

RPG CityPlanner

A Collaborative Dungeons & Dragons Map-Making Game

INTRODUCTION

A lingering issue for many DMs is the anxiety of world-building. On one hand, your world is precious to you and allowing someone else in is a scary proposition. On the other hand, getting player buy-in to your world from the jump is equally as scary.

This map-making game can help you bridge that gap. Everyone will have a hand at ideation and creation and you can all laugh at how bad you are at drawing. The DM will also have a light touch on how the world will be made through their prep.

If you are looking for an example of running CityPlanner, the ["Building Our Town"](#) and ["Building Our City"](#) episodes of the 5e D&D podcast that I DM, [Join the Party](#), can give you a great starting point. I developed this game as we started our second campaign, and it laid a great foundation for our world.

And finally, an important disclaimer. This game is a hack of Avery Adler's ["The Quiet Year"](#) and the initial world-building section in her game ["Monsterhearts 2."](#) If you're looking for a game that really gets into the nitty-gritty of community building, look into ["The Quiet Year."](#) Go [buy the PDF](#), seriously. Avery is incredibly talented and we are in debt to this amazing work.

SUPPLIES

You will need:

- Two pieces of blank paper
- A pencil or pen for each player
- A copy of the Events Tables and at least one six-sided die (aka a d6)

This can be modified for a digital version, but the key thing to get across to the players is everyone will be drawing and everyone will be reading events.

THE DM'S TOOLBOX

Hello DM! If you're reading this, we know that you're giving your players an opportunity to world-build alongside you. This is a big leap for you and we're proud of you. It worked out very well for Lake Town City in *Join the Party*, so we have full faith in you.

Before you run *CityPlanner*, we recommend running a Session 0 with your players. During this session, the players and DM collaborate on character creation and discuss the themes of the game they are about to play. For your game going forward and for *CityPlanner*, it's important that everyone is on the same page. Is this a modern game or a fantasy game? Is it silly or grimdark? What themes and ideas do you want to explore? What creative touchstones are there?

Specifically for *CityPlanner*, this is the opportunity for the DM to talk about any seeds of storylines for the campaign and the setting in which the game is going to take place. This will be important if/when the DM draws environmental constraints on the neighborhood or city maps.

This game is flexible for the setting of your game. Originally, this was used for a town growing into a city, and has been adapted for one neighborhood growing into a cityscape. This could work for a village growing into a kingdom or a city growing into a capital of an empire. As long as your environment grows, this can work for you!

If you'd like an example of where to start with that, listen to the [Pregame episodes](#) of *Join the Party* for how DM Eric talked about the ideas of the story leading into the game of *CityPlanner*. We broke the game into two episodes if you want to listen to how ours went: "Building our Town" and "Building Our City."

PREPPING THE EVENTS TABLE

Like any DMing for *Dungeons and Dragons*, you will need to do some prep. Luckily, it is not as much as you think and you're going to love it, we promise.

This game is supposed to facilitate your campaign, so switch in the events that you want to see in your game. Want to focus on more political intrigue? Add more events about subterfuge and a city council. Want to drop in some aliens or space monsters? Ask how everything changed once the mothership arrived!

When we ran this for Join the Party, each participant got to go six times plus the Era Events, totaling 28 rounds in the City area. Shoot for around this number; you don't want to over-stuff the map. The bigger concern is to make sure the number of events is evenly divisible by the number of players. You don't want anyone getting the short end of the stick.

Finally, this game was created to generate a modern, "real life" city that grows and changes over the most recent thirty years (approx 1985 to 202X). This can be used to make a fantasy city, or a city that changes over a much longer period of time. However, we recommend keeping the Era structure and the number of Eras. Feel free to modify the language and intent of the events (unless you want a basketball team in Highgarden, which is very cool in its own way). If you want to change it as such, be sure to rewrite what you need, but use these examples as the kind of open-ended questions you will need to generate fun things.

Fantasy Examples

- Where does the king keep the beasts? Who runs the bestiary?
- What yearly event brings the lords and gentry together?
- How do you select the Kingsguard? Who is their most fearsome member? Who is the most surprising?

AFTER THE GAME

Remember, this is just the starting point of your worldbuilding. Everything will grow and change as you need it to because this is Dungeons and Dragons! Just because it's not on the map now doesn't mean you can't establish it later or have your players create new spots on the fly.

Not only that, all of the leads generated by this game don't have to be used! This is a jumping off point to get everyone excited.

GAME INTRODUCTION

The DM will write NEIGHBORHOOD on the top of one piece of paper and CITY on the top of another. Put the NEIGHBORHOOD paper in the middle of the table and move the CITY one off to the side for now. Write a heading of RESOURCES in the top-left corner of the NEIGHBORHOOD. Next to that, draw a t-chart in the bottom-right corner of the NEIGHBORHOOD MAP and label it Abundances and Scarcities.

The DM will read these next paragraphs out loud:

We have two maps in front of us. The first is going to turn into the small neighborhood in which we start. And then, on the city map, we're going to use the small town as a locus point to grow a big city around it.

Since we're all doing this together, our roles aren't to control specific characters or act out scenes. Instead, we consider the goals and needs of the different factions of the community. A player can care about the richest people in one turn and the ruffians on the street in another.

This is about building the most interesting city we would like, one that we want to play in later. Therefore, it is our obligation to make bold, interesting choices. They can be silly, funny, or ridiculous, but our campaign will live here.

I am the DM of this game and I've prepared the events that delineate our new eras and I have some idea of why these things are happening. I may introduce some characters or elements that I want your opinion on as we establish the setting for our campaign. Since we're using this as an introduction to D&D, it may feel a touch railroaded, but only to steer into the story that we're all going to make together.

As we play, we'll all add to the map to reflect the town's growth and the decisions we make along the way. As each player takes a turn, they will draw something on the map to represent their answer. Think of this as more of a key than an illustration: you're trying to signify a bigger concept, not draw a perfect rendering of a shop or gas station or park. Each drawing should be simple, smaller than an inch, and take less than 30 seconds to draw. Whoever is drawing has creative control. They can discuss what they want to do, but it is ultimately their decision.

Alright, let's get it going!

(You can stop reading aloud, DM. Good job!)

THE NEIGHBORHOOD MAP

First, let's establish some of the environment. If you haven't talked about the landscape previously, have a brief discussion led by the DM's notes for the beginning of the campaign. This can be as simple as the DM saying, "I was thinking about a community in a rocky desert?" and everyone else nodding in agreement.

If the DM has an idea of where this will be set, make some preliminary drawings now (no more than two features). The DM can also ask the table about the biggest set piece in the area.

EX: We talked about the neighborhood began as a summer community of about 100 families. What would a summer community be centered around or near? Where would the people live?

Each player will now introduce one detail about the local natural terrain and draw it onto the map. Go around again, including the DM, and add some man-made features.

RESOURCES

Next, every participant names an important resource for the community.

Consider the world and genre your campaign is set in. You can choose a resource that already jives with the world, or you can choose a resource that you want to introduce into the world. For example, if you pick "technology," it becomes something our community cares about.

This resource can be a tangible good or a value. Some examples include transportation, fish, openness, hard work, or entertainment. Write these under the RESOURCES heading.

Next, divide resources into abundance and scarcities. When you pick a resource to be in either of the columns, write it into its side of the t-chart and draw what that looks like on the map. The DM can choose to go first, but it is not necessary.

Depending on the type of game you are running, you can choose the balance of abundances to scarcities. We recommend an even number of each side, like two and two, but you can skew towards scarcity if you are playing a low-magic fantasy or a post-apocalyptic genre game.

WRAPPING UP THE NEIGHBORHOOD

If the neighborhood still feels bare, go around again as you did before the features were introduced. If the DM wants to establish something in the neighborhood that is essential for the plot of the campaign, this is a good time to prompt the players to draw it.

EX:

- Where is the movie theater?
- Where is the statue to the Goddess?
- Where are the mining caves?

Finally, you need to pick a name for this. Every person must come up with at least one full name for the neighborhood and a suffix (such as -burg, -ville, -town). Try to come to a consensus for the time being. If there is no outstanding name, swap in the suffixes to the suggestions until something sounds right.

THE CITY

Put the CITY paper in the middle of the table and move the NEIGHBORHOOD nearby for reference. The DM should put up the Events Tables on the table and take out the d6.

The DM continues:

Now that we have our neighborhood, we're going to move on to the second map. Aw hell yeah! Imagine that we've zoomed out by a level or two on Google Maps. We're going to use our neighborhood as the starting point of a new, bigger map that will grow into a city.

The DM can take this time to add some more rough topography of the land at large. This is not the environment of the entire country, only the land that affects this particular city. As you are drawing, explain to the players what exactly you're drawing.

EX: We have a river stretching down the eastern border, a forest to the south along the bottom, and the main road that leads west to the nearest city a few hundred miles away.

First things first, where should we put our neighborhood?

Discuss the placement and draw a dotted line around the area of the neighborhood. Remember, you will have many neighborhoods in your city, so don't make it too big. It also doesn't have to be a perfect shape; if you look at any map, neighborhoods are weird polygons that are dictated by many different factors.

Now that we have our starting point, I want to introduce the Events Table. This will guide us on how the city is going to come to life and grow. We're going to go around the table (including me) starting with the player on my left. On your turn, you'll roll the dice, read the prompt out loud, and resolve it. You can ask other players or me for input, but ultimately it's your decision.

Add new drawings and symbols to the map to reflect what's changed in the city. If these changes affect something that is already drawn, anyone can speak up and discuss how it may change the map.

The events table is divided into four eras—The Start, The Boom, The Build, and the Present. Each era begins with an Era Event. Treat this Era Event like an All-Play in Pictionary: I'll lay out a situation or problem, and all of the players will collaborate to figure out how the city would handle it. The players must come to an agreement and then draw the results.

Let's get started with our first Era Event!

And now, the game begins!

POINTS TO KEEP IN MIND

- *Use the abundances and resources to guide your decisions. What does the city value? How do they respond to success? Adversity? Who needs places and who will give them that space?*
- *If you roll the dice and get an event you have already chosen, roll again. If this happens a second time, pick the next new event that is available on the table.*
- *This game is about worldbuilding together, so follow in the same ethos as your game of D&D. Remember to make jokes and have fun!*

EVENTS TABLE

THE START

ERA EVENT

Good news! You're allowed to spread outside of the confines of your town, ready to really make it a city. Everyone picks a new neighborhood to establish, who lives there, and what its vibe is (preppy, hipster, suburban, industrial, ramshackle, etc).

1	What group has the highest status in the community? What must people do to gain inclusion in this group?
2	There is one good road and one not-so-good road that connects the neighborhoods. What are they?
3	What belief or practice helps to unify your community?
4	The city elects its first mayor. Who is it? What is their platform? <i>Represent them with a city government building.</i>
5	What's the most beautiful thing in this area? <i>OR</i> What's the most hideous thing in this area?
6	A prominent citizen decides to move elsewhere in town. Where do they go? What does their new house look like?

THE BOOM

ERA EVENT

Let's institute some public transportation. What does the city invest in?

OR

A major local employer builds a regional amenity (hospital, arts center, etc). What is it?

1	A celebrity moves to town. Who is it? Why are they there? Who is excited about it?
2	The two high schools in the area have a deep-seated rivalry. Where are the two high schools? Over what?
3	The city council wants to attract tourists and families. Who do they focus on? What is that slogan?
4	A contingent within the community demands to be heard. Who are they? What are they asking for?
5	Name a bar of recognition. Why is it so? Who hangs out there?
6	A headstrong citizen decides to put one of their ideas in motion. Start a ridiculous or foolish project.

THE BUILD

ERA EVENT

The city has experienced a massive influx of people. Add a new neighborhood, and a new school, and a highway OR improved public transit.

1	A neighborhood expands, overtaking another one. What is it? Is there a blend or an erasure of the past one?
2	The local teens and young people get into a new activity. What is it? What businesses spring up to keep it going?
3	A group explores the city more thoroughly and finds something that had been previously overlooked. What is it?
4	A natural disaster hits the city. What is it? What does it destroy?
5	Where is the seedy underbelly in the city? What crime sustains them?
6	A heart-warming story captures the entire city's consciousness. What is it? What changes? <i>OR</i> A weird urban legend captures the entire city's consciousness. What is it? What changes?

THE PRESENT

ERA EVENT

Finally, the state has approved the plans for a technologically-advanced project? What is it? Where does it go? Where is the station?

1	What is the city missing? Add one of whatever you'd like.
2	A sports team is coming to the city. What sport? What's the team name?
3	What's the newest food craze in the city? Who makes it the best? Who makes it the second best?
4	The city finishes a long-term public works project. What is it? When was it started?
5	A series of bank robberies take place over a summer. Who is committing them? What is their MO?
6	Who is the current mayor? For how long? What was their platform?

THE END...?

Hey, you made it to the end! If you tweet me, [@el_silvero](https://twitter.com/el_silvero), the word "Alabaster," I'll know that you read this and it will make me happy.

If you liked this, you'd like [Join the Party](#), the 5e D&D podcast that I DM and developed this game for! Go find it wherever podcasts are sold.

Thank you to [Amanda McLoughlin](#) for formatting the PDF and being neat; Avery Adler for making amazing games to inspire me; and Julia Schifini and Brandon Grugle for getting very into the food of the world we created so I knew this game was a good idea.

XOXO Gossip GM,
[Eric Silver](#)