



From Wood Blocks to City Blocks

A Young Planner's Guide to Building Better Places

By Juan Mullerat
PLUSURBIA DESIGN



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For city builders, big and small.

and

For my children: Maggie, Rose and Jordi,
my fiercest critics and favorite dreamers.

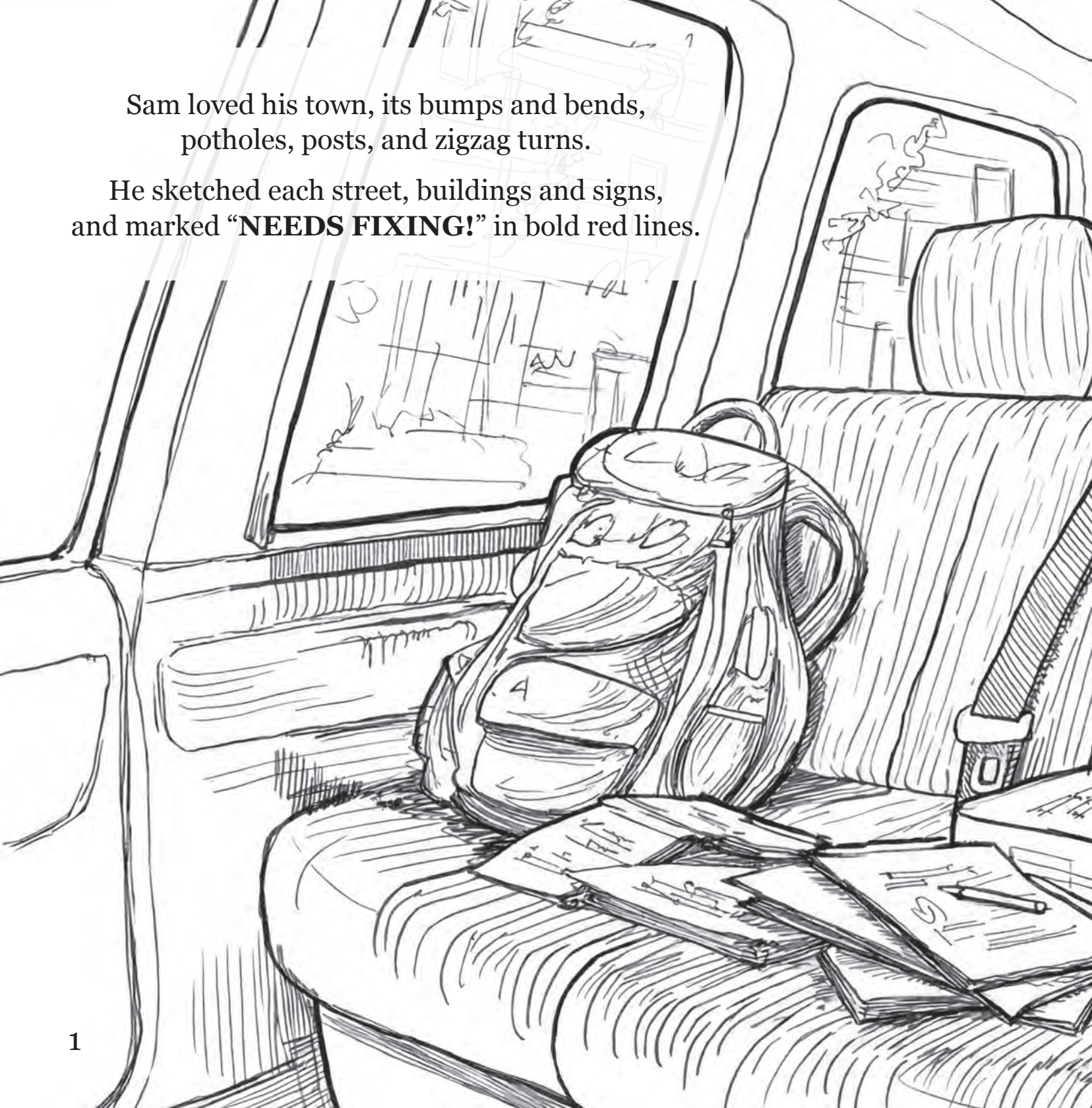
With all my love.



May 2026

Sam loved his town, its bumps and bends,
potholes, posts, and zigzag turns.

He sketched each street, buildings and signs,
and marked “**NEEDS FIXING!**” in bold red lines.









Weekday mornings raced on by.
In Mom's old car, they watched streets fly.

Until one day... CLUNK! No spark.
Their faithful car refused to start.

“We’ll walk,” Mom said. “No need for speed.”
Sam grabbed his plans and took the lead.



A sidewalk cracked. A puddle splashed.
A leaning signpost nearly crashed.

“Who planned this mess?” young Sam declared.
“Who made this path? Who even cared?”



Then Sam saw Jamie from his class,
her wheels were stuck and could not pass.

The path too steep, the curb too tall,
and no one seemed to mind at all.





Sam's heart felt heavy, filled with care.
So he drew a town that would be fair.

He widened walks and fixed some flaws,
with ramps, trees, and smarter laws.

Sam took his map to school one day and asked his friends, "What should we say? What should we fix, what could be fair? What helps us all get here and there?"



"My street floods when it starts to rain."
"We wait for buses in the lane."
"My grandma walks. She needs a rest."
"Without trees, where will birds nest?"

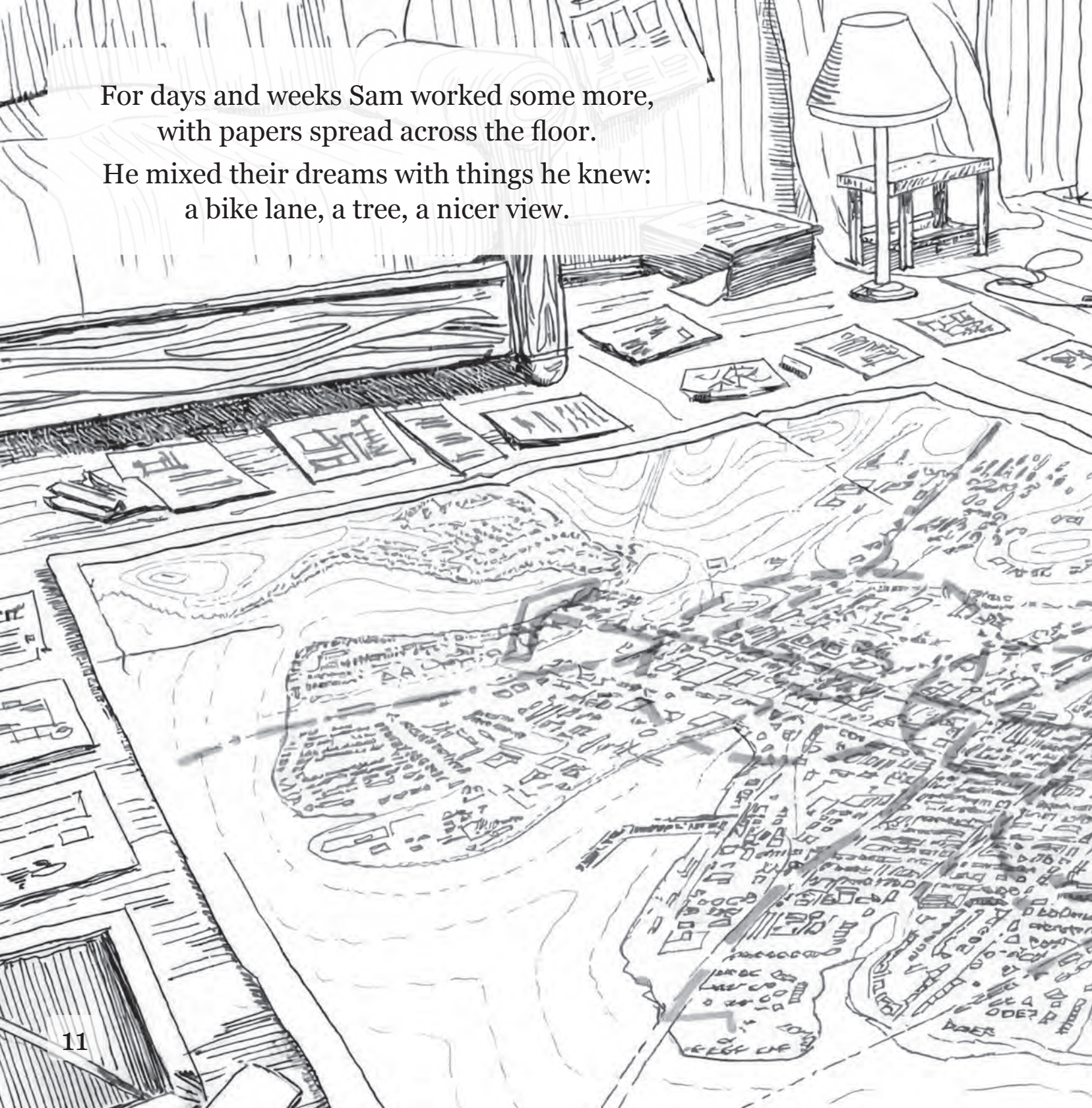


Then pencils moved from hand to hand,
as kids drew dreams across the land,
with painted signs, new paths, more light,
and ramps that made each crossing right.

Together on one giant sheet,
they shaped a town from street to street.

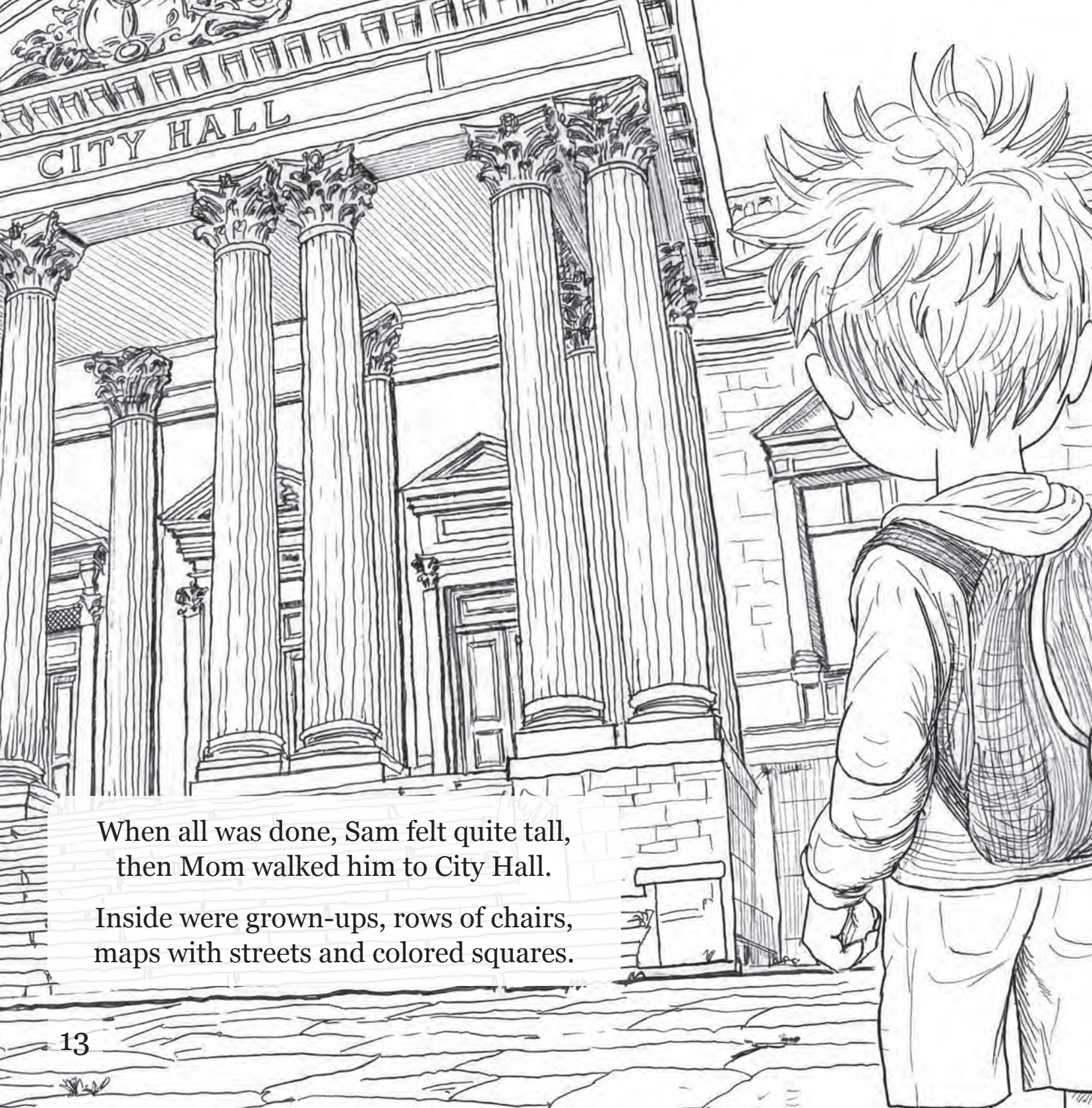
And when the bell rang loud and clear,
they rolled their map to one big cheer!

For days and weeks Sam worked some more,
with papers spread across the floor.
He mixed their dreams with things he knew:
a bike lane, a tree, a nicer view.



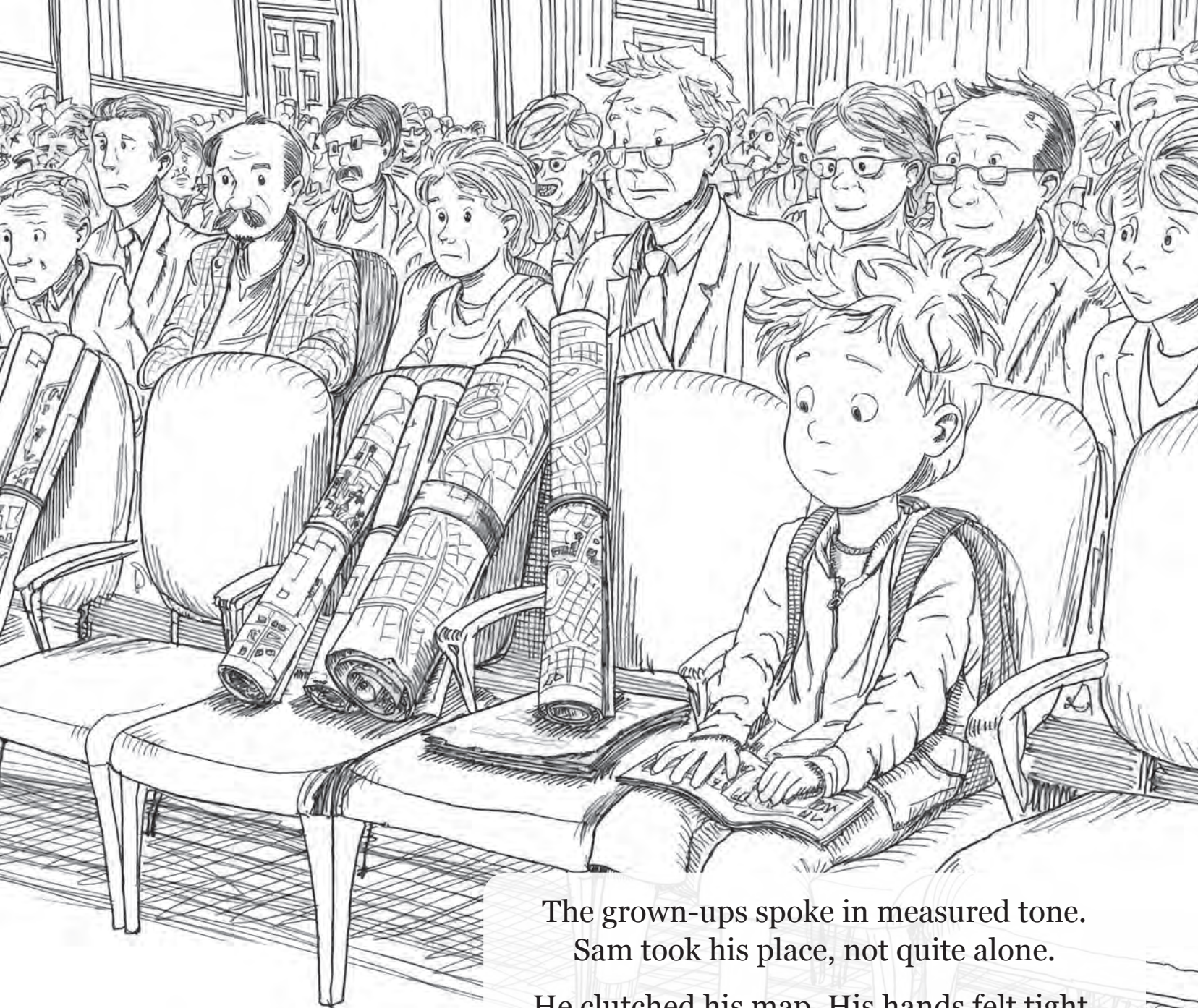


He sketched and circled without fear,
a better town was growing here.



When all was done, Sam felt quite tall,
then Mom walked him to City Hall.

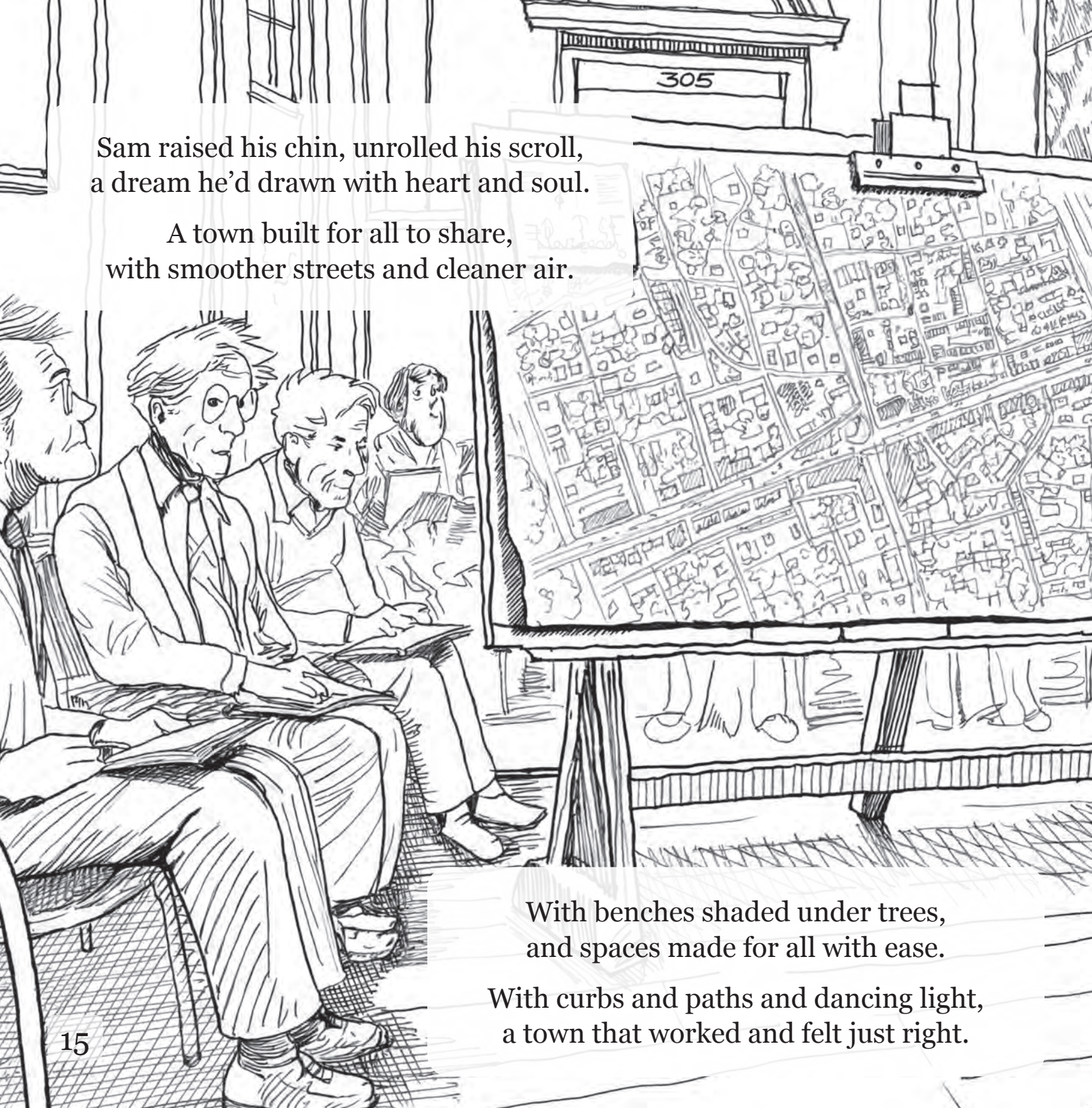
Inside were grown-ups, rows of chairs,
maps with streets and colored squares.



The grown-ups spoke in measured tone.
Sam took his place, not quite alone.

He clutched his map. His hands felt tight.
His heart thumped loud, but this felt right.





Sam raised his chin, unrolled his scroll,
a dream he'd drawn with heart and soul.

A town built for all to share,
with smoother streets and cleaner air.

With benches shaded under trees,
and spaces made for all with ease.

With curbs and paths and dancing light,
a town that worked and felt just right.





“But here,” Sam said, “is what we found. These broken sidewalks hold wheels down.

My friend gets stuck there every day.
Can we *please* find a better way?”

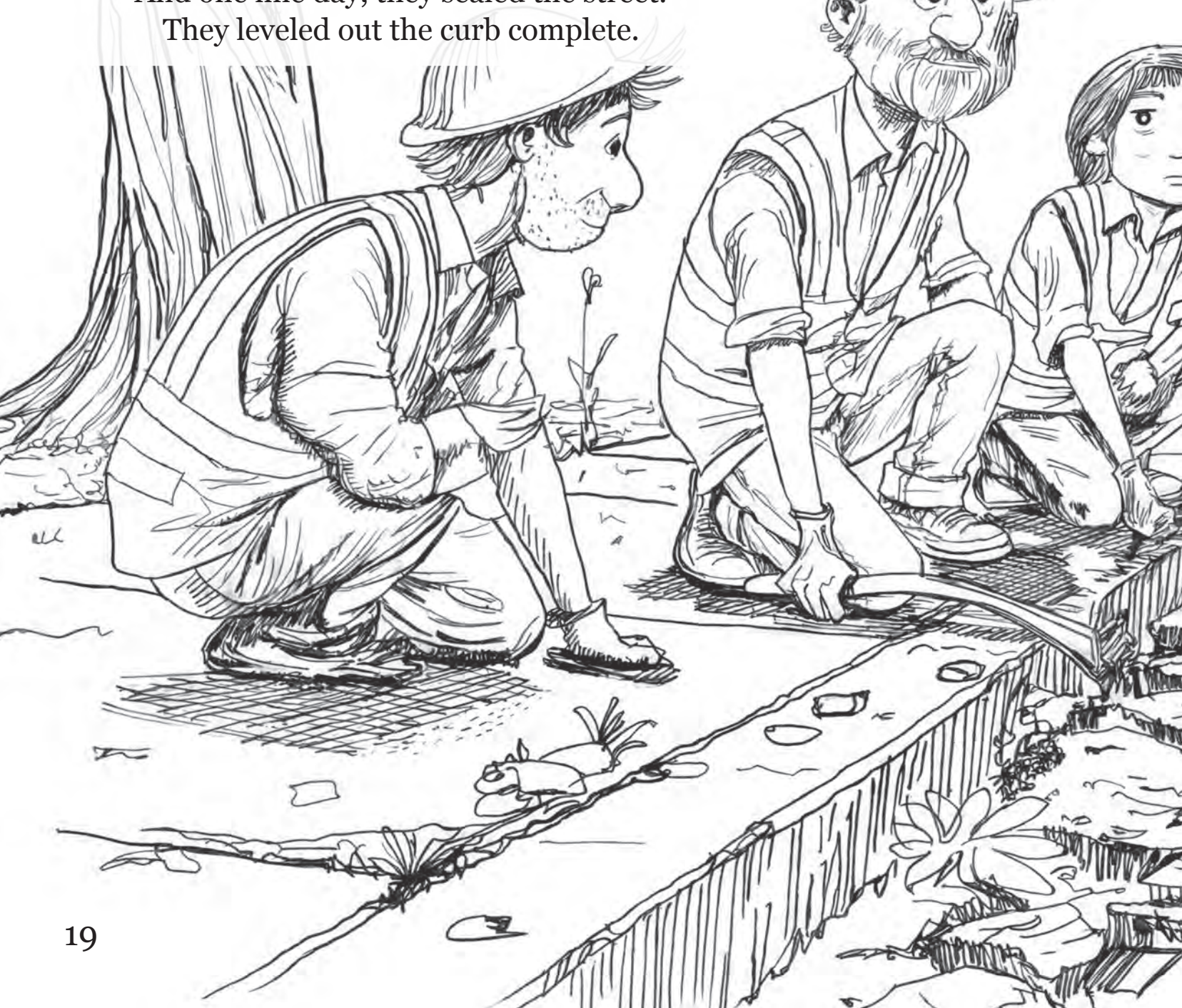


The Mayor smiled. “That’s a great plan,
a vision built by more than one hand.

One fix, one crack, one small repair,
and step by step, we show we care.”

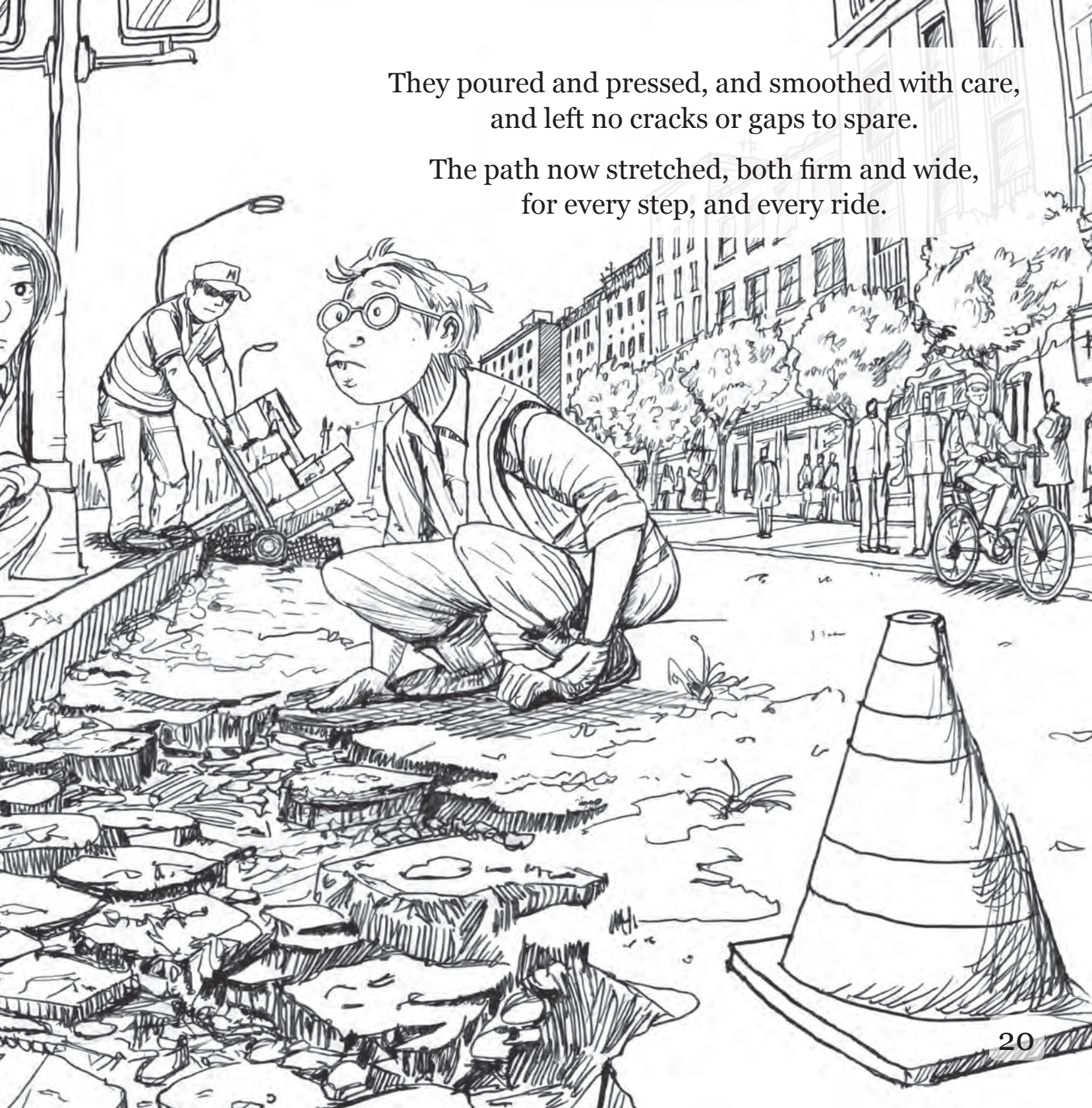
It took some time, but not too long,
for city crews to right that wrong.

And one fine day, they sealed the street.
They leveled out the curb complete.

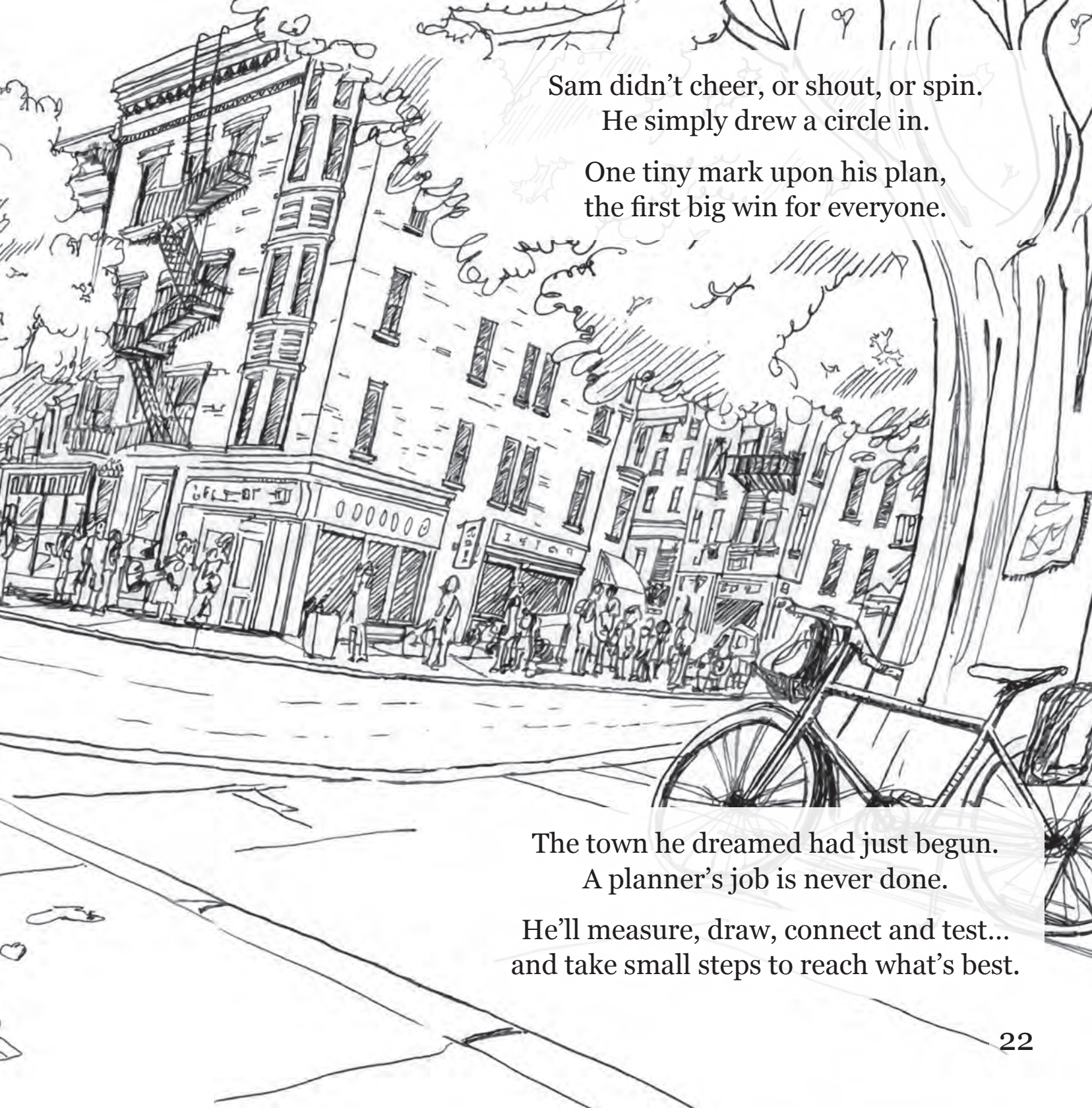


They poured and pressed, and smoothed with care,
and left no cracks or gaps to spare.

The path now stretched, both firm and wide,
for every step, and every ride.





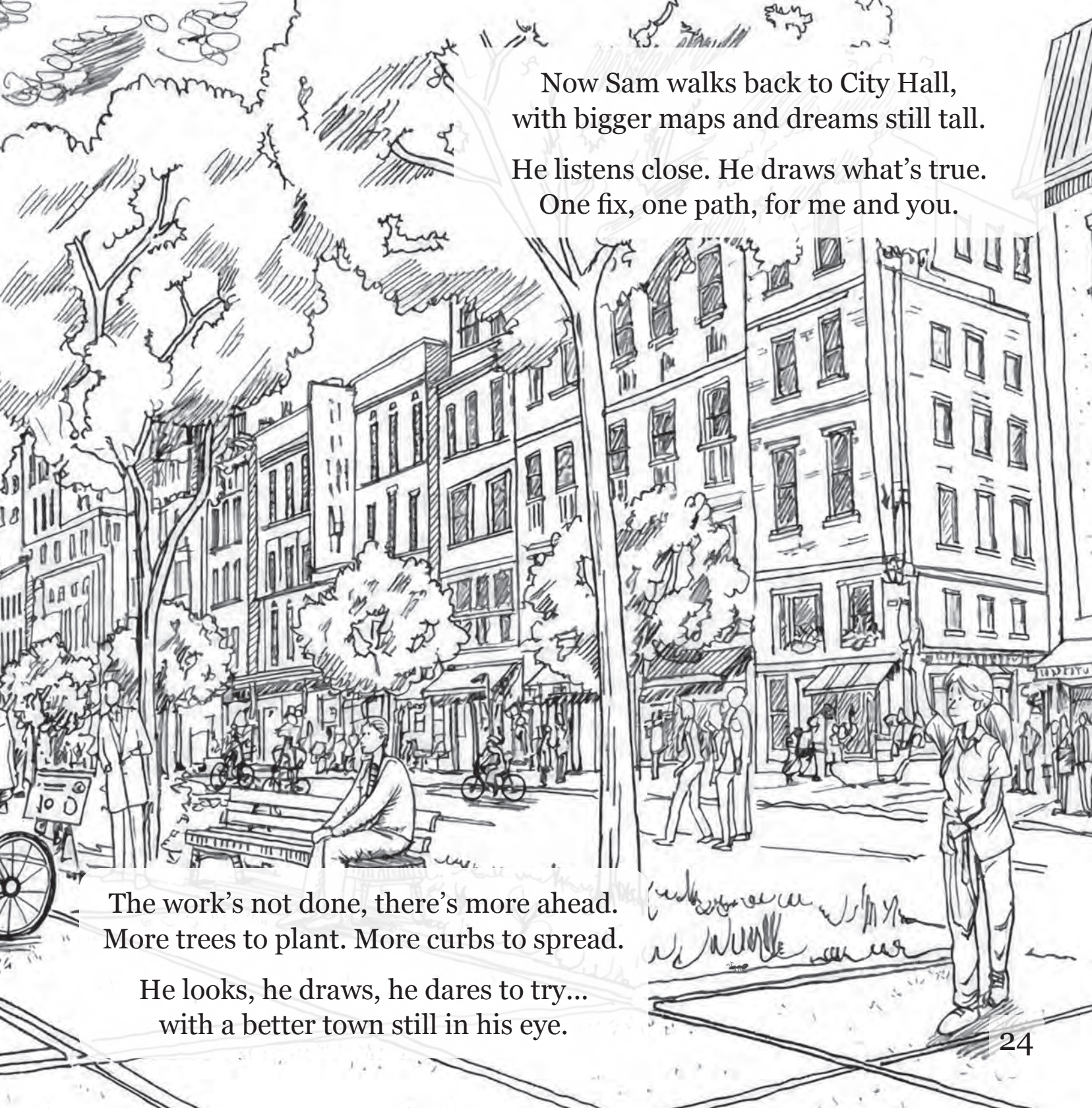


Sam didn't cheer, or shout, or spin.
He simply drew a circle in.

One tiny mark upon his plan,
the first big win for everyone.

The town he dreamed had just begun.
A planner's job is never done.
He'll measure, draw, connect and test...
and take small steps to reach what's best.



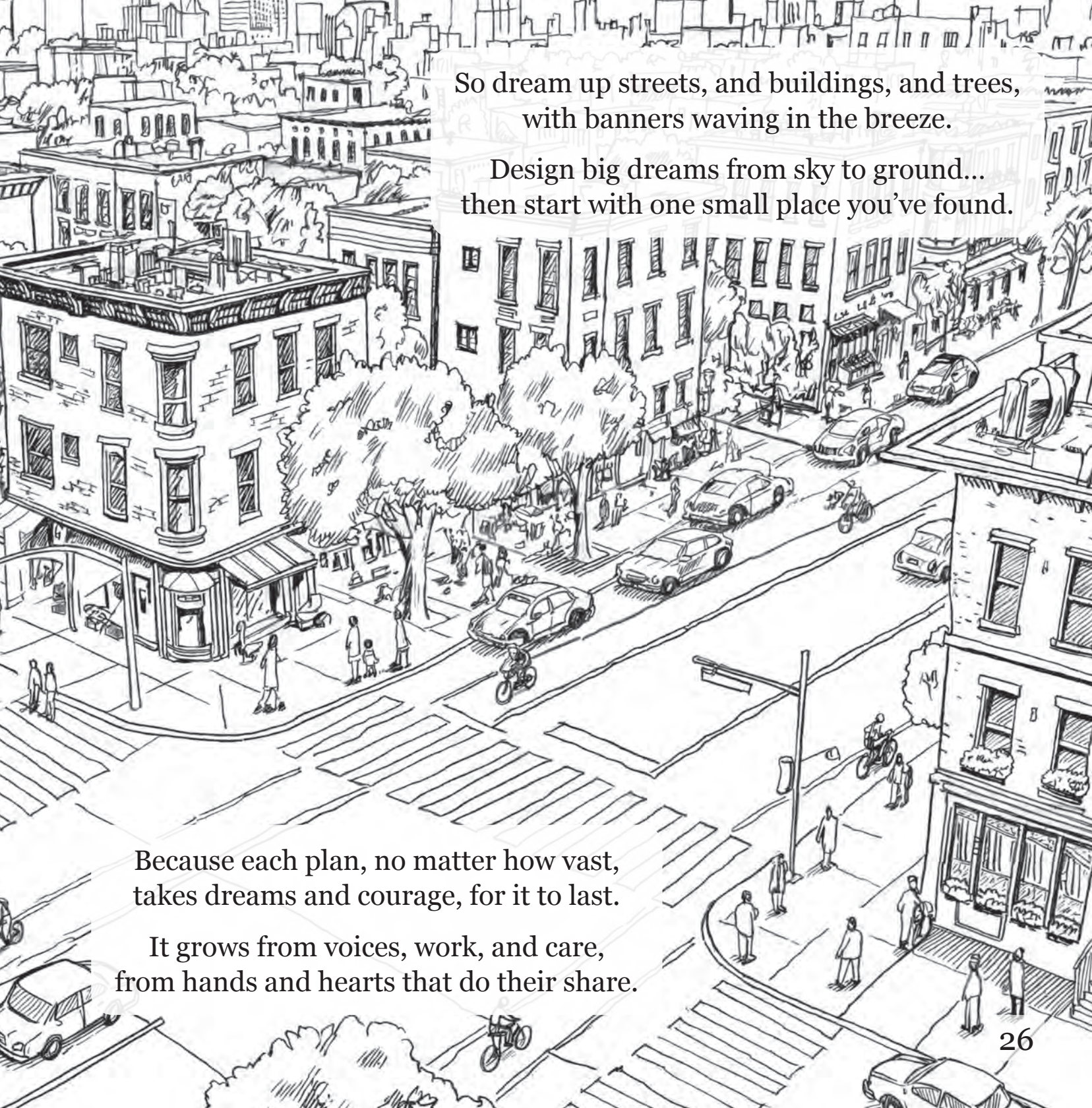


Now Sam walks back to City Hall,
with bigger maps and dreams still tall.
He listens close. He draws what's true.
One fix, one path, for me and you.

The work's not done, there's more ahead.
More trees to plant. More curbs to spread.

He looks, he draws, he dares to try...
with a better town still in his eye.





So dream up streets, and buildings, and trees,
with banners waving in the breeze.

Design big dreams from sky to ground...
then start with one small place you've found.

Because each plan, no matter how vast,
takes dreams and courage, for it to last.

It grows from voices, work, and care,
from hands and hearts that do their share.

Young Planner's Toolbox

8 Steps for Brave Change-Makers

Want to help build a better neighborhood? Here's how Sam got started and how you can too!

1. Look Closely: Good planners are great observers.

Take a walk, or ride around your block. Look carefully at what's around you. Are the sidewalks smooth or cracked? Are there places that feel safe and welcoming, or places that feel confusing or forgotten? Notice where people gather, where they rush, and where they slow down.

Planners pay attention to small details, because small details shape how places feel.

Planner Tip:

Bring a notebook or sketchpad with you. Draw what you see. Circle spots that need help and star places you really like.

2. Notice Who Is There and Who Is Not:

Planning is about everyone.

Look around and ask yourself: Who can use this place easily? Who might have trouble? Think about kids, elders, people using wheelchairs, people carrying groceries, or parents pushing strollers. A good planner notices when a place works well for some people, but not for others.

When you notice who is missing, you start designing places that welcome everyone.

Planner Tip:

Make little stick figures in your drawings. Try drawing people of different ages and abilities to see if your ideas work for all of them.



3. Listen to Others: Planning is not just about your ideas. It is about listening.

Talk to your friends, family, neighbors, and teachers. Ask questions like:

“What do you like about our town?”

“What would you change if you could?”

You might hear stories and ideas you never noticed before. Listening helps planners understand what really matters to people.

Planner Tip:

Write down or draw what others tell you. Remember, every voice matters, even if it is different from yours.

4. Ask “Why?”: Curiosity makes plans better.

When you notice a problem, ask why it happens. Why does the sidewalk flood when it rains? Why is it hard to cross the street? Why does this park feel empty? Asking “why” helps planners move from noticing problems to solving them.

Good questions lead to good ideas.

Planner Tip:

Next to each problem you draw, write a “Why?” bubble. You do not need all the answers. Just asking is a great start.

5. Dream Big and Be Kind: Great plans solve real problems and imagine something better.

Now it is time to imagine. How could your neighborhood be safer, greener, friendlier, or more fun? Dream about places where people want to walk, talk, rest, and play. Big dreams help planners see what is possible.

These activities are designed for classrooms, workshops, charrettes, and community engagement settings. Educators, planners, and community groups are encouraged to adapt them for local contexts, with credit, in the spirit of shared learning.

At the same time, think kindly. Ask how your ideas help others, not just yourself.

Planner Tip:

Mix practical fixes like better lighting or smoother sidewalks with fun ideas like statues, murals, reading benches, or shade trees. Imagination is part of the job.

6. Make a Map or Plan: Planners draw to share ideas.

Sam did not just talk about his ideas. He drew them. Maps and drawings help other people understand what you are thinking. You do not need to be perfect. You just need to be clear.

Your drawings turn ideas into something others can see and talk about.

Planner Tip:

Use a big piece of paper. Draw your neighborhood. Add trees, ramps, crosswalks, gardens, benches, bike paths, lights, and anything else you think would help.

7. Start Small: Big change begins with small steps. You do not have to fix everything at once. Planners often start with one sidewalk, one corner, or one small improvement. Small wins build confidence and show others what is possible.

Every plan grows over time.

Planner Tip:

Circle one idea that feels easiest to start. That can be your first step.

8. Speak Up and Share: Your voice can make a difference.

Sharing your ideas can feel scary, but it matters. Show your plan to a teacher, parent, neighbor, or city leader. You can speak at a school meeting or a community gathering, just like Sam.

You do not need to be loud. You just need to explain what you noticed and why your idea helps people.

Planner Tip:

Practice explaining your plan with a friend. Be clear, be kind, and be proud of the care you put into it.

Ant Watch Challenge

If you look closely at this book's drawings, you may spot a small ant hiding in each scene.

Ants are community builders. They work together, carry more than their size suggests, and build careful, connected systems. Planners do something similar. They notice small details and work with others to improve shared spaces.

Can you find the ant in every illustration?

Good planners are good observers.
Look carefully.

Planning Games

8 Simple Activities to Make Better Places

Want to explore how places really work? Try these simple games to notice, imagine, and start making change.

1. Neighborhood Bingo

What you need: A pencil, paper, and your eyes
Take a walk around your school, park, or neighborhood. Look for things that help people and things that might need fixing. Create a simple bingo grid with boxes like these:

- A smooth sidewalk
- A broken sign
- A shady tree
- A place that feels unsafe
- A place where people like to gather
- A missing ramp or crosswalk
- A mural or colorful wall
- A street with no trees

Mark each one you find. Can you get three in a row?

2. Design Dice

What you need: One die, paper, and drawing tools
Roll the die and draw what you roll. Keep rolling to build your own town.

- 1 = A park with trees
- 2 = A crosswalk or bike lane
- 3 = A school, library, or community space
- 4 = A ramp or path that works for everyone
- 5 = A place to sit, rest, or gather
- 6 = A mural, garden, or something fun

Draw streets, people, and signs too. Try to make a place where everyone feels welcome.

3. What Would You Fix First?

What you need: Your memory and your imagination
Think about a place you go often. Maybe your walk to school or your favorite park. Ask yourself:

- Is there something that makes it hard to get there?
- Is it easy for everyone to use?
- Does it feel safe and friendly?

Now draw one thing you would fix. It could be a smoother sidewalk, a safer crossing, or a new bench in the shade. Start with one small idea. That is how better towns begin.

4. Build-a-Block

What you need: Paper, markers or crayons, scissors (optional)
Each student gets a blank square that represents one city block. Ask them to design their block by drawing streets, buildings, parks, trees, or anything that helps people move, meet, or feel welcome.

When everyone is done, put the blocks together to create a class-sized town. Notice how the blocks connect. Are there sidewalks between them? Is there a park nearby? Can everyone get around easily?

Variation: Use cardboard or construction paper squares and arrange them on the floor to make a larger town map.



These games introduce planning concepts like observation, accessibility, and shared responsibility in ways that work for young participants during classes, workshops, and public engagement activities.

5. The Listening Wall

What you need: Sticky notes or scrap paper, markers, a blank wall or board

Set up a “Listening Wall” with a big question written at the top, such as:

- What would make our town better?
- What do you wish we had near school?

Invite students to add notes or drawings with their ideas. They can also write something a friend, parent, or neighbor has told them.

Afterward, group the ideas by themes like safety, fun, nature, or accessibility. Talk about how planners listen to many voices before making a plan.

6. Street Swap

What you need: Drawing tools, paper, and imagination

Ask students to think of a real street near where they live. Have them draw it the way it is now, with buildings, sidewalks, traffic, and signs.

Then, on a second page (or by folding the paper), have them redraw the street as they wish it could be. They might add trees, wider sidewalks, better lighting, more places to sit, or safer crossings.

This activity helps kids practice noticing real conditions and imagining how to make them better for everyone.



7. Map Your Day

What you need: Paper and pencils or markers

Ask students to draw a simple map of their day, from home to school, or from one favorite place to another. It can be a real path they walk, bike, or ride. Encourage them to mark:

- Places they like or feel safe
- Spots that are confusing or tricky
- Where they stop, rest, or wait
- Where others (like an elder or someone with a stroller) might struggle

This helps them think like planners by noticing how people move through space, and where small changes could help.

8. Planning Pairs

What you need: A partner, paper, and pencils

Working in pairs, students take turns interviewing each other about what they like (or don't like) about their school or neighborhood. Prompts could include:

- What's your favorite place to go?
- Is there a place that needs to change?
- What makes you feel welcome?
- What's missing?

After they talk, each student draws a better place, not for themselves, but for their partner. Then they present their ideas.

This activity teaches listening, empathy, and designing with others in mind, just like real people-first planners.

Young Planner's Idea Page

Use this page to take notes, draw what you observe and imagine a better way.

About This Book

From Wood Blocks to City Blocks is a story about how places can be better when people pay attention and take responsibility for what they see around them.

Through Sam's experience, young readers discover that cities are shaped not only by streets and buildings, but by everyday questions, observations, and conversations. Change often begins with something small, like noticing a crack in the sidewalk and asking how a place could work better for everyone.

The story introduces children to core ideas in planning and civic life:

- Paying attention to how places work
- Considering who a space helps and who it leaves out
- Listening to others before proposing solutions
- Turning ideas into drawings that others can understand
- Starting with one small, practical improvement

Although written for children, the book is also intended for educators, planners, and community groups looking for accessible ways to discuss shared spaces, accessibility, and local decision-making.

This book can support:

- Classroom conversations
- Community walks and mapping exercises
- City Planning Workshops and charrettes
- Discussions about how neighborhoods function and change

Sharing and Civic Use

This book is shared in the spirit of civic learning and people-first planning.

Understanding how cities work should not be limited to professionals. Streets, parks, sidewalks, and public spaces belong to everyone, and everyone deserves a voice in shaping them.

For that reason, the book is released under a Creative Commons Attribution–NonCommercial–ShareAlike 4.0 License (CC BY-NC-SA 4.0), which allows others to share it for NonCommercial purposes with credit and the same license.

If this story encourages someone to observe more carefully, listen more closely, or improve one small place in their community, it has achieved its purpose.

Because better cities begin with listening, learning, and shared imagination.

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P R E S S

About Plusurbia Design

Plusurbia is a planning and urban design studio focused on creating walkable, inclusive, and community-centered places. The firm works with cities, neighborhoods, and local partners to make planning more transparent, more accessible, and more grounded in everyday experience.

This book reflects the belief that **everyone should be included in shaping better places**. And that effort begins with paying attention, listening, and inviting more people, including young ones, into the conversation.

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