can analyze how a proposed government policy affects growth, displacement, and stability across competing groups.

TIME	WHO	WHAT HAPPENS
0-15	GROUPS	Hand out Council Sheets and read the speech recipe — hook, ask, three reasons, pushback, landing. Section 01: pick ONE ordinance to fight for and write the ask as a sentence: <i>"I'm asking the council to pass _____."</i>
15-30	GROUPS	Sections 02-03: hook, then three arguments — helps us / helps the city / it's just right. Every argument needs one number from the stakeholder sheet or the Day 1 research.
30-38	GROUPS	Section 04: the rebuttal. The sheet pre-loads what two rival groups will say. Protect this time — it is the difference between a B speech and an A speech.
38-47	GROUPS	Sandbox rehearsal. Each group toggles <i>only its own ordinance</i> and records which groups it helped and which it hurt most. Then answers in writing: <i>who do we need to buy off, and with what?</i> Coalitions get made here.
47-50	WHOLE CLASS	Draw speaking order. Council announces the running order and the hard time limit.

CHECK FOR UNDERSTANDING

- The ask names a specific ordinance, not "more affordable housing."
- Sandbox notes name at least one group their ordinance harms. If a group says theirs hurts nobody, they have not run it.

WATCH FOR

- ! Groups toggling everything at once. One ordinance at a time today — the full combination is Day 4's reveal, and spoiling it costs you the moment.
- ! Speeches written out word for word. The sheet says bullet points only.

DAY 4 Decision day — the vote, then the consequences.

~50 MIN • SLIDE 7

LEARNING TARGET

I can evaluate and defend a policy proposal that balances economic, social, and spatial trade-offs — and explain who paid for the decision I supported.

TIME	WHO	WHAT HAPPENS
0-3	COUNCIL	The mayor opens. Council reads its three priorities from section 01: fiscal (\$500K surplus, not \$5M), equity, and the twenty-year test. This is a hearing, not a debate club.
3-33	SIX GROUPS	Speeches, 4 minutes each (5 in a block), plus one council question each. Order: Renter, Senior, Small Business, Homeowner, Environmentalist, Developer. Council notes the ask, not the delivery.
33-40	COUNCIL	The vote. Deliberate aloud at the front — no private huddle — ordinance by ordinance. Write each passed ordinance on the board as it goes.
40-47	WHOLE CLASS	THE REVEAL. Project the sandbox and toggle exactly what passed, in the order it passed. Students shade their own scorecard to match and compare it to their prediction. Protocol on page 4.
47-50	EXIT	One sentence: <i>Did your group win? Which ordinance decided it? Which group paid for your win?</i> Then assign the Capstone Reflection.

SANDBOX ANSWER KEY – WHAT THE MODEL DOES

Every meter starts at 5. A group wins when all three reach 6 or higher; a meter at 2 or below is a crisis. The treasury starts at \$500K, caps at \$1M, and cannot go below zero — so the **order** the council passes things in matters.

COMBINATION	TREASURY	RESULT	WHAT IT TEACHES
Luxury Condos alone The developer's dream	\$900K	0 win 4 in crisis	The richest treasury in the game and <i>nobody wins</i> — <i>including the Developer</i> , whose Approval collapses to 3. Winning the vote is not the same as winning the city.
Affordable + Historic + Height + Green The community wishlist	-\$275K	Blocked	The sandbox refuses the last ordinance — the package costs more than the city has. Without new revenue there is no protection to hand out.
Affordable + Historic + Reuse + Mixed-Use Community coalition, no condos	\$300K	5 win 0 in crisis	Five groups thrive, nobody is in crisis — and the council still reads NO DEAL , because Developer Build Speed sits at 3. A council can be popular and still fail the twenty-year test.
Condos + Affordable + Reuse + Mixed-Use + one green measure The grand bargain	\$475K– \$725K	7 win 0 in crisis	The only way everyone wins: approve the project <i>and</i> attach every condition to it. The condo revenue is what pays for the affordability.

The four winning combinations: Condos + Affordable + Reuse + Mixed-Use, plus either Energy Codes (\$725K) or Green Infrastructure (\$550K) — and each also works with Height Limits added (\$650K / \$475K). Order matters: pass Condos first, then Adaptive Reuse, then the expenses; passing all three revenue ordinances first hits the \$1M cap and the sandbox refuses the third.

RUNNING THE REVEAL – DAY 4, MINUTES 40–47

Step 1	SET IT UP	Reset the sandbox. Every meter reads 5 — the line printed on their sheets — and a group wins only when all three of its meters reach 6 . Show of hands: <i>how many groups can win at once?</i> Write the guesses down.
Step 2	ENTER THE VOTE	Toggle one ordinance at a time. Ask the affected group what just happened to them <i>before</i> you read the number. If the treasury blocks an ordinance, stop — the council passed a package the city cannot fund. That is a finding, not a bug. Ask what they would cut.
Step 3	READ THE BOARD	Read the scoreboard aloud: groups winning, groups in crisis, city-wide average, treasury. Then each group says whether the number matches what they predicted.
Step 4	PUSH	Watch the City Official card — it carries a rule no other group has: <i>the council only wins if no other group falls below 4</i> . If it reads "NO DEAL," ask which group they left behind, and whether they knew.
Step 5	OPEN IT UP	Five minutes of free toggling — can anyone get all seven groups to win? Four combinations do it. If a student finds one, put it on the board with their name. If nobody does, that is the lesson too.

HANDOUTS → SANDBOX

Ten ordinances on the handouts, eight in the sandbox; the names match one-to-one with two exceptions. Tree Preservation, Stormwater Management, and Green Roof are one toggle — Green Infrastructure Package — so if the council passes any of the three, toggle the package and say the model bundles them. Height & Design Standards = Building Height Limits (4 stories).

DEBRIEF QUESTIONS – PICK THREE

1. Every combination where everyone wins starts by approving the condos. What does that tell you about where a city's money for affordability comes from?

2. The council can have five happy groups and still read NO DEAL. Should a government be judged by its average, or by its worst-off group?

3. Your ordinance helped you. Name the group it hurt. Did you know that on Day 3 — and did you say it in your speech?

4. Boomtown gives every group the same starting number. Real neighborhoods do not. How would the game change if the Renter started at 3 and the Developer at 7?

MAKE IT REAL – PULL YOUR OWN CITY'S NUMBERS (DAY 1)

Boomtown is invented; the pressures are not. Every placeholder figure on the stakeholder sheets can be swapped for a real number about your students' own town — five minutes, free, no account.

WHO NEEDS IT	WHAT TO LOOK UP	WHERE	WHAT IT REPLACES
Renter	Median gross rent, your city; Fair Market Rent, your county	data.census.gov ACS B25064 ; huduser.gov FMR lookup	"Average rent: \$1,400/mo"
Senior	Average retired-worker Social Security benefit	ssa.gov (published monthly)	"Fixed income: about \$1,800/mo"
Homeowner	Median home value; your county's assessed values	ACS B25077 ; county assessor	"Bought for \$180K, now worth \$310K"
Small Business	Commercial rents on one real street near school	Any commercial listing site	"\$2,500/month profit"
Environmentalism	A real brownfield or contaminated site near you	EPA "Cleanups in My Community" map	"Site cleanup: \$5M"
Developer	The federal Historic Rehabilitation Tax Credit — 20% of qualified rehab costs	National Park Service, Technical Preservation Services	The invented "80.6% / 89.3% ROI" pair
City Official	Your city's actual budget and property tax rate	Your municipality's annual budget	"\$500K surplus"

Short on time? Do the **Renter** row — median rent versus what students think rent costs is the most productive number in the lesson. **Facts worth stating outright:** HUD treats housing as affordable at or below **30% of gross household income** (above that, "cost burdened"), and roughly **half of US renter households** are cost burdened — Harvard's Joint Center for Housing Studies tracks it yearly in *America's Rental Housing*. Inclusionary-zoning set-asides commonly run **10–30%**; the sandbox uses 20%. Transportation is the **largest single source of US greenhouse gas emissions** (EPA) — the real basis for the mixed-use argument. LEED is a private certification, not a building code.

Honest numbers — read this before you print

- DISPLACEMENT** The Senior's sheet says "1 in 3 seniors get displaced" and the Renter's says "rents rise 25–40%." **Neither is sourceable** — they are the character's fear, not a finding. Researchers disagree about how much gentrification *directly* pushes people out: Freeman and Braconi (*JAPA*, 2004) found no higher move-out rates in gentrifying 1990s New York; the Philadelphia Fed found those who did leave landed in lower-quality neighborhoods. What changes reliably is **who can move in**. Say this instead: "Researchers disagree about how many people get pushed out. Everyone agrees the neighborhood ends up with different people in it. Argue which matters more."
- SIX OF EIGHT** Each stakeholder sheet shows how six ordinances move that role; the sandbox models all eight. A student hand-tracking will be missing two rows — say so before the reveal, so a mismatch reads as "the model knows more," not "I did it wrong."
- CAPSTONE SCOPE** The Capstone's four prompts are keyed to a multi-week unit. Running Boomtown standalone? Assign **prompts 02 and 04 only** — the two that draw on the simulation — and grade out of 10.
- FAKE NUMBERS** The council's "\$5M in new revenue" is a projection, like most figures quoted at a real hearing. Don't correct it, **interrogate it**: who produced this number, what do they get if I believe it, and is it measured, projected, or asserted?

DIFFERENTIATION & CONTINGENCIES

SUPPORT / CHALLENGE

- POV sheet sections 04–05 are full sentence and image banks — a student can build a strong post from those alone.
- Pair a reluctant speaker: one delivers the hook and ask, the other the three arguments.
- For challenge: assign City Official, or find a combination where six groups win and defend why the seventh should accept it.

CONTINGENCIES

- No projector, or a student absent on Day 4?** The sandbox runs on any single device, offline if you save the page — an absent student can reproduce the result at home from the passed-ordinance list.
- Speeches run long?** Cut to 3 minutes and drop the council question. Protect the reveal — the reveal is the lesson.
- Council deadlocks?** Good. Run the sandbox with zero ordinances and show them a city where nothing was decided.
- Only two days?** Run Day 1 and Day 4, speeches at 2 minutes off the stakeholder sheet.