

Teaching with SimCity: Guide to Building a Starter City



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<https://sites.psu.edu/simcity/>

Designed for use with SimCity 4

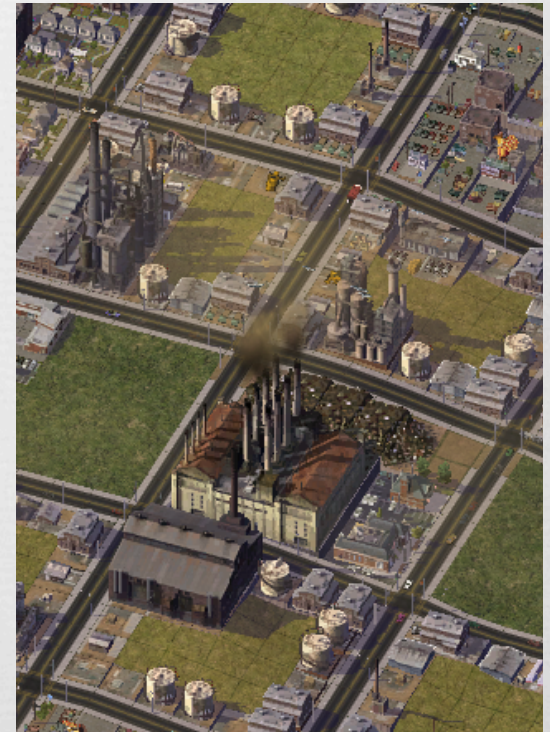
Designing a Starter City

Overview



This tutorial will explain four easy steps to creating a successful starter city for use in the SimCity governance simulation. These steps include:

- ❧ 1st Laying the Foundations for a City
- ❧ 2nd Creating a Basic Infrastructure
- ❧ 3rd Zone, Zone, Zone
- ❧ 4th Establishing Basic Services
- ❧ 5th Balancing the Budget



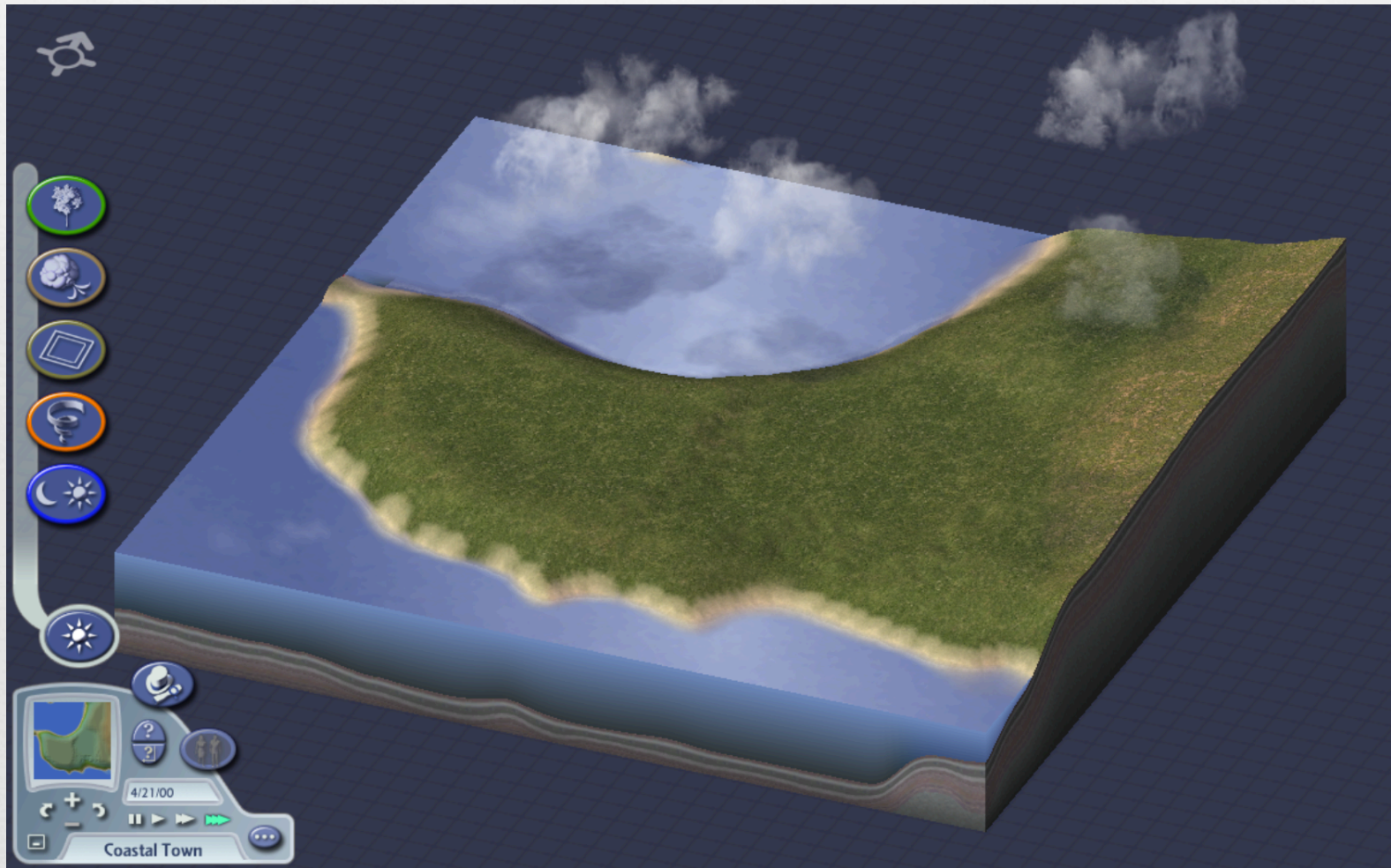
Principle of a Good City



When designing a starter city for the SimCity governance simulation, there are four keys to success:

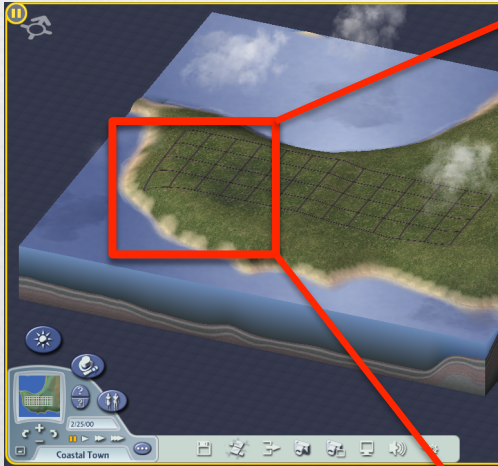
- ❧ **Simplicity** – The city layout should be very simple and easy to understand at a glance.
- ❧ **Stability** – For beginners, cities should be economically stable. Students new to the exercise won't be ready to solve a looming budget crisis. A balanced budget gives players time to acclimate to the game.
- ❧ **Perfectibility**– Starter cities should be poorly designed. There should be opportunities for students to improve the city, whether their playing to meet demands for social welfare (Democrats) or to lower taxes (Republicans).

1st Laying the Foundations for a City

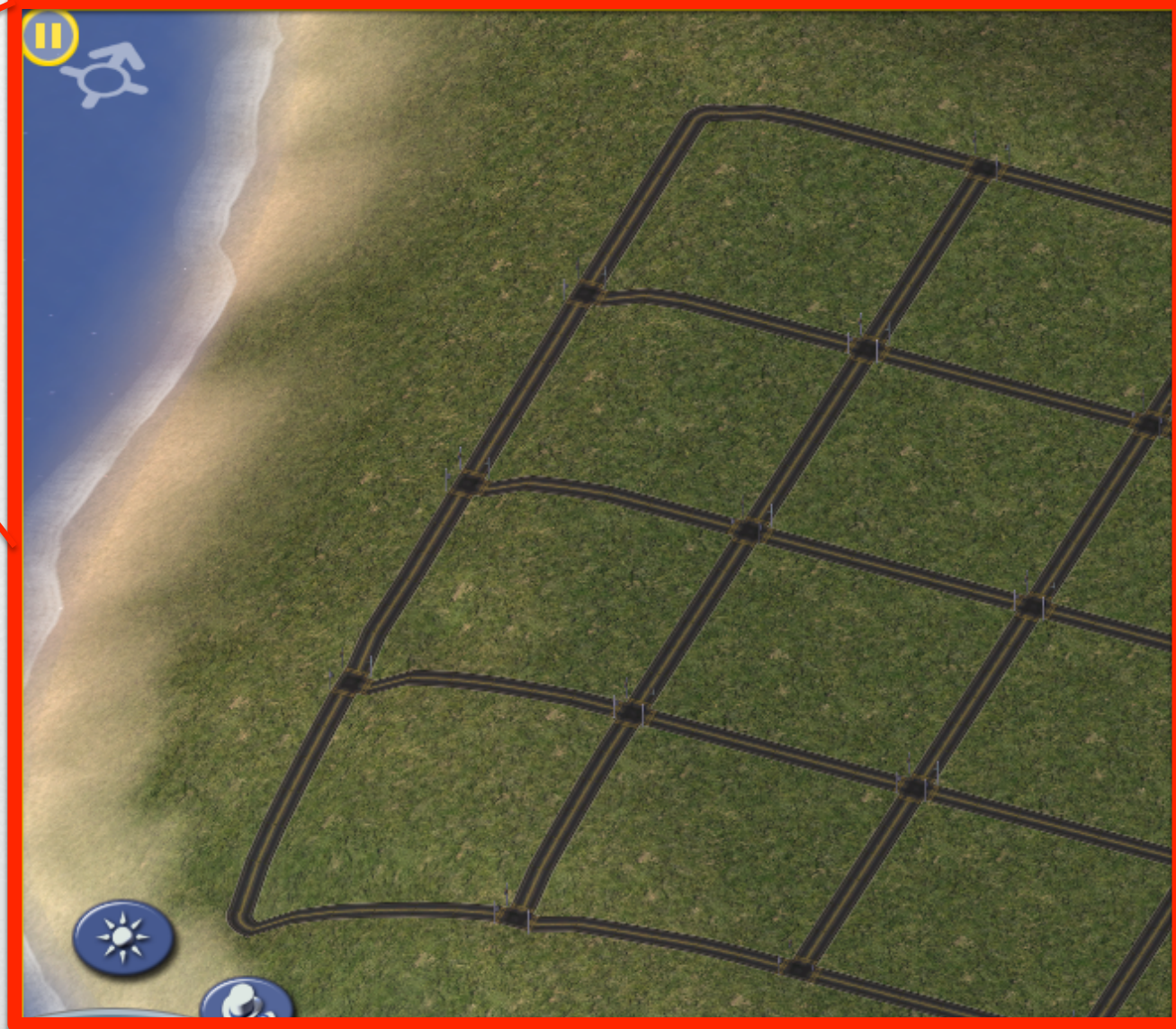


Citing your city: Begin by selecting (or designing with SimCity's terrain editor) a relatively flat landmass.

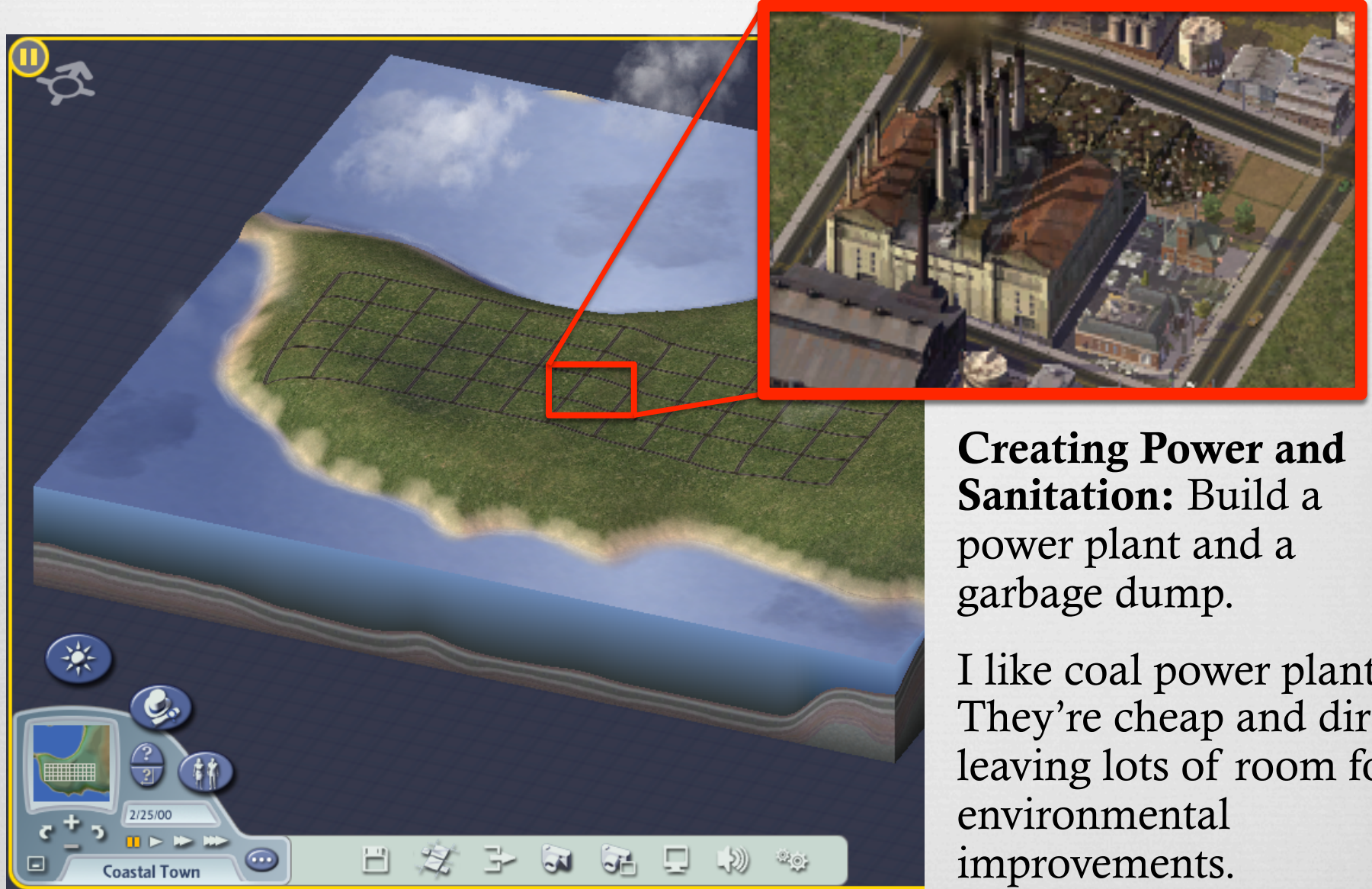
1st Laying the Foundations for a City



Built Roads: Lay very simple grid-like streets. I prefer blocks that are 6x6 squares. SimCity 4 requires most zoning areas to be 3 squares from a road in order for the land to be properly developed.



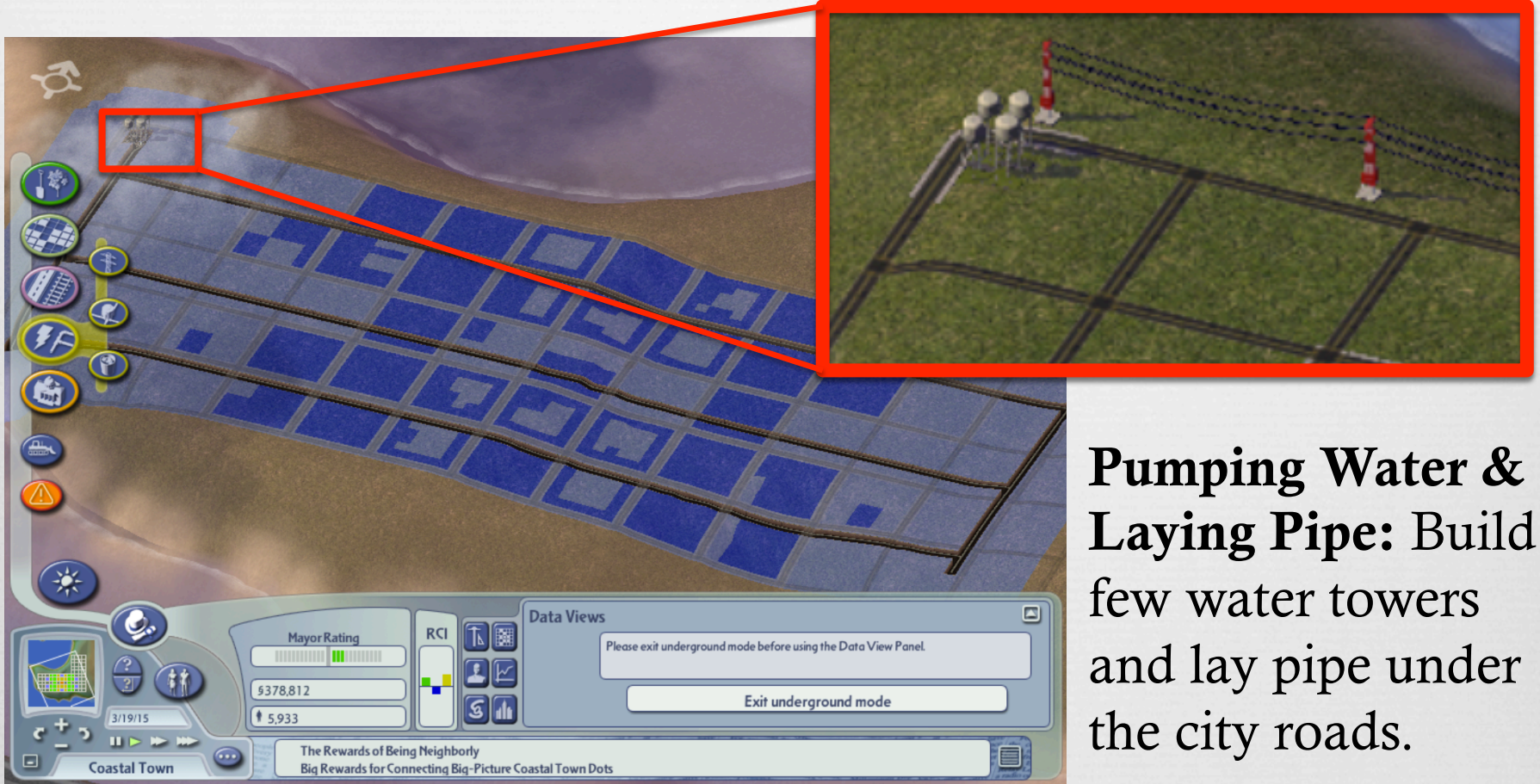
2nd Create a Basic Infrastructure



Creating Power and Sanitation: Build a power plant and a garbage dump.

I like coal power plants. They're cheap and dirty, leaving lots of room for environmental improvements.

2nd Create a Basic Infrastructure



Pumping Water & Laying Pipe: Build a few water towers and lay pipe under the city roads.

Tip: Make sure your water towers are connected to the power plant with high voltage lines. Build water towers in more than one location. This makes it less likely the city will have problems with the water supply as it develops.

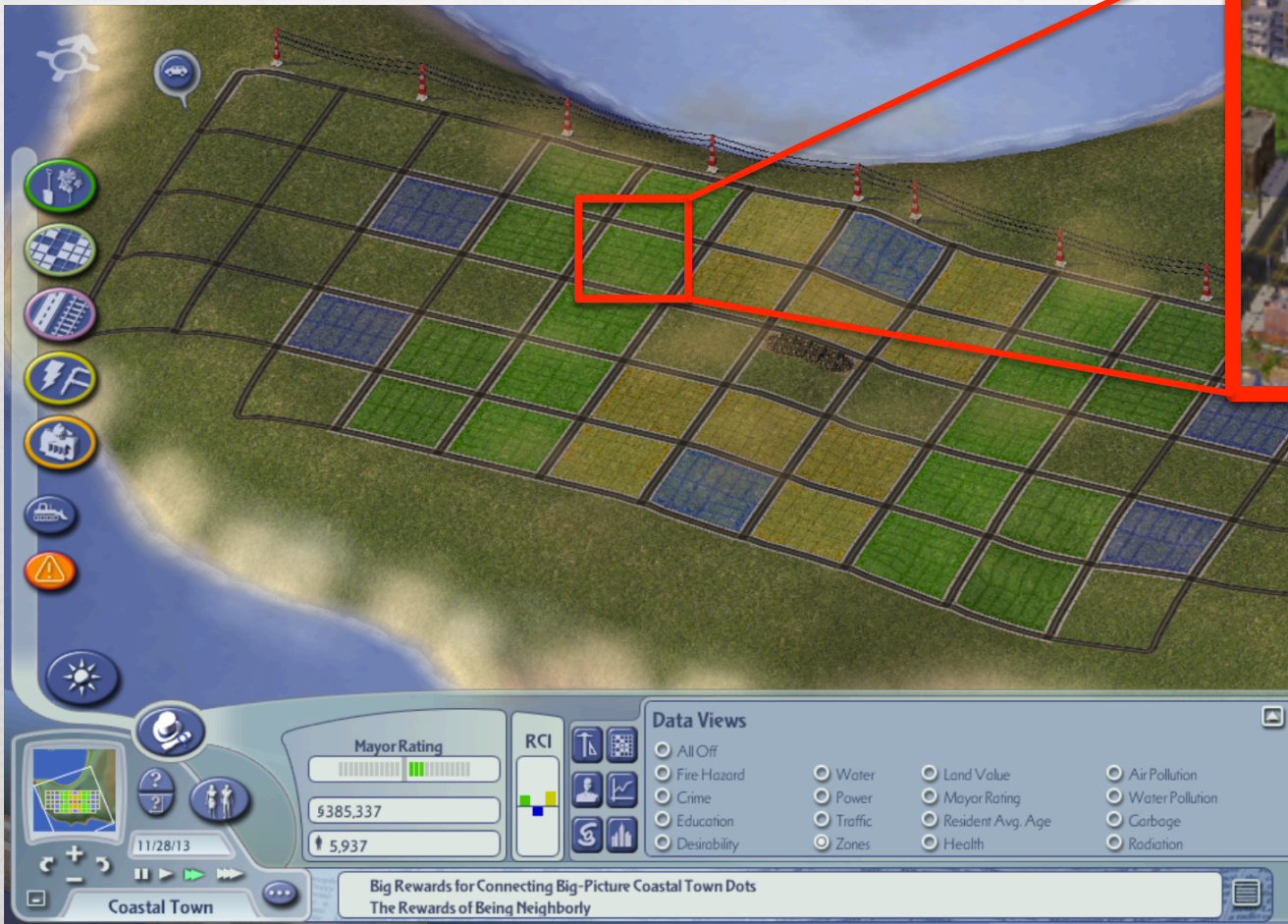
3rd Zone, Zone, Zone



Zone Industrial: Citizens will need jobs. Zone about 12-20 squares for industrial development (**yellow squares**).

Tip: You can choose to zone squares as agricultural, medium industrial or heavy industrial. I prefer heavy industrial to get started.

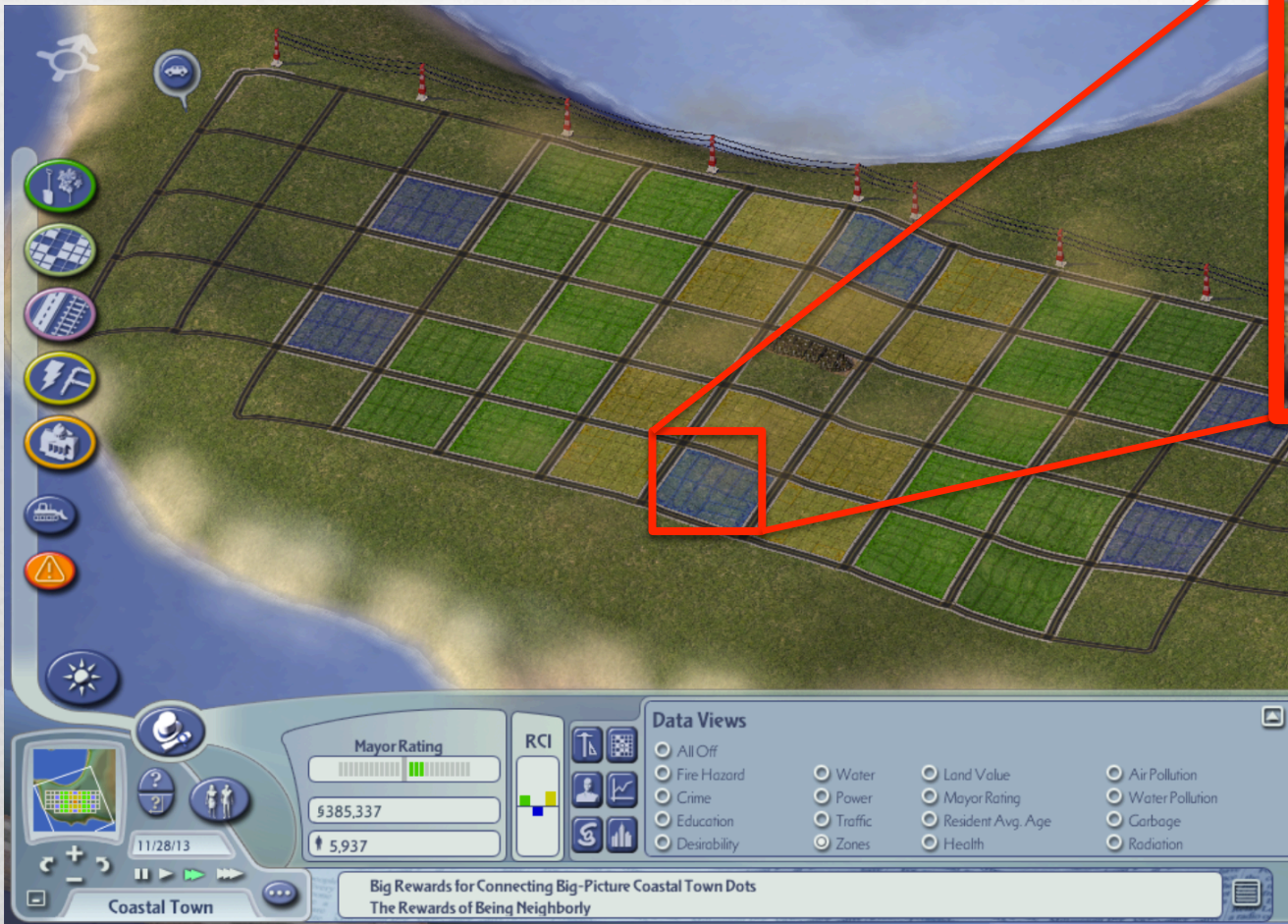
3rd Zone, Zone, Zone



Zone Residential:
Citizens will need places to live.
Zone about 12-20 squares for residential development (**green squares**).

Tip: You can choose to zone squares as light residential, medium residential or heavy residential. I typically start with medium residential zones.

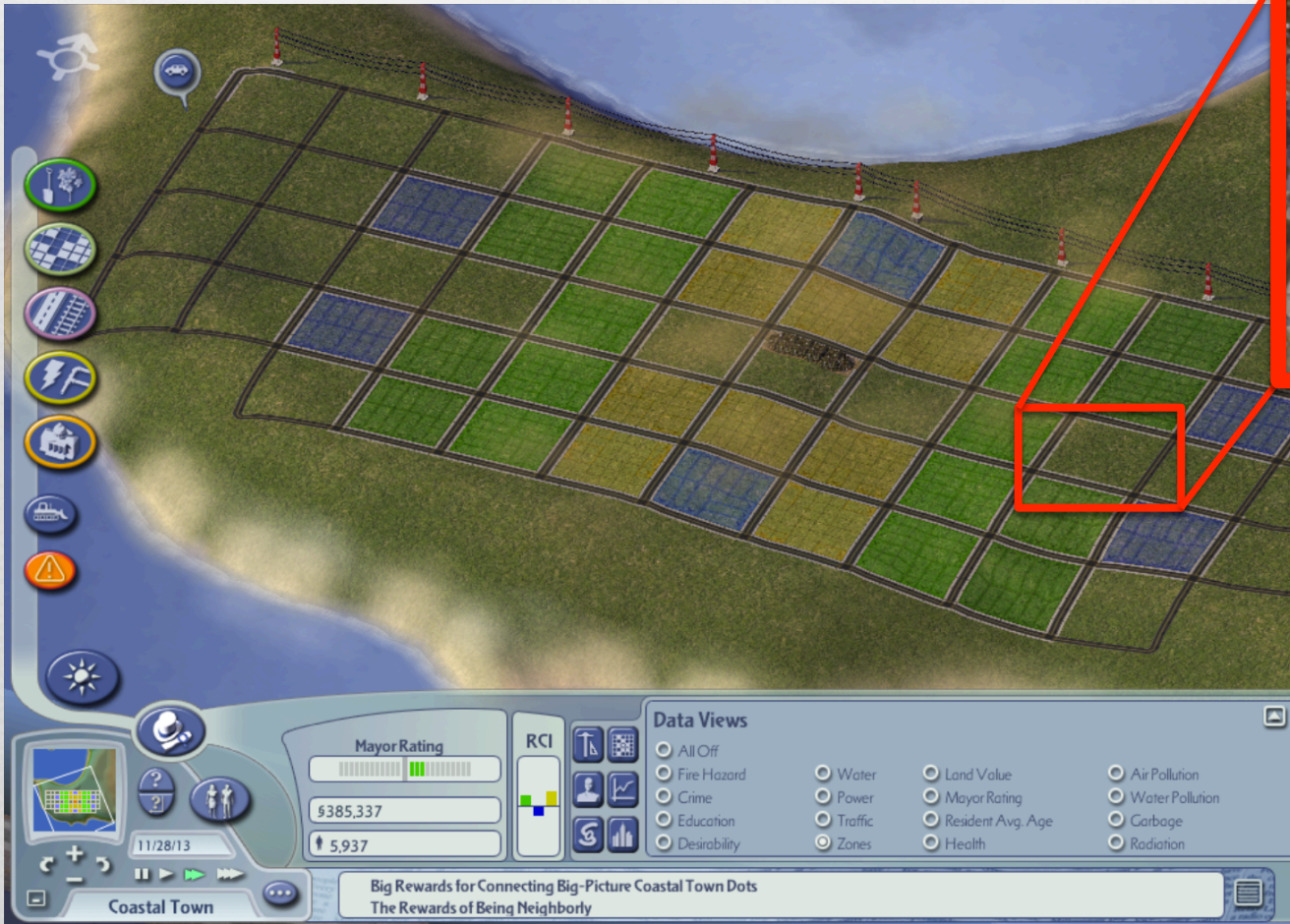
3rd Zone, Zone, Zone



Zone Commercial: Citizens will need places to shop. Zone about 5-6 squares for commercial development (**blue squares**).

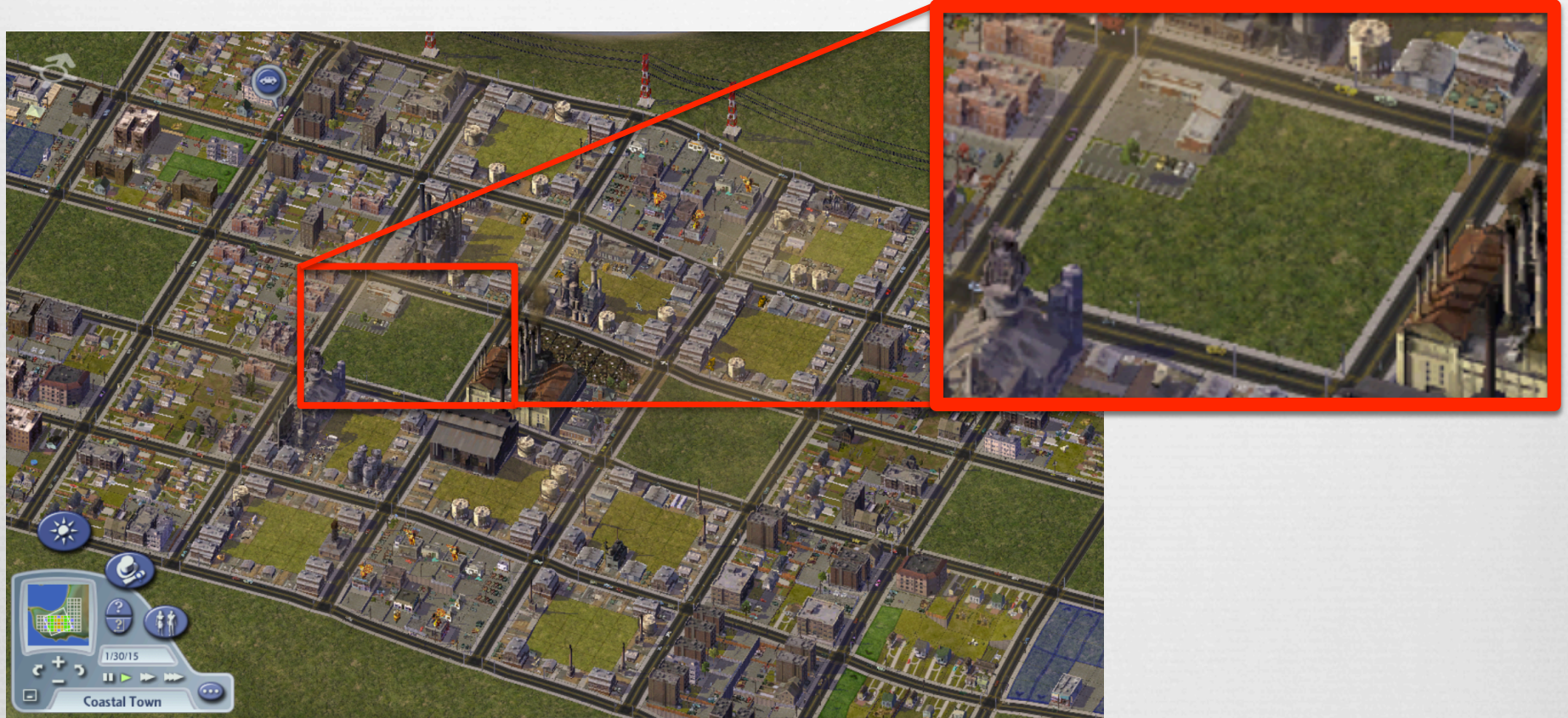
Tip: You can choose to zone squares as light commercial, medium commercial or heavy commercial. I typically start with medium commercial zones.

3rd Zone, Zone, Zone



Leave Gaps:
Remember to leave empty spaces for your municipal buildings (i.e. schools, fire stations, police, hospitals, etc.).

4th Establishing Basic Services



Build Social Services: In the blank spaces construct: 1) an elementary school, 2) a small fire station, 3) a small police station, 4) a small health clinic.

Tip: Don't build a high school, college or library. Early in the game, these tend to bust the budget.

5th Balance the Budget

The screenshot shows the SimCity 4 budget management interface. A red box highlights the 'Taxes' window, which is used to adjust tax rates for different income categories. The 'Taxes' window is divided into three sections: Residential Monthly Income, Commercial Monthly Income, and Industrial Monthly Income. Each section lists various income types with their current tax rates (all set to 9.0%) and monthly estimates. The 'Accept' and 'Cancel' buttons are visible at the bottom of the 'Taxes' window.

Residential Monthly Income			Monthly Estimate
Low Wealth Residential (R-9)	9.0 %		\$1,042
Medium Wealth Residential (R-55)	9.0 %		90
High Wealth Residential (R-555)	9.0 %		90
Subtotal			\$1,042

Commercial Monthly Income			Monthly Estimate
Low Wealth Commercial Service (CS-9)	9.0 %		\$141
Medium Wealth Commercial Service (CS-55)	9.0 %		\$69
High Wealth Commercial Service (CS-555)	9.0 %		90
Medium Wealth Commercial Office (CO-55)	9.0 %		\$35
High Wealth Commercial Office (CO-555)	9.0 %		90
Subtotal			\$245

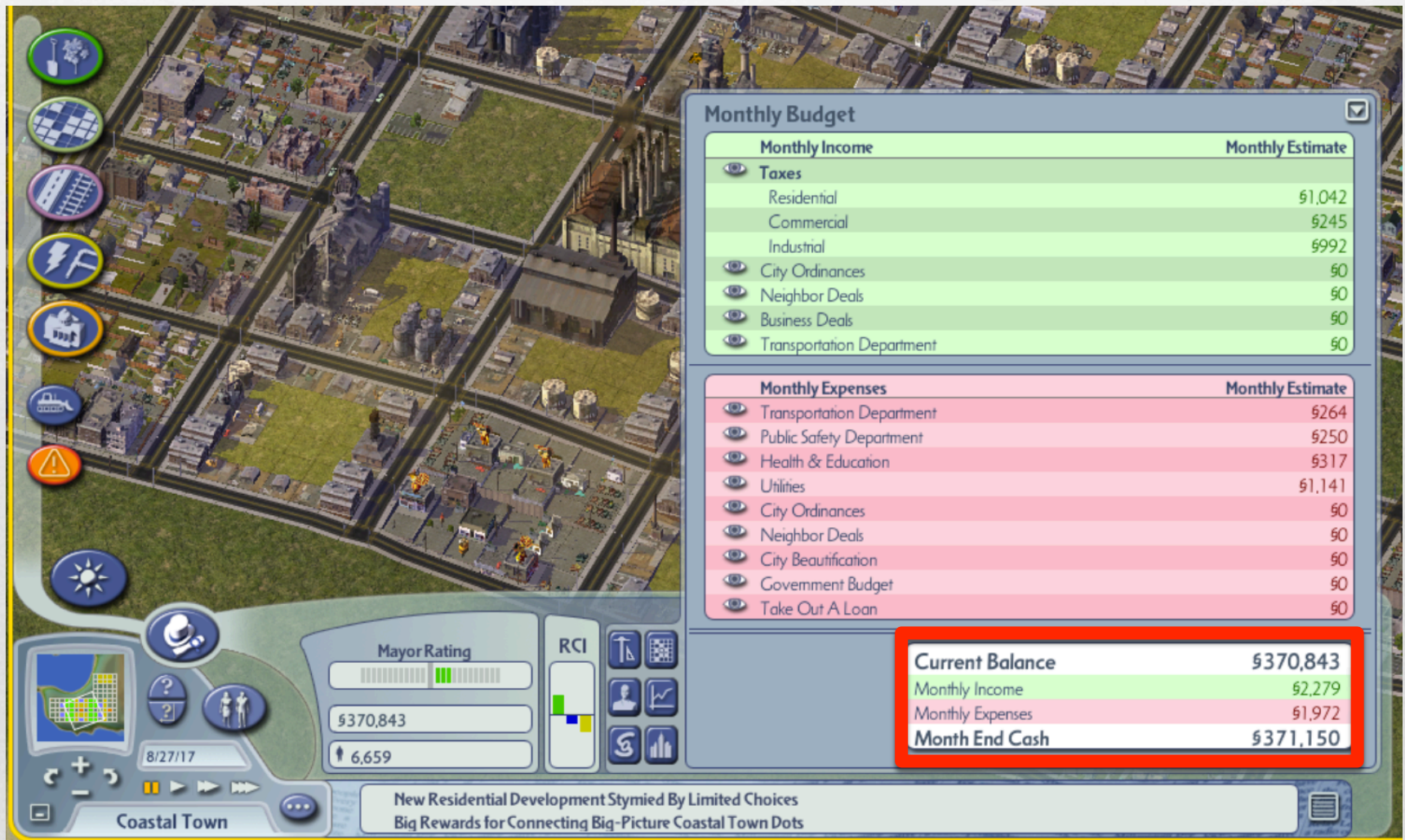
Industrial Monthly Income			Monthly Estimate
Agricultural (I-Ag)	9.0 %		\$25
Dirty Industry (I-D)	9.0 %		\$651
Manufacturing Industry (I-M)	9.0 %		\$316
High Tech Industry (I-HT)	9.0 %		90
Subtotal			\$992

Buttons: Accept, Cancel

City Information: Mayor Rating: 6/6, Current Balance: \$370,843, Monthly Income: \$2,279, Monthly Expenses: \$1,972, Month End Cash: \$371,150

Adjust tax rates till the budget is balanced: I normally run the city for a few years and play with the tax rates till income roughly matches expenses.

5th Balance the Budget



The screenshot shows the SimCity 4 budget interface. The background is an aerial view of a city. On the left is a vertical toolbar with icons for various city services. At the bottom left is a control panel with a map, a Mayor Rating bar, and a cash reserve of \$370,843. The main panel on the right displays the 'Monthly Budget' with two tables: 'Monthly Income' and 'Monthly Expenses'. A red box highlights the 'Current Balance' and 'Month End Cash' at the bottom of the budget panel.

Monthly Income	Monthly Estimate
Taxes	
Residential	\$1,042
Commercial	\$245
Industrial	\$992
City Ordinances	\$0
Neighbor Deals	\$0
Business Deals	\$0
Transportation Department	\$0

Monthly Expenses	Monthly Estimate
Transportation Department	\$264
Public Safety Department	\$250
Health & Education	\$317
Utilities	\$1,141
City Ordinances	\$0
Neighbor Deals	\$0
City Beautification	\$0
Government Budget	\$0
Take Out A Loan	\$0

Current Balance	\$370,843
Monthly Income	\$2,279
Monthly Expenses	\$1,972
Month End Cash	\$371,150

Spend your Extra Cash: Don't leave the students with more than a \$20,000 cash reserve. Spend excess cash as needed.

Leaving Room to Grow



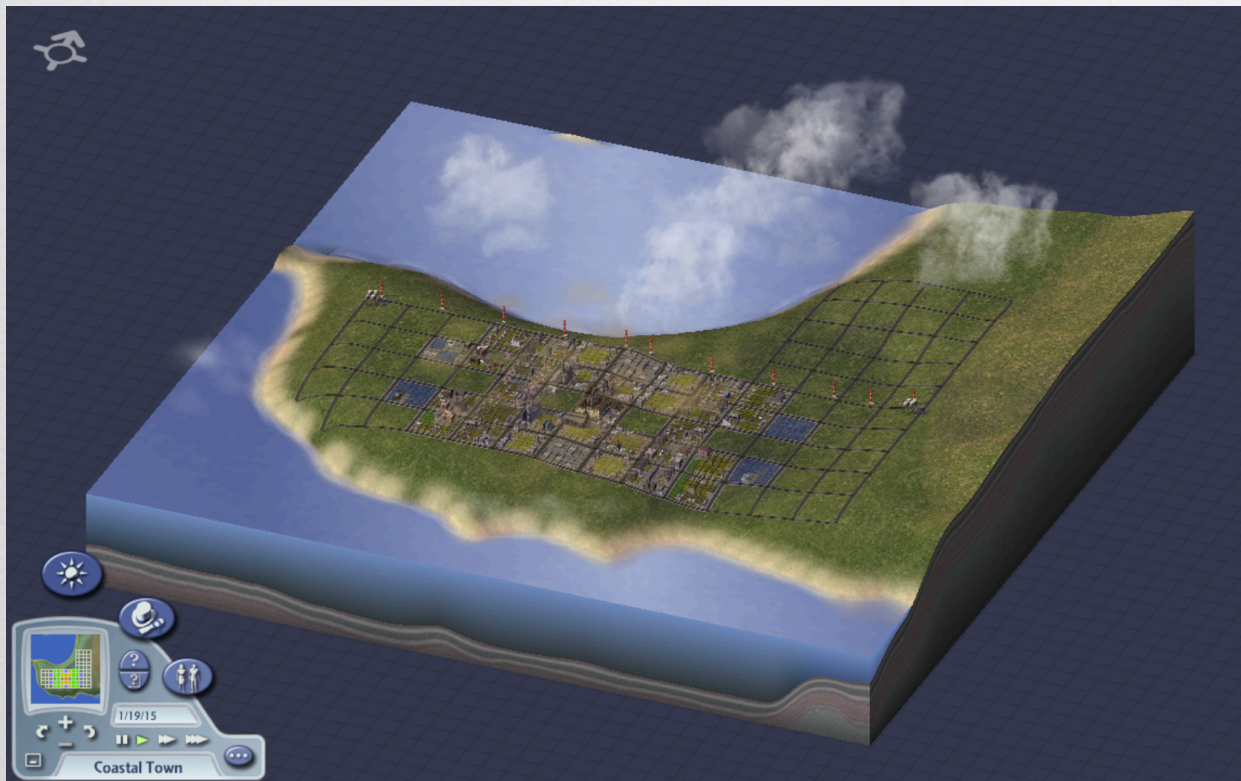
When making a starter city, I often leave empty spaces on the outskirts of the town for the students to develop if they want to grow the city.

Beyond the Basics

Creating Special Scenarios



If students master collectively governing basic starter cities, consider constructing more advanced challenges.



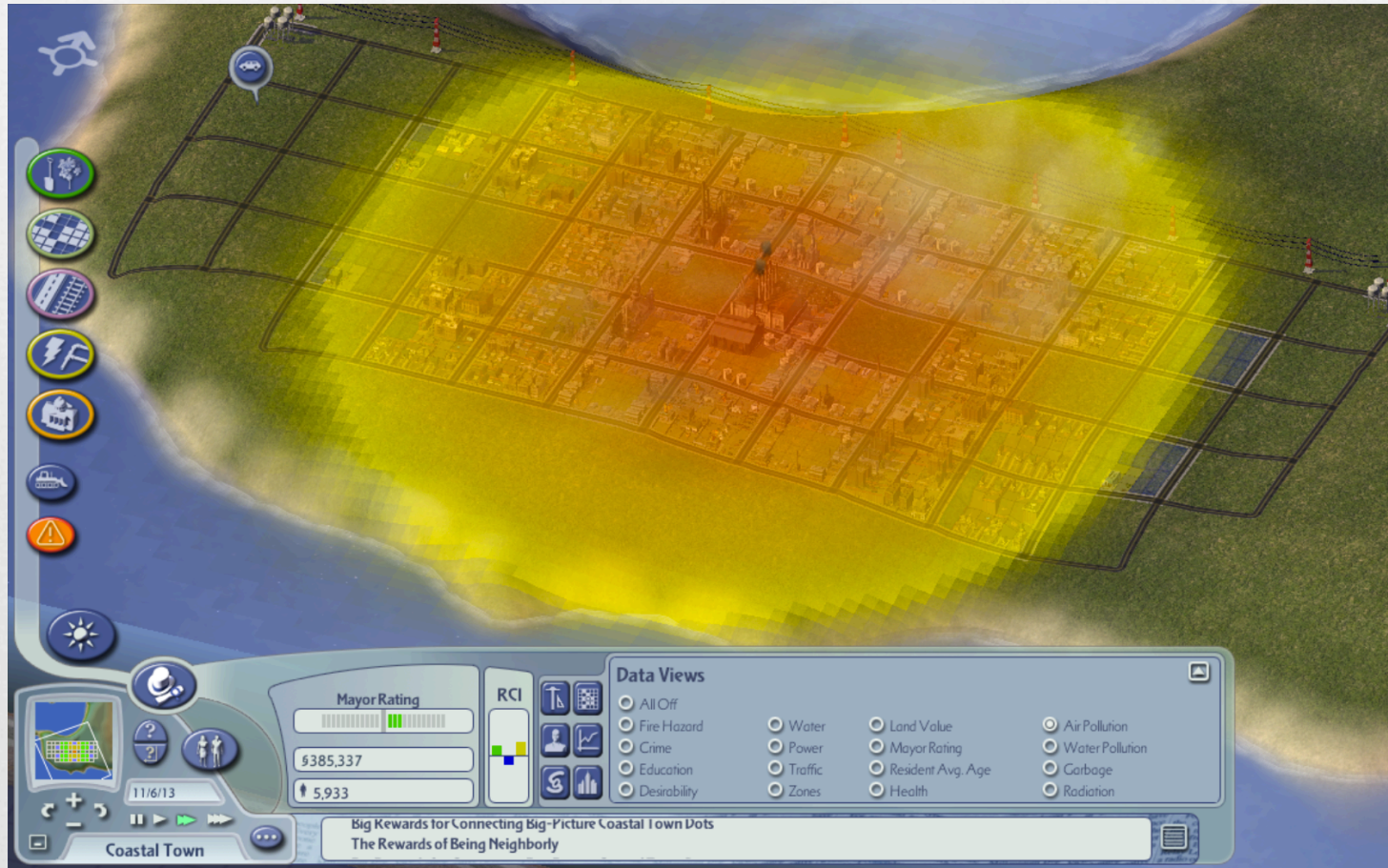
Create a particularly bad city with one overriding problem.

- Environmental Crisis
- Fiscal Cliff
- Natural Disaster

Challenge the students to fix the problem without busting the city's budget.

Beyond the Basics

Environmental Crisis



Environmental Crisis - Create a city with a serious air pollution problem. Build a coal burning power plant, a garbage incinerator, and lots of heavy industry right in the middle of an otherwise beautiful city. Challenge the students to reduce the pollution by 50% while still balancing the budget.

Beyond the Basics

Fiscal Cliff



Fiscal Cliff- Create a city with a large rainy day fund but a huge budget deficit. Challenge the students to balance the budget before the city spirals into fiscal ruin. Constructing unnecessary high schools, a city college, museums and libraries is a great way to throw money away. Let the students clean up the mess!

Beyond the Basics

Natural Disaster



Natural Disasters- Create a relatively well run city. At the start of the simulation, use SimCity's natural disaster generator to throw the city in to crisis. A big fire, meteor strike, earthquake or tornado (see above) will give the students a real challenge. Remember to record the city stats after the disaster strikes!



Thank You



Thank you for taking the time to review the SimCity governance simulation Guide to Building a Starter City. Please send your comments and questions to...

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