



In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

Master of Science

Patricia Garland

Will defend her thesis

Environmental Justice and the Siting of SR-85 and North Gateway Transfer Station

Abstract

It is widely recognized that, compared to others, minority and low-income populations are more exposed to environmental burdens and unwanted land uses like waste facilities. To prevent these injustices, cities and industry need to recognize these potential problems in the siting process and work to address them. I studied Phoenix, AZ, which has historically suffered from environmental justice issues. I examined whether Phoenix considered environmental justice concerns when siting their newest landfill (SR-85) and transfer station (North Gateway Transfer Station). Additionally, I assessed current views on sustainability from members of the Phoenix Transportation and Infrastructure Subcommittee and of decision-makers in the Public Works Department and Solid Waste Division. Using a mixed methods approach consisting of interviews, document analysis, and a demographic assessment of census tracts, I addressed two main research questions:

1. Do the distributions and siting processes of environmental burdens from SR-85 and North Gateway Transfer Station constitute a case of environmental injustice according to commonly held definitions?
2. Do current Solid Waste and council members on the Transportation and Infrastructure subcommittee consider environmental justice, defined as stakeholder engagement, to be a part of sustainability?

The results show that the distribution and siting processes of environmental burdens from these facilities may constitute a case of environmental injustice. While city officials do involve stakeholders in siting decisions, the effects of this involvement is unclear. An analysis of long-term demographic data, however, revealed no significant racial, ethnic, or economic effects due to the locations of the SR-85 and North Gateway Transfer Station.

Interviews with current members of the Transportation and Infrastructure Subcommittee, Public Works Department, and Solid Waste Division indicated that Phoenix's decision-makers don't consider environmental justice as part of sustainability. However, they seem to consider stakeholder engagement as important for decision-making.

To help mitigate future injustices, Phoenix needs buffer zone policies for waste facilities and stakeholder engagement policies for decision-making to ensure the public is engaged appropriately in all circumstances. Enacting these policies will help Phoenix become both a more sustainable city and one in which stakeholders have the opportunity to provide feedback and are given decision-making power.

Tuesday, June 16, 2015
8:30 am
Wrigley Hall, 481

Faculty, students, and the general public are invited.

Supervisory Committee:
Dr. Aaron Golub, Chair
Dr. Christopher Boone, Member
Dr. Yushim Kim, Member