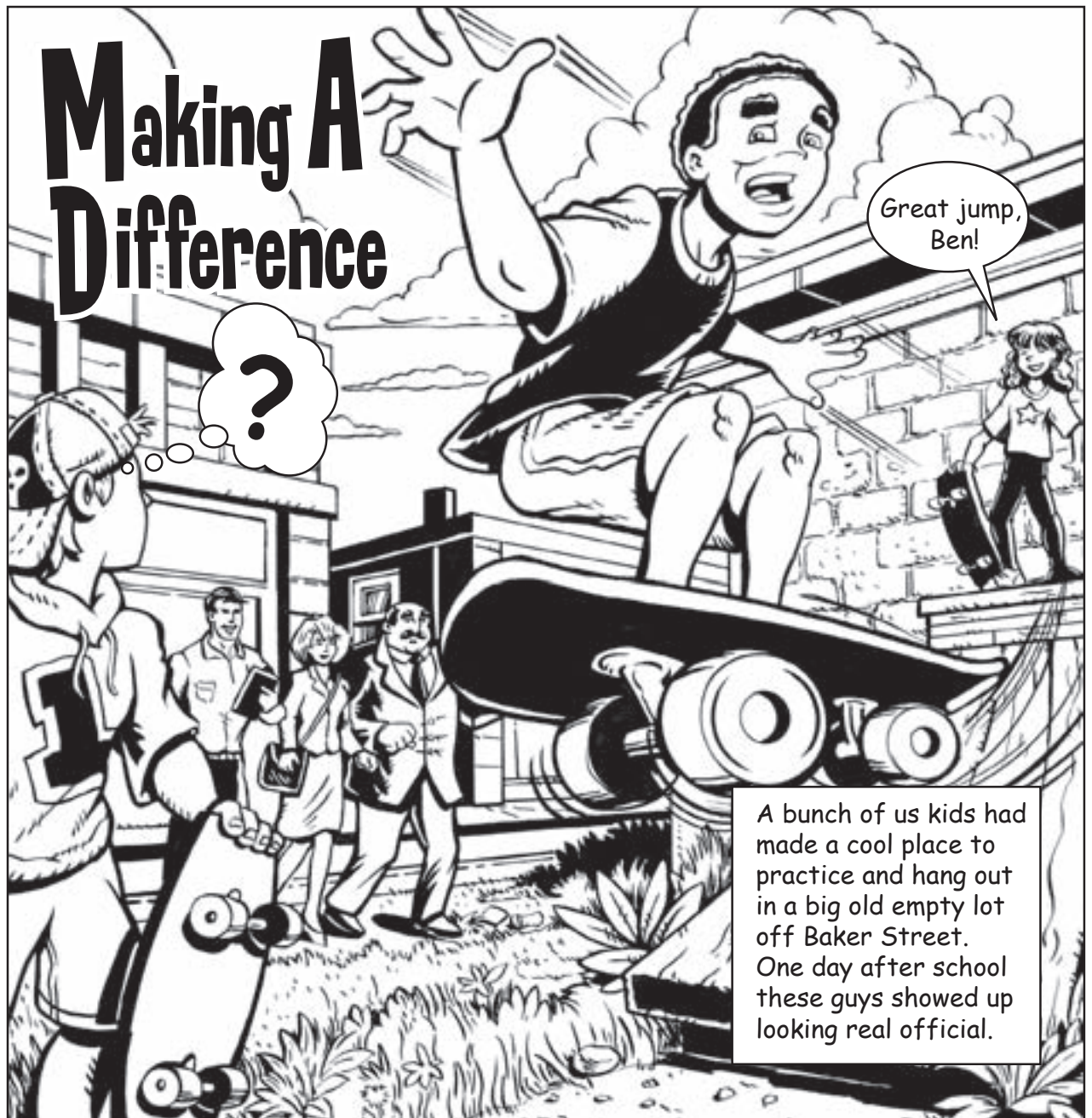


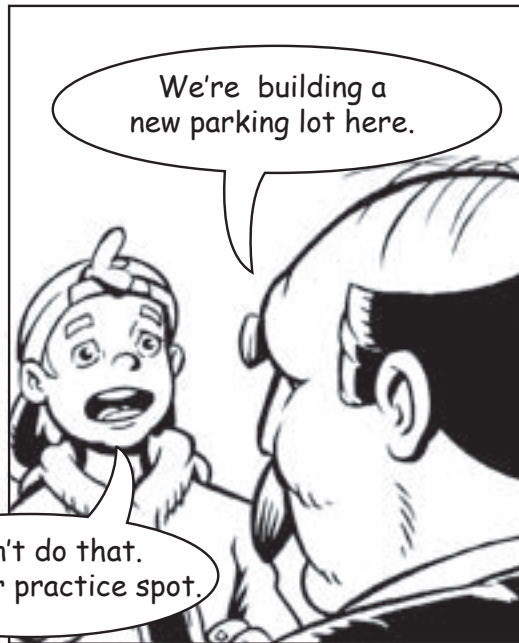
GRAPHIC NOVEL



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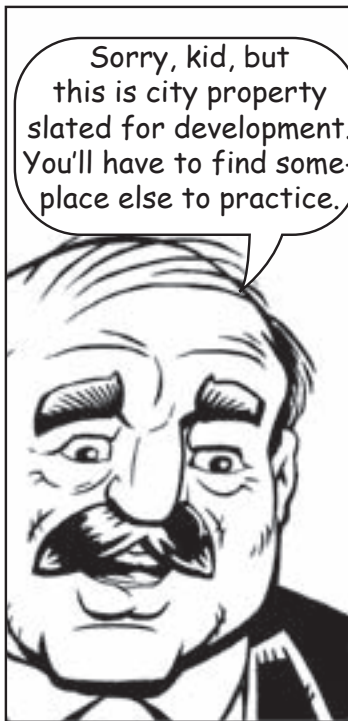


Whatcha doin'?

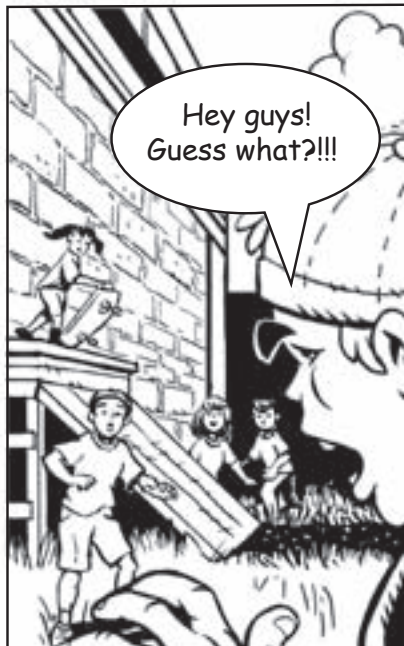


We're building a new parking lot here.

You can't do that. This is our practice spot.



Sorry, kid, but this is city property slated for development. You'll have to find someplace else to practice.



Hey guys! Guess what?!!!



...and they said they're gonna turn it into a parking lot!



I guess the city thinks it needs the parking space.

If the city owns the land, that means all its citizens do, too. And every citizen has a voice in what the city does with its resources. But it takes hard work to get your voice heard. I can help you, if you're really willing to give it your all.

Ms. Harris from Civics class gave us some ideas.



Yeah. Me, too.

We will!

I am.

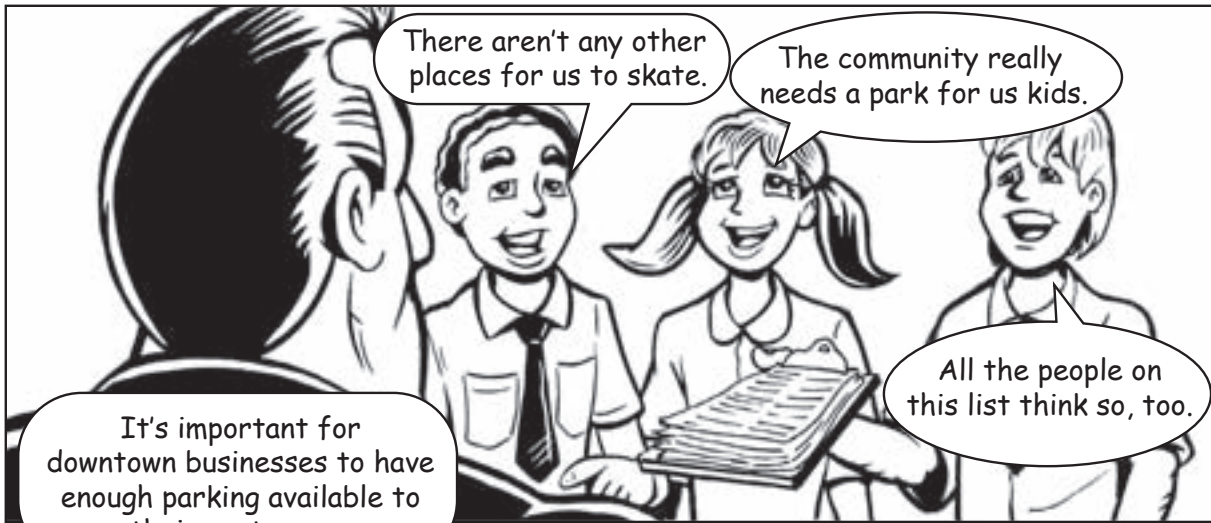
The first thing we had to do was find other people who thought a park was better than a parking lot, and get them to sign a petition. We had to get the petitions from the City Clerk's office. Then the Mayor and the City Council would see what a good idea it was.



We asked everyone we knew to sign our petition. Lots of people signed, ...but some didn't.



We brought the petitions to the City Council Meeting to show the city's elected officials.

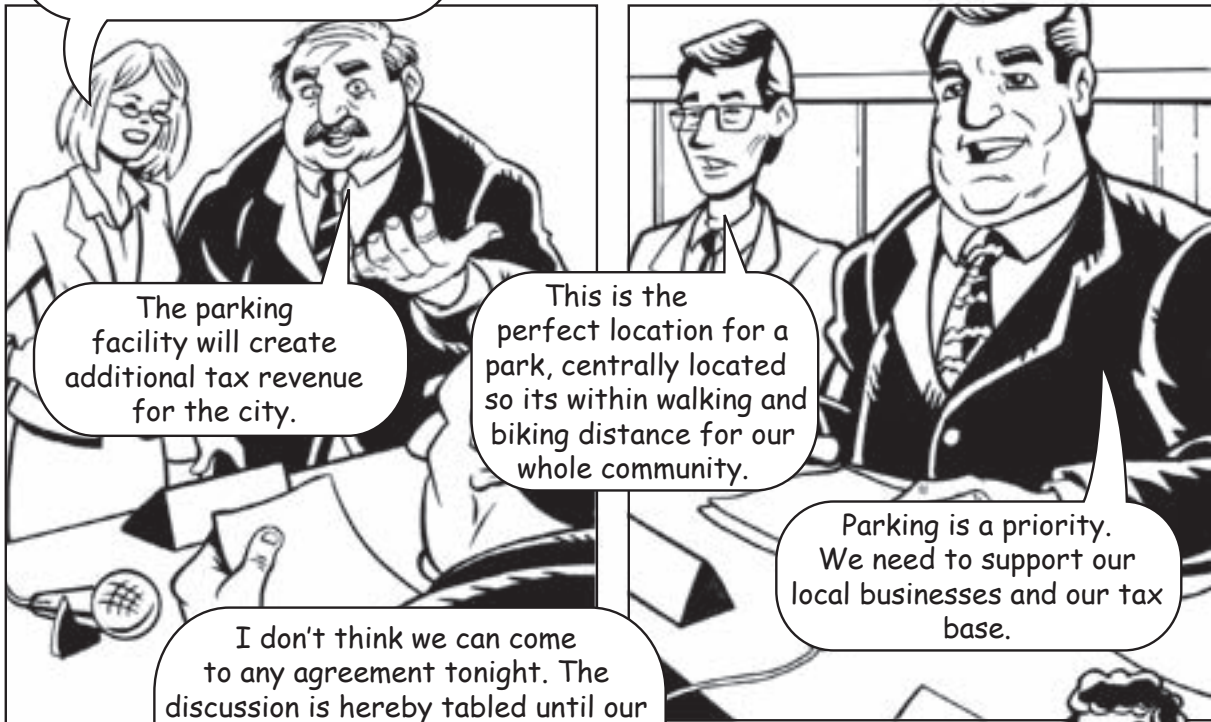


There aren't any other places for us to skate.

The community really needs a park for us kids.

All the people on this list think so, too.

It's important for downtown businesses to have enough parking available to their customers.

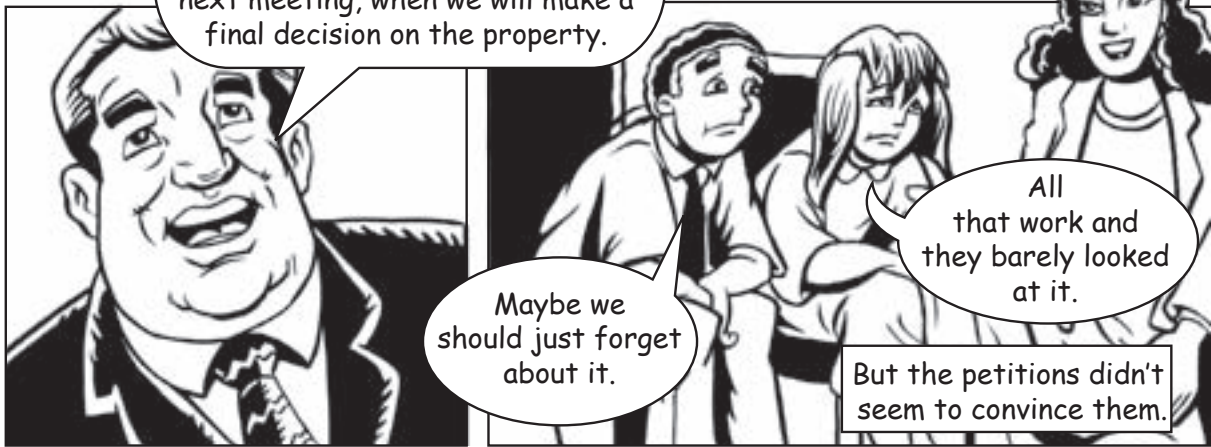


The parking facility will create additional tax revenue for the city.

This is the perfect location for a park, centrally located so its within walking and biking distance for our whole community.

Parking is a priority. We need to support our local businesses and our tax base.

I don't think we can come to any agreement tonight. The discussion is hereby tabled until our next meeting, when we will make a final decision on the property.

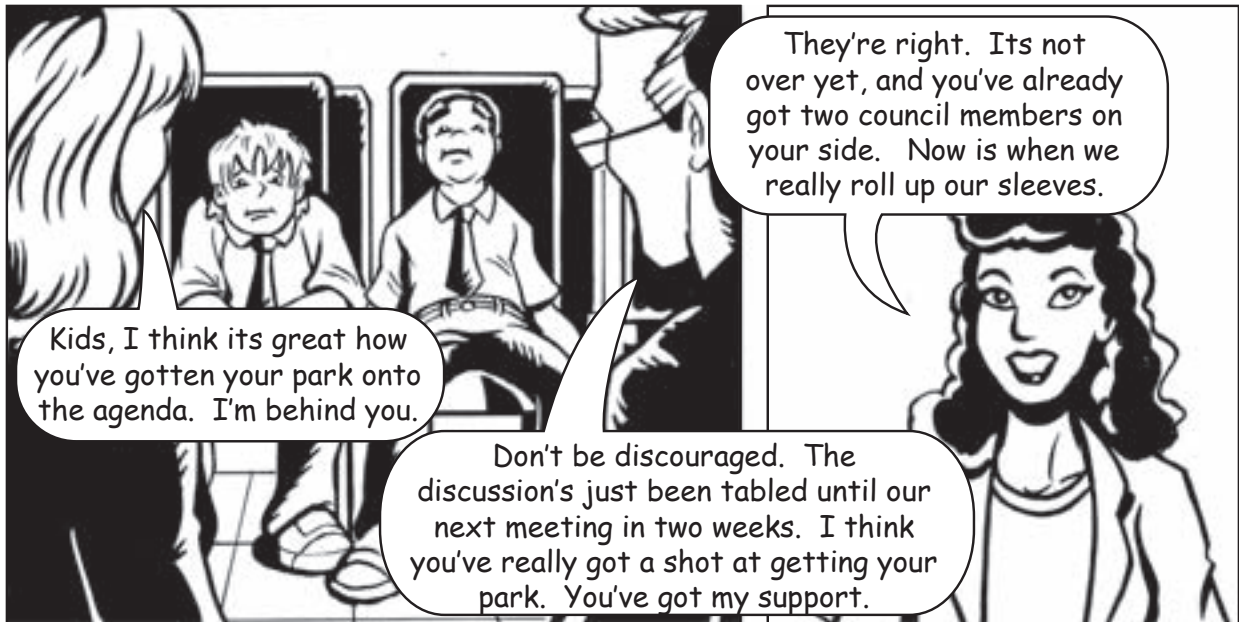


Maybe we should just forget about it.

All that work and they barely looked at it.

But the petitions didn't seem to convince them.

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At the next meeting, we were ready...
City Council scene, full attendance

MIDTOWN CITY COUNCIL

DOWNTOWN
SHOPPING & DINING



Shopping and dining in our downtown area is down. The best way to help is to create a community meeting place where families can come to play, and then shop, eat, or see a movie. A park can be that meeting place.

We could use the kind of businesses a nearby park would attract, like ice cream or coffee shops or bookstores. New businesses will build our tax base far more than just adding a parking lot would.

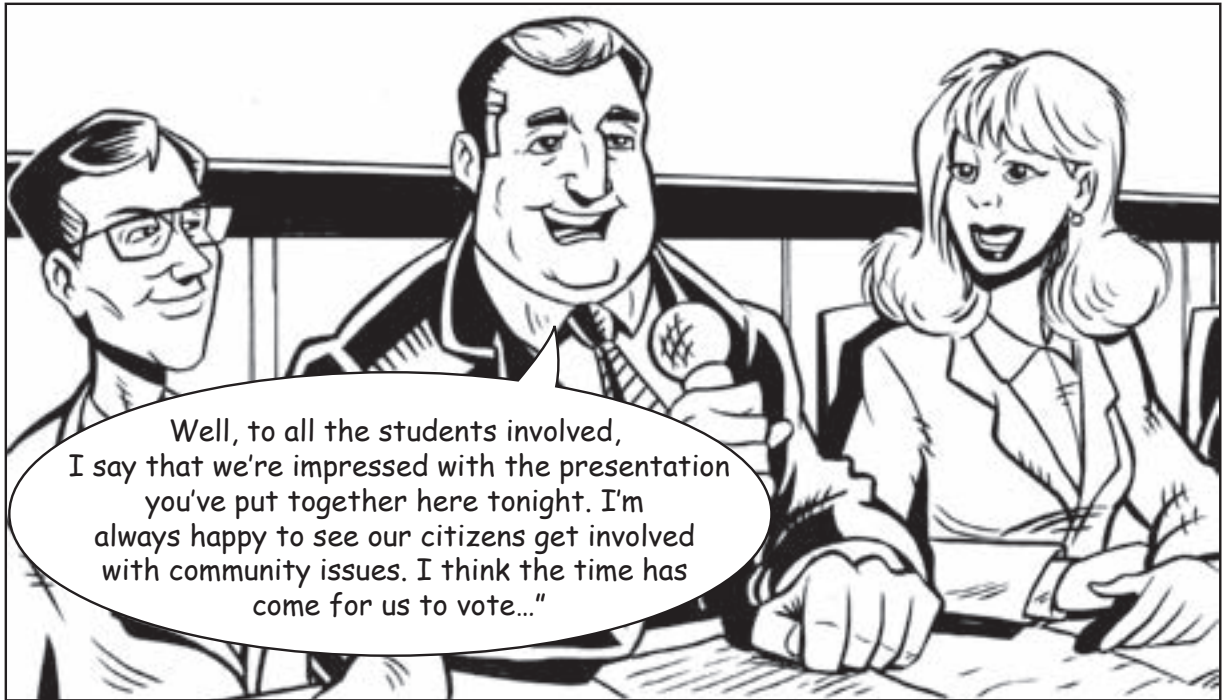


More people coming downtown on weekends and evenings means a safer, more secure city.

We need a place for our kids to play and for community events. We'd be able to walk to a downtown park, and I'm sure others would too.

Places to walk and bike to mean less cars and traffic... and less need for more parking.





GRAPHIC NOVEL

Background Summary

Local government officials face many challenges when deciding how public resources are put to use. Infrastructure, finances, long- and short-term city plans, and impact on existing structures all have to be considered before new projects are started or improvements are made. Every citizen in the community is affected by those decisions and should take an active role in making his or her voice heard. There are a number of ways to do that including serving on planning committees, attending city council meetings, volunteering to help with special projects, keeping informed, and most importantly by voting in all elections.

In *Making a Difference*, a group of middle-school kids learn how to effect change in their community. The kids have adopted a vacant lot in the middle of town and have been using it as a skate park and a place to hang out. Everything was working out just fine until a group of businesspeople visit the site and announce that they plan to turn it into a parking lot. Guided by their civics teacher, the kids mobilize and enlist the support of other people in the community in an effort to have the city turn the lot into a public park. The result is a valuable lesson in how local government works and serves its citizens.

Activities**Illustrating**

Ask students the following questions. *How did Ms. Harris respond when her students shared their feelings with her about losing their play area? Who owns city land? Who decides how it should be used? What does it mean when someone says a discussion or a decision is tabled? Is that the end of it?* Encourage students to discuss their responses with the class.

Opinion Writing

Explain to students that many cities maintain their own Web site. Cities use the Web sites to publicize upcoming social events and public meetings. Some even have a section where opportunities and activities intended just for teens are listed. Have students log on to your city's Web site, or the site for a larger city near yours. Ask students to make a list of the different services you can access there. Students should put a star next to the services their family might use. Share your list with classmates.