



## Second-graders help mayor build a city

Some Battle Creek second-graders got a lesson in civics from the city's top leader Friday.

Mayor Susan Baldwin arrived at Dudley STEM School armed with a carpet showing a city layout and wooden blocks of buildings, cars and trees.

Two classes met the mayor in the school's library, and sat around the toy city as she explained her role and the basic functions of city government.

As mayor, Baldwin usually deals with adults as she leads city commission meetings and hears concerns from residents. She said she's spoken to classes numerous times but didn't always have the visual aids to help kids grasp the idea of building a city.

"You can try and use their desks and the paths between for streets, but it's just not the same," she said.

She invited the students to call her Mayor Sue and then talked about the city commission and what purpose the city fills in residents' lives.

The mayor's visit tied in to lessons on city government the students had in social studies classes. They'd even learned a

song, "Who Works in City Hall."

Baldwin likened the nine-member city commission to a sports team selected by voters. That commission then chooses the mayor to be team captain.

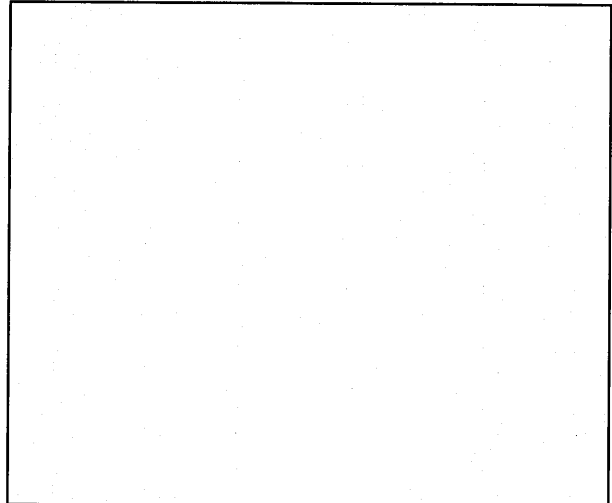
The team of commissioners leads the city, but Baldwin said much of the work gets done by some 500 people who work on parks, streets, the airport and other city services.

To pay for all of those services, the city uses taxes, a very adult topic the second graders had covered in class. Baldwin explained taxes were kind of like everyone pitching in to buy a pizza.

"What we do as a city is we all share together so we can be sure that we all have streets," she said. "If everybody shares a little bit of money, we can do that."

At that point, 7-year-old Brenica Hicks raised her hand and asked the mayor what happens if a tornado hits Battle Creek.

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It's happened before, Baldwin noted, and it's just one of the bad situations the city has to plan for as well as direct tax money toward.

"We don't want to take a lot of money from folks," Baldwin said. "We just want to take enough so that we have a nice city to live in."

The second-graders helped Baldwin lay out a city on the carpeted map. First they laid down two fire stations - on separate ends of the city so they would be close to different neighborhoods. Then they picked a central spot for a hospital.

Finally, the students chose spots for two factories in open areas away from homes. One student cautioned against putting the factories close to the river.

Students peppered Baldwin with questions about who she knew and worked with. Did she know the city clerk or other mayors? What about the governor and president?

While she does get to talk to the governor occasionally, Baldwin said she's never had the honor of meeting the president.

Before heading back to their classroom, a student asked Baldwin if she was the boss of the city.

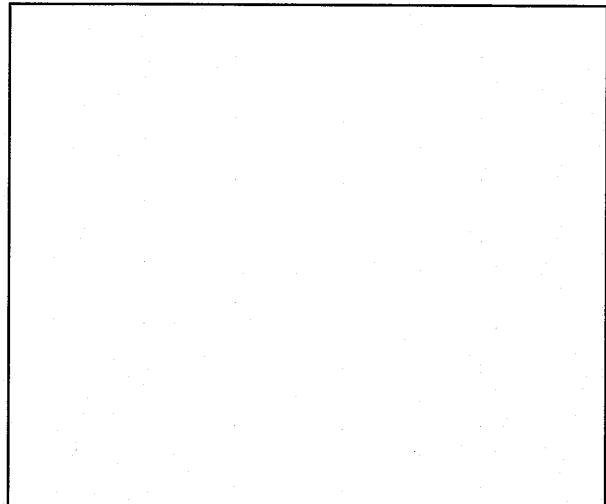
Baldwin said that while she holds the title of mayor, the real people in charge are the residents.

"You guys are the boss of the city," she

said.

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