# Simulated Town Meeting: To Build or Not To Build

This activity is set in the context of a town meeting, in which the participants (whole class) are discussing the proposed development of a new shopping center where they live. The teacher plays the role of the manager of the construction company. The purpose of the meeting is to discuss ideas and opinions and (at the end) to vote on whether the development will actually go ahead.

Before the lesson, the teacher will need the following things:

1. A script outlining the structure of the meeting, and describing the development itself (where is it? what is going to be there?) A copy of one can be found at the end of this document.
2. Display map of the local area (or provide color copies). These you should highlight the "location" of the new development. The shopping center itself should be colored in pink, and the parking area in green (as specified in the speech). Try to place the center in a provocative situation (i.e. on top of some of the major roads, on some of the students’ houses, or even on top of the school!). This might provoke them a little, and will liven up the discussion.
3. The room can be set up as seen in the following diagram (where possible).

***Teacher Note:*** Environmental focus questions should be included in this simulation and/or adapt your groups to represent *environmentalists* and *community residents*. Speeches and discussion should include these ideas and point out the key points discussed in this unit (i.e., unit vocabulary)

Before the lesson begins, briefly explain what is going to happen (i.e. a new shopping center is going to be built in the local area), and ask the students to decide if they are FOR or AGAINST the development (this is for seating purposes only- they can change their minds later if they wish). Then ask them to sit on the appropriate side of the room.

Throughout the lesson, you will play the role of the manager of the construction company who is going to build this center. You will obviously be biased in the discussion, so "act" as much as possible, disagreeing with the AGAINST children and agreeing with the FOR children! Repeat how brilliant this will be for the local residents.

Lesson Outline:

* Speech by teacher - outlining how the discussion will be/should be handled
* Initial vote to find out the general public opinion on this development
* Speech by the teacher - outlining the development itself, showing the location and features of the center
* Students ask questions to the construction manager (i.e. the teacher)
* Students discuss opinions and (in groups) write a short speech outlining their feelings
* Each group shares their speech with the rest of the class
* Final discussion and question-answering
* Final vote - the results of this vote will decide whether the shopping center will or will not be built!

You could record or video-record the lesson, and assess the students afterward.

**Development Meeting Speech**

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Welcome to this meeting, in which we will discuss the proposed construction of a new shopping center in (insert town name here). I know that you all feel very strongly about this issue, as it will affect all of your lives a great deal.

This meeting will be arranged as follows:
First, we will have a vote to find out the general level of public opinion. Next, I will outline the plans for the new development, explaining some of the intended features and the actual location of the site. Then, I will provide some time for you to discuss the issue in small groups. During this discussion, I will ask you to write a short speech with a group outlining your feelings about the proposed development. After about 20 minutes, groups will read their speeches so that everyone can hear how you feel about the new building.
Once we have heard everyone's speeches, we will then conduct a vote which will decide if the development will go ahead.

* Conduct vote to find out opinions at the beginning
* Display/Hand out maps

My company, the Warner Construction Company, is proposing to build a new shopping center in (insert town name here). The location of the shopping center is colored in pink on your maps, while the green area shows the parking spaces which we will build. They will be able to hold up to 300 vehicles.
As you can see, the development will be situated on what is now farming land, although a number of farm buildings and houses will have to be destroyed. There will also have to be major changes to the road system in (insert town name here), in order to cope with the large volumes of traffic which we are expecting, especially around the holidays when people shop most

(insert 2-3 local street names here that some of your students know) will have to be expanded, which will mean the destruction of houses which are situated at the sides of these roads. Residents whose houses are expected to be destroyed will be paid for their properties and will be found new homes in (insert town name here) and the surrounding area. They will also be paid a considerable sum of money as compensation for losing their home.

Thus, the construction of this site will have major implications for the future of (insert town name here), and there will be considerable changes to the area around your homes. We chose this site for a two main reasons:
First, there are large areas of open spaces which we can use to build on and use as parking spaces.
Second, the main roads to this area are excellent. The area is close to (insert surrounding towns), and we expect people to travel from even further to visit the center too. Travelers will also be able to visit because of the proximity of the airport and Chesapeake Bay where they can arrive by plane or boat from other states, or even countries.

Although the changes to (insert town name) itself are quite drastic, we see this development as an exciting new chapter in (insert town name)'s history. The building will not just have shops, as there will be many new leisure facilities, which residents of (insert town name here) will be able to use at discounted rates.

The following features are planned:
A huge shopping mall, including branches of (insert large chain stores that would be familiar to students) and other large chain stores, as well as a number of small, family-run shops. There will also be a new five-screen movie theatre with full Dolby Digital Surround Sound, and a swimming and sports complex which will have an olympic-size pool, gym, basketball and tennis courts, a football field and a small golf course. Other intended features include an arcade with all the latest computer and video games, a laser tag center and a go-carting track.

It is hoped that this development will only be the start of (insert town name here)'s bright future. By starting the ball rolling here, we are expecting a number of other companies to locate branches here, including Toys R Us (and name some others here). The owners of Six Flags have also shown an interest in building a smaller version of their world-famous theme park in this area.

We, at the Warner Construction Company hope that the residents of (insert town name here) will welcome this new and exciting development. Although it may cause a great deal of this disruption to residents, we hope that the benefits of this new center will outweigh the disruption.

Any questions?

In groups, discuss how you feel about this new development. Then, make a short speech representing your groups’ opinions and concerns which you will share in (insert time constraint here) minutes.

One person writes, another reads, and the others contribute to the speech.

* After \_\_\_ minutes:
* Read speeches
* Discuss points raised in the speeches
* Final votes - should the development take place or not?]

This lesson activity was adapted from: <http://www.teachingideas.co.uk/geography/developm.htm>