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Citizens, Development Interests, and Local Land-Use Regulation

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Local governments confer significant benefits and costs on individuals and businesses through their power to regulate private land use. This article analyzes such regulation by using discriminant analysis to test a model of rezoning decision making. The results indicate that the best predictor of a local governing body's decision in a rezoning case is the recommendation of the appointed planning commission. This is contrary to both scholarly and popular expectations that pressure by developers or public protest is the major factor influencing elected officials in rezoning cases. The results suggest that citizen advisory boards may have significant effects on local policy-making, and that elected officials use such institutions both to provide themselves a buffer from political pressure and to forge a consensus on issues.

Urban politics . . . is a means by which space and place are socially controlled and allocated in order to facilitate or limit accessibility [to things of value]—
Oliver Williams (1971, 36).

[T]he discretion available to a local government in determining land use remains the greatest arena for the exercise of local autonomy. . . . Urban politics is above all the politics of land use—Paul Peterson (1981, 25).

As Williams and Peterson suggest, the physical location of individuals, groups, businesses, and other organizations provides them with various benefits and costs, many of which result from the actions of local government. Nonetheless, little systematic research has examined the most direct way local governments influence locational benefits—their power to regulate land use. The present study helps to fill this gap in the literature by testing a model of the rezoning process.

Since the late 1930s, zoning has become the centerpiece of local land-use regulation (Plotkin 1987, 75–110). Communities generally arrange land-use categories in a hierarchy downward from farm land and open space, which have the most strict limits on development, through residential uses, office

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and commercial zones, to heavy industry at the lower end. Property owners normally may adopt the designated land use or one of greater "rank" in the hierarchy.

Those who want to make more intensive use of their property must have it rezoned to permit a less restrictive use, i.e., a lower rank in the hierarchy. In most localities, rezoning applications are reviewed by professional planners and a planning commission made up of laypeople appointed by the city council or county commission. The planning commission holds a public hearing on each case and makes a recommendation to the elected governing body which retains final authority to rezone the land (see Kelly 1988).

LOCATION, LOCAL GOVERNMENT, AND INDIVIDUAL BENEFITS

Recent research on urban politics has devoted increasing attention to two ways in which local government policies advantage or disadvantage individuals, groups, and firms because of their location. First, the literature has considered the costs or benefits that result from residing in one jurisdiction as opposed to another. These are collective effects accruing to all residents or businesses in a city (e.g., tax rates, amenities, services). Within this context, local governments compete to improve their economic well-being by attracting residents and firms, who can promote their interests by moving to another city (see Peterson 1981; Sharp 1984; Lyons and Lowery 1986).

The second type of research on locational effects has analyzed variation in policy outputs within communities. Much of this literature has examined the distribution of services among neighborhoods to determine if there is any systematic bias along class, racial, or similar lines (see Lineberry 1977; Hero 1986). A comparable body of literature has considered whether local agencies are more responsive to citizen demands from some areas or groups than others (see Mladenka 1981; Jones 1981).

Studying local zoning practices is an important extension of this research because land-use regulation has locational effects both between and within communities. As Baer (1985) notes, a local government's general policies regarding land use serve to attract or keep out certain types of residents and firms. These policies thus establish a community's overall character and development pattern, which may differ significantly from those of neighboring cities. Decisions on specific cases, on the other hand, have direct effects on both rezoning applicants and nearby property owners. Those who have their land rezoned may enjoy a significant increase in its value and other benefits, while adjacent owners may see their property values and the nature of their neighborhood change as the rezoned tract is developed. With so much at stake, proposals to rezone specific pieces of property can lead to significant political conflict (Logan and Molotch 1987), although the literature is very unclear about the nature of rezoning decision making.

FACTORS INFLUENCING REZONING OUTCOMES

Predicting how local governments will decide rezoning cases is difficult for three reasons. First, what is known about the rezoning process is based largely on anecdotes, analysis of individual cases, or the impressions of participants. Second, most empirical research has a limited focus. The few available studies of rezoning decisions typically examine only one local government (see Steele 1987). This reliance on case studies is understandable, though, given the difficulty of gathering data on rezoning applications. Moreover, empirical studies of zoning concentrate heavily on its impacts, especially land values, housing prices, segregation, and similar economic or social effects (see Fischel 1985, 59–81, 231–251; Shlay and Rossi 1981). Finally, existing research has produced competing claims about the factors affecting the outcome of rezoning cases. Three types of variables have been suggested as important determinants: characteristics of participants, the nature of the proposal being considered, and the structure of the rezoning process.

Participants

There are conflicting assertions about how much influence citizens and business interests have on the local governing body's rezoning decisions. Some have argued that members of city councils and county commissions decide rezoning by satisfying as many constituents as possible in order to be reelected and are most likely to reject or modify applications that generate public protest (Fischel 1985, 207–230; Siegan 1972, 16–18; Weaver and Babcock 1979, 5–10, 140–53). Richard Babcock (1966, 141), perhaps the nation's most prominent zoning lawyer, has observed that, "It is a rare municipal legislature that will reject what it believes to be the wishes of the neighbors."

Limited evidence does suggest that public officials are responsive to citizen pressure over land-use regulation. One study found that when citizen opposition was present, California coastal commissions were less likely to follow a staff recommendation to approve a development permit but more likely to adopt a staff recommendation for denial (Rosener 1982). It should be noted, though, that these commissions faced only the dichotomous choice of approving or denying a permit. A study of Evanston, Illinois, an older Chicago suburb, discovered that public support for rezoning had no impact on the local planning board's recommendation if there was no opposition present. On the other hand, more than 80% of the rezoning requests were recommended for denial when there was opposition but no support for a proposal. When there was both support and opposition, the majority of cases were recommended for outright or modified approval (Steele 1987, 732–37).

Another view holds that business interests, especially developers, exert the most influence over local land-use decisions. Those who make their profit from land development rely on local governments to provide infrastructure and regulation which aid their success. Moreover, because developers are concerned with the specific location of growth, they are expected to be active and regular participants in local politics (Elkin 1985; Logan and Molotch 1987). Indeed, some studies have concluded that developers "capture" local land-use regulation (see Allensworth 1980). Other research suggests that real estate interests are among the most powerful groups in local politics because of direct links such as campaign contributions, frequent appointment of developers and realtors to planning commissions, and even outright corruption (Gottdiener 1977, 75–87; Prewitt 1970, 112–14; Gardiner and Lyman 1978).

Others explain business dominance of the rezoning process as the result of a mismatch in which "the local officials that developers commonly deal with are rarely an intellectual or political match for the high-priced talent the developers can command" (Allensworth 1980, 3). A third explanation of developers' influence is that local officials are predisposed to support requests for more intensive development of land in order to enhance a city's fiscal well-being (Logan and Molotch 1987; Elkin 1985; Stone 1980).

Those who argue that development interests will control rezoning essentially describe what Wilson (1980, 369–70) calls client politics—a pattern of regulation in which benefits are narrowly concentrated and costs are dispersed. While developers benefit financially as rezoned tracts of land are improved, costs such as traffic congestion, public improvements, and the like are distributed to the community as a whole. Individuals have little incentive to oppose most rezonings under such conditions. It is possible, however, that zoning is a form of what Wilson (1980, 368) labels interest-group politics. Both the costs and benefits of regulation are narrowly concentrated in such cases, which leads to frequent competition among groups. Thus, if a developer and nearby property owners will be affected significantly by a rezoning, the activities of both could influence the outcome of a case.

The Rezoning Proposal

The second general factor which may influence a rezoning decision is the proposal itself. The amount of land involved, the current zoning, and the requested zoning may affect a governing body's decision (Babcock 1966, 30–40, 140–44; Siegan 1972, 11–18; Hutcheson and Snow 1986). Public officials may hesitate to rezone tracts of substantial size; larger areas may also be more likely to generate citizen protest. Outcomes could also be affected by differences between the existing and requested zoning, with officials generally trying to "overzone"—zone land as restrictively as possible in order to

increase political control over future development (Siegan 1972, 4–11, 123–33; Fleischmann 1989). Elected officials may be especially likely to prevent the introduction of other land uses in single-family areas and to turn down requests for apartment or other multifamily zoning (Babcock 1966, 30–32, 75–79, 148–49; Plotkin 1987, 30–37).

The Rezoning Process

The third set of variables encompasses the structure of the rezoning process, particularly barriers to applicants and the role of planners and the planning commission in decision making. Local governments use several procedures that can have a chilling effect on applicants' behavior. Most charge a nonrefundable fee for filing a rezoning request; these can range from less than one hundred up to several thousand dollars. Jurisdictions also limit the time between rezoning applications covering the same piece of property, which means that those whose applications are denied may have to wait as long as two years to file another request. Thus, the threat of both losing money and keeping their current zoning for an extended period provides powerful incentives for applicants to put together proposals that will not be rejected by the city council or county commission. These procedures help eliminate frivolous requests and increase the likelihood of applications being accepted, at least in modified form.

Most zoning ordinances also specify a formal role for the planning staff and the appointed planning commission, both of which are isolated from the electoral process. Planners tend to maintain a liberal, progovernment ideology, which may bring them into conflict with business interests less receptive to land-use regulation. Planners also recognize the political nature of their job: most neither consider themselves neutral judges nor see citizen groups as representative organizations (Vasu 1979, 69–89, 146–56; Forester 1989). The planning staff can influence rezoning in several ways. One is an official recommendation on how to dispose of an application. Communities with few professional staff members seldom make such recommendations a formal part of the rezoning process. Other jurisdictions avoid this step to reduce the workload of their staff or to increase the political influence of elected officials. Bureaucratic discretion may flourish under such conditions, with planners interacting behind the scenes with applicants and other participants in a case. This can lead to proposals being modified, withdrawn, or not filed in the first place (Vasu 1979, 12–25; Lyons 1983; Fleischmann 1989).

The planning commission may also exert significant influence over the outcome of a case, although its decision is only advisory to the governing body. The planning commission's public hearing provides a basis for both tempering public protest and allowing participants to discover each other's strategies. The hearing is designed to encourage citizen participation and to

insulate elected officials from the initial, often emotional, debates over a proposed rezoning (Nelson 1977, 63–65, 75–77; Weaver and Babcock 1979, 155–60). Most communities alert citizens to a proposed rezoning with a combination of signs posted on the affected tract, letters to adjacent property owners, and legal notices in local newspapers. These procedures should increase citizen opposition to an application, and, in turn, reduce its likelihood of being accepted as submitted (Hutcheson and Prather 1988).

Several cross-cutting pressures may make the planning commission a means of forging compromises. First, the commission's role as a stepping stone to the city council (Prewitt 1970, 112–14) may make members responsive to competing interests in rezoning disputes. Second, the presence of both homeowners and development interests on many planning commissions may produce compromise (Weaver and Babcock 1979, 163–65; Allensworth 1980, 212–17; Pierannunzi 1989). Finally, small legislative bodies can be expected to promote a norm of universalism (Miller and Oppenheimer 1982), which existing research suggests does occur at the local level (Heilig and Mundt 1984, 101–13; Rosener 1982, 341; Fleischmann 1989). Thus, planning commission recommendations and final decisions in cases should favor applicants when no opposition is present but should tend toward compromise in cases involving conflict.

STUDY SITE AND DATA

This research examines rezoning requests during 1984 in the Atlanta Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA), where rapid development has created great pressure for rezoning. This 18-county area had 2.1 million residents in 1980, including 425,000 in the city of Atlanta. By 1984, the MSA population increased to 2.4 million, making it the nation's fourteenth largest. Population growth rates of 27% in the 1970s and 11.3% between 1980 and 1984 were more than double the national average for metropolitan areas. Fully 37% of the MSA's 800,000 housing units in 1980 had been built during the previous decade, compared to 25% for all metropolitan areas. In 1984, building permits were authorized for another 49,000 housing units in the MSA (U.S. Department of Commerce 1986, xxxiv, 2–3, 10–11, 62–63, 70–71).

There are several benefits to conducting this study in metropolitan Atlanta. First, government is highly fragmented. The presence of 18 counties and 91 municipalities allows wide variation in land uses and participants.¹ In contrast, studying a single jurisdiction can severely limit the types of cases available. For instance, a given city may not provide the full range of indus-

¹ Municipalities with some of their territory outside the boundaries of the MSA were classified as part of metropolitan Atlanta if a majority of their residents lived within the MSA. Counties have jurisdiction over zoning in their unincorporated territory, although zoning in a handful of small cities is controlled by their respective county governments.

trial, commercial, and residential land uses available in a metropolitan area. Similarly, developers of large residential projects may only be active in outlying areas, while citizen activism may be confined to older, built-up cities.

Second, using an entire metropolitan area permits study of rezoning politics in a single market area. It is within this economic and demographic setting that individuals and businesses make strategic choices about where to live and invest. These decisions, in turn, create pressures to modify existing land-use patterns. Finally, limiting the analysis to a single state eliminates the need to control for interstate variation in statutes and case law affecting rezoning (see Lyons 1984).

The data cover all rezoning applications filed during 1984 in all 18 counties and 33 of the 91 municipalities in the MSA.² Information was gathered during visits to county and municipal zoning offices between January 1986 and April 1988. Among the independent variables, data on participants include the occupation or business of the applicant and property owner, the presence or absence of an attorney for the applicant, and the number of speakers and signatures supporting and opposing the application.³ The second type of variable, the nature of the proposal, is represented by the current zoning, proposed zoning, and acreage of the tract.⁴ The procedural variables include the fee charged for filing each application, an urbanization variable that differentiates the complexity and professionalism of the review process in three types of communities, and the planning commission recommendation.⁵

The dependent variable in this analysis, the decision of the elected governing body in each case, is categorical: denied, withdrawn, approved as a

²The omitted municipalities had no applications, were under the zoning authority of their county government, or did not answer requests for appointments to conduct research. Their estimated 1984 population was 119,306 (only 5% of the MSA total).

³Citizen support was calculated by adding the number of persons who spoke in favor of a rezoning request at public hearings to those who signed petitions supporting the application. Support ranged from zero to 124 persons. Since 87.2 % of all applications had no support, citizen support was coded as a dummy variable (0 = no support, 1 = support present). Citizen opposition is the sum of speakers and signatures against an application and ranged from zero to 3,000 persons. Because 54.8% of all applications had no opposition but intense hostility was present in some cases, opposition was coded as a three-category scale (0 = opposition, 1 = up to 10 opponents, 2 = more than 10 opponents).

Legal representation, which was present in 18.6 % of all cases, was coded 1 if an applicant was represented by an attorney at public hearings and 0 if not. Development interests were also coded as a dummy variable. Any case involving a developer or real estate professional as an applicant or property owner was coded 1; all others were coded 0. Forty-two percent of all cases involved such development interests.

⁴Zones were coded in increasing order of restrictiveness as industrial (10–19), commercial (20–29), office (30–39), mobile home (40–49), multifamily residential (50–59), single-family residential (60–69), and agriculture (70–79). Each group includes a number of categories, e.g., several types of single-family residential areas coded according to minimum lot size.

⁵The urbanization variable was coded as a three-part scale based on county. Applications in the 13 outlying counties were coded 0. Local governments in this suburban fringe generally

different zone, tabled, approved with conditions, and approved. In addition to approving or denying an application as submitted, governing bodies can grant a rezoning subject to required driveway cuts, setbacks, landscaping, or similar conditions regulating development. Officials may rezone a piece of property as a different zone than the one requested. They can also defer a decision to obtain more information or to pressure an applicant to withdraw a request. Lastly, applicants may withdraw a proposal in the face of strong opposition or certain denial.

Field work yielded data for 2,290 cases. The 2,153 applications for which areal data are available covered 44,715 acres (approximately 70 square miles). Missing data for one or more independent variables limit the analysis below to 1,603 cases.

FINDINGS

Multiple discriminant analysis was used to predict the governing body's disposition of cases (see Klecka 1980). Discriminant analysis interprets differences among groups of a categorical dependent variable and then uses information derived in determination of these differences to forecast the dependent variable into groups, a process known as classification. Characteristics used to distinguish between groups, similar to independent variables in regression techniques, are called discriminating variables.

By reviewing the geometric placement of group centers, the centroids, each analysis notes the groups that are most distinguishable from all others possible. The analysis maximizes the distances between groups on the basis of the discriminating variables. The process continues until the number of iterations reaches the total number of discriminating variables. Thus, in an analysis with 10 discriminating variables, up to 10 iterations may occur. Each iteration, or function, will discriminate between groups using a linear combination of variables, given the interpretations of all previous functions. As a result, the first functions will always derive the maximum distance between group centroids.

assign zoning to the local building inspector rather than hiring a professional planning staff or retaining consultants.

Cases in suburbs and unincorporated territory within the five heavily urbanized counties (Clayton, Cobb, DeKalb, Fulton, and Gwinnett) that constituted the MSA in 1970 were coded 1. Governments in this area, especially the counties, have professional planning staffs that include specialists assigned to zoning. Smaller suburbs without a planning staff often hire planning or engineering firms as consultants.

Applications filed in the city of Atlanta were coded 2. In addition to having a large staff devoted to planning matters, Atlanta has the most elaborate review process in the MSA (see Hutcheson and Prather, 1988).

Planning commission recommendations were coded the same as the six decisions that can be reached by elected governing bodies; denied, withdrawn, tabled, approved as a different zone, approved with conditions, and approved.

Observing the group centroids and the relationships between variables within each function,⁶ the researcher is able to identify which groups are best defined by specific discriminating variables. The results of this analysis can be used to describe further relationships in the explanatory and classification processes of discriminant analysis. In the case at hand, discriminant (or antecedent) variables include application fees, citizen support, citizen opposition, the use of legal representation, acreage, the presence of development interests, an urbanization variable, the current and requested zonings, and the planning commission recommendation.

The first function, which explained 82.91% of the variance, is dominated by a positive association with the recommendation of the planning commission (see table 1). With a structure coefficient of .94, it appears that similar information is carried by the function and this single variable. As noted by the group centroids, this function is quite successful in predicting denial and withdrawal, and to a lesser degree, approval. Other centroids are more clustered and more difficult to interpret. Thus, clearly identifiable outcomes are best predicted by the actions of planning commissions. The function has difficulty, though, in determining when the governing body will place conditions on an approved application. From this function, therefore, it appears that denial recommendations made by planning commissions are more consistently ratified by elected governing bodies than are recommendations to approve an application.⁷

Other antecedent variables are not significant in the first function, although the direction of several relationships is worth noting. Neither opposition nor support is a significant predictor, although both are negatively associated with the function. This seems due to the fact that citizen support is present in less than 15% of the cases and is usually mobilized by applicants who encounter public opposition, which occurs in roughly 45% of all cases.

The second function discriminates between cases that come to a vote and those which do not, as the centroids of the tabled and withdrawn groups are spatially distant from the others (although conditional approval has a centroid that is close to that of the tabled group). This function is dominated by application fees and the urbanization and development interest variables,

⁶Within function comparisons are calculated as total structure coefficients. These are analogous to factor coefficients and determine the correlations between single variables and functions. Large structure coefficients (close to the value of 1) indicate that the function and variable are strongly correlated.

⁷Although the literature would suggest a similar impact for staff recommendations, this variable was excluded due to the limited availability of data. Formal staff recommendations were not made or recorded in all jurisdictions. This reduced the total number of cases to 1,045 and produced a coefficient in the same direction as planning commission recommendations. In function 1, total structure coefficients for planning commission and staff recommendations were .89998 and .76055, respectively. This function was slightly less predictive (82% of the variance explained) than the analysis presented here.

TABLE 1
 ANTECEDENT VARIABLES INFLUENCING REZONING OUTCOMES
 REACHED BY ELECTED GOVERNING BODIES
 (N = 1,603)

| Discriminating Variables | Total Structure Coefficients | | |
|------------------------------------|------------------------------|------------|------------|
| | Function 1 | Function 2 | Function 3 |
| Planning commission recommendation | .94161 | .14493 | .20608 |
| Urbanization | -.08767 | .65134 | -.14863 |
| Development interests | -.03164 | .50263 | -.06421 |
| Application fee | -.06424 | .45531 | .08630 |
| Citizen opposition | -.47236 | .22617 | .75918 |
| Current zone | -.05978 | .28149 | -.28443 |
| Citizen support | -.05716 | .33835 | .18355 |
| Legal representation | -.13761 | .21925 | .14791 |
| Requested zone | -.01770 | .31016 | -.09621 |
| Acreage | -.00986 | .15262 | -.12139 |
| | Function Coefficients | | |
| Variance explained | 82.91% | 11.37% | 4.34% |
| Eigenvalue | .94 | .12 | .05 |
| Canonical correlation | .69698 | .33868 | .21696 |
| | Group Centroids | | |
| Denied | -1.54994 | -.08692 | .19517 |
| Withdrawn | -1.25519 | -.43807 | -.90254 |
| Approved as different zone | -.74901 | -.02690 | .04222 |
| Tabled | -.66297 | -.47204 | .13109 |
| Approved conditionally | .32912 | .42299 | -.04683 |
| Approved | .99796 | -.38789 | .05728 |

which are negatively related to the tabled or withdrawn categories. Thus, in the more urbanized jurisdictions and when developers are seeking a rezoning, the governing body is likely to take a vote, although the outcome of the case is unclear. When decisions do occur, they are not directed toward approval or denial but are likely to produce an approval with conditions. In the central counties of metropolitan Atlanta, which have more professional planning staffs and more established neighborhoods, outright approval becomes less likely due to increased levels of citizen opposition and support (structure coefficients of .33835 and .21925, respectively). In addition, legal representation is interesting in that the sign is positive but was negative in the first function. This suggests that cases in which applicants hire attorneys fall into the categories of approved conditionally and approved as a different zone.

Although the third function does not provide any improvement in explanation (only an additional 4.34% of variance is explained), it does indicate an association between rezonings withdrawn by applicants and the presence of

citizen opposition. Also significant within the function is the level of the current zone. Thus, the function indicates that citizen opposition may be successful in prompting the withdrawal of applications, and that withdrawal is more likely when the existing zoning is highly restrictive. Subsequent functions produced trivial results and are therefore not reproduced here.

Function coefficients produced in table 1 are summaries of the functions' explanatory power. The canonical correlation coefficient (measured from 0 to 1) represents the association between the groups and the function. The eigenvalue, a constant used in simultaneous linear equations to compute the discriminant scores, can best be interpreted as a relative measure of each function's predictive strength. Thus, in function 2 the discriminating power of the analysis is diminished by 87.2% (the eigenvalue drops from .94 to .12).

Overall, the model correctly classified 56.46% of the cases. Since there are six categories of the dependent variable, classification by chance alone would have achieved only 16.7% accuracy (see table 2). The classification portion of the model is very successful in predicting cases denied (46.8% correct), withdrawn (55.8%), approved with conditions (56.6%), and, especially, approved (68.7%). However, the classification table notes the model's difficulty in predicting two intermediate categories: approved as a different zone and tabled. In these categories, correct classification occurs in only 28.4% and 30.0% of the cases, respectively.

In summary, the findings indicate that the planning commission recommendation dominates the governing body's decision making on rezoning cases. Factors related to bureaucratic professionalism and the complexity of the rezoning process may define those cases which are not brought to a vote by the governing body but do not significantly affect the direction of the vote once it occurs. Citizen support and opposition do not exert a strong influence in the first function, although citizen opposition is, as expected, negatively related to approval. Nor do the proposed zoning or the acreage involved emerge as significant features of rezoning decisions. Current zoning is important only in the third function, which suggests that citizen opposition to changes in relatively restrictive zoning may force applicants to withdraw their requests. Thus, structural factors, and to a lesser extent, the actions of participants, dominate decision making in the rezoning process.

DISCUSSION

The initial test of the model of the rezoning process proved quite satisfying. The model correctly classified more than half of the cases, which is quite encouraging in light of that large grey area between outright approval and denial of an application.

The findings have several implications. First, and most obviously, citizen advisory boards can have a significant effect on the behavior of local govern-

TABLE 2
CLASSIFICATION RESULTS
(N = 1,603)

| Actual Group | Number of Cases by Group | Predicted Group | | | | | |
|----------------------------|--------------------------|-----------------|-------------|----------------------------|-------------|------------------------|--------------|
| | | Denied | Withdrawn | Approved as Different Zone | Tabled | Approved Conditionally | Approved |
| Denied | 331 | 155 46.8% | 82 24.8% | 9 2.7% | 21 6.3% | 46 13.9% | 18 5.4% |
| Withdrawn | 77 | 10 13.0% | 43 55.8% | 1 1.3% | 9 11.7% | 5 6.5% | 9 11.7% |
| Approved as different zone | 67 | 16 23.9% | 13 19.4% | 19 28.4% | 14 20.9% | 10 0.0% | 5 7.5% |
| Tabled | 30 | 3 10.0% | 6 20.0% | 2 6.7% | 9 30.0% | 5 16.7% | 5 16.7% |
| Approved conditionally | 622 | 51 8.2% | 25 4.0% | 11 1.8% | 17 2.7% | 352 6.6% | 166 26.7% |
| Approved | 476 | 3 0.6% | 21 4.4% | 1 0.2% | 12 2.5% | 112 23.5% | 327 68.7% |

Note: Percent of cases correctly classified = 56.46%

ing bodies. This is contrary to the general finding that public hearings have little impact on policy decisions (see Cole and Caputo 1984). The results here can be explained, though, by higher citizen interest in the perceived costs and benefits of a rezoning than in the rather diffuse effects of a city budget or federal grant. The impact of advisory boards may vary, however, for both different types of policy and changes in a board's relationships with bureaucrats and elected officials (Houghton 1988).

Second, the rezoning process seems structured like a political filter that screens out most unacceptable or controversial applications before they reach elected governing bodies. The decision-making process makes the planning commission hearing the forum for developing consensus on rezoning requests. Because all parties in a case can pressure the elected governing body regarding a case at any time, it is especially interesting that neither the presence of a developer nor citizen opposition is an important predictor in the first function. This flies in the face of the notion that land-use regulation is controlled by either real estate interests or neighborhood groups—the reality seems much more complex.

The second function implies that interaction with planners helps developers modify their applications to assure a vote by the city council or county commission. Public protest, however, seems capable of forcing the withdrawal of applications for properties with relatively restrictive zoning. This pattern does not answer the question of whether rezoning more closely approximates the client politics or the interest-group model of regulation described by Wilson (1980). Instead, the results may imply that prevailing theories of regulatory politics are not readily applicable to local government where the public can mobilize easily and the impact of regulation on citizens is more direct and visible than at the national level.

Third, the findings point to the need for additional research. The ambiguous nature of the planning commission recommendation as a predictor of a governing body's decision suggests examining the strategic behavior of actors in the rezoning process. Such research should focus on the relationships between planning staff members and other actors, links between elected officials and those they appoint to planning commissions, and the tactics of developers and neighborhood groups. Especially interesting is the extent to which applicants, knowing that compromise is likely to occur, request more liberal zoning than they are willing to accept. These questions are beyond the reach of the data analyzed here, which are based on public records of rezoning cases rather than survey or interview results.

Another focus for future research is the role of local context in rezoning decisions. Analyzing variation in outcomes among different types of communities will help understand how local governments develop the general land-use policies designed to provide locational benefits to those within their borders. In particular, rezoning politics may vary both between and within

metropolitan areas, depending upon communities' population growth, demographic characteristics, economic base, and similar factors. Patterns like those in metropolitan Atlanta may not prevail in declining or slowly growing areas, where local officials may be more likely to support increased development (see Jones and Bachelor 1986). The same may hold true for poor or declining cities within a growing metropolitan area. Conversely, affluent residential suburbs may be resistant to more intensive land uses, while citizen protest may be quite effective in built-up communities, where any rezoning poses a threat to long-established residents and land-use patterns.

Finally, it is important to note that zoning is only one aspect—albeit a major part—of the politics of urban development. This wider arena involves not only developers but politicians and local businesses such as banks, newspapers, utilities, and large retailers that benefit from a community's growth. Although these “progrowth coalitions” do not become involved in all rezoning cases, they use the provision of public infrastructure, business subsidies, and similar policies to foster a community's growth (Logan and Molotch 1987; Fleischmann and Feagin 1987). Given the critical role of land-use politics in urban development, however, the bottom line remains that rezoning decision making uses appointed planning commissions and planning staffs to filter applications and forge compromises which are overwhelmingly ratified by elected officials.

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