



In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

## **Doctor of Philosophy**

**Benjamin W. Stanley**

Will defend his dissertation:

### **Sustainable Urban Development and the Political Economy of Growth in Phoenix, Arizona**

#### **Abstract**

Sustainable development in an American context implies an ongoing shift from quantitative growth in energy, resource, and land use to the qualitative development of social-ecological systems, human capital, and dense, vibrant built environments. Sustainable urban development theory emphasizes locally and bioregionally emplaced economic development where the relationships between people, localities, products, and capital are tangible to and controllable by local stakeholders. Critical theory provides a mature understanding of the political economy of land development in capitalist economies, representing a crucial bridge between urban sustainability's infill development goals and the contemporary realities of the development industry. Since its inception, Phoenix, Arizona has exemplified the quantitative growth paradigm, and recurring instances of land speculation, non-local capital investment, and growth-based public policy have stymied local, tangible control over development from Phoenix's territorial history to modern attempts at downtown revitalization. Utilizing property ownership and sales data as well as interviews with development industry stakeholders, the political economy of infill land development in downtown Phoenix during the mid-2000s boom-and-bust cycle is analyzed. Data indicate that non-local property ownership has risen significantly over the past 20 years and rent-seeking land speculation has been a significant barrier to infill development. Many speculative strategies monopolize the publicly created value inherent in zoning entitlements, tax incentives and property assessment, indicating that political and policy reforms targeted at a variety of governance levels are crucial for achieving the sustainable development of urban land. Policy solutions include reforming the interconnected system of property sales, value assessment, and taxation to emphasize property use values; replacing existing tax incentives with tax increment financing and community development benefit agreements; regulating vacant land ownership and deed transfers; and encouraging innovative private development and tenure models like generative construction and community land trusts.

Wednesday, October 30, 2013  
3:00 PM  
Wrigley Hall, Room 401

Faculty, students, and the general public are invited.

Supervisory Committee:

Christopher G. Boone, Chair  
Charles Redman, Member  
Bob Bolin, Member