

Independent Study – PPOL 8800

Zoning and Land Use in the U.S.: History, Theory, and Regional Variation

Student: Warren Wooten

Instructor: Suzanne Leland

Semester: Fall 2025

Meeting Times: Arranged

Office Hours: By appointment

Course Description

This independent study explores the structure, function, and variation of land use regulation in the United States, with a primary focus on zoning. The course examines how zoning has historically operated as a tool of spatial and social governance, and how regulatory outcomes are shaped by not only ideology and party control but also procedural rules, institutional design, and organized interests. Through a combination of theoretical texts and empirical research, the student will analyze the evolution of zoning practices, evaluate regional variation, and begin preliminary data exploration using land use regulation indices and policy datasets. The course also prepares the groundwork for dissertation research on the intersection of zoning, political institutions, and housing policy.

Expanded Learning Objectives

By the end of this course, the student will:

- Understand the historical origins of zoning in the U.S. and its institutional evolution.
- Analyze zoning as a political tool used to influence development and maintain spatial control.
- Assess how regional variation reflects differences in institutions, political mobilization, and demographic change.
- Critically engage with academic literature on how partisanship and governance structures mediate zoning outcomes.
- Begin developing empirical research skills related to land use policy, including familiarity with zoning datasets such as WRLURI and the National Zoning Atlas.

Core Readings

- Fischel, William A. *Zoning Rules!: The Economics of Land Use Regulation* (Lincoln Institute of Land Policy, 2015)
- Hirt, Sonia A. *Zoned in the USA: The Origins and Implications of American Land-Use Regulation* (Cornell University Press, 2014)
- Logan, John R., and Harvey Molotch. *Urban Fortunes: The Political Economy of Place* (University of California Press, 2007)

- Glaeser, Edward. *Triumph of the City: How Our Greatest Invention Makes Us Richer, Smarter, Greener, Healthier, and Happier* (Penguin, 2012) – Selected excerpts
- Gyourko, Joseph, Albert Saiz, and Anita Summers. “A New Measure of the Local Regulatory Environment for Housing Markets: The Wharton Residential Land Use Regulatory Index” (2008)
- Gay, Claudine. “A Room for One’s Own? The Partisan Allocation of Affordable Housing.” *Urban Affairs Review* 53, no. 1 (2017): 40–70.
- Schleicher, David. “City Unplanning.” *Yale Law Journal* 122 (2012): 1670–1737 – Selected sections

Assignments & Grading

Assignment	Description	% of Grade
Literature Review	Synthesis of zoning, land use theory, and drivers of variation	30%
U.S. Zoning Timeline	Chronological outline of major zoning laws, court cases, and state/federal interventions	10%
Comparative Theory Essay	Compare and contrast key zoning theories (e.g., homevoter, growth machine, racial exclusion)	30%
Research Concept Memo	Forward-looking memo outlining data strategies and research questions for dissertation work	30%

Module 1: History and Origins of Zoning in the United States

Objective: Examine the historical emergence of zoning as a tool of spatial control and governance. Analyze how early zoning laws reflected and reinforced patterns of racial and economic exclusion, and how those legacies persist in contemporary land use systems.

Topics:

- Legal and political foundations of zoning
- Early zoning and racial/class segregation
- Institutionalization of local land use authority
- Federal interventions and regional divergence

Key Readings:

- Fischel – *Zoning Rules!*
- Hirt – *Zoned in the USA*
- Glaeser – *Triumph of the City* (excerpts)
- Selected academic journal articles

Deliverables:

- Literature Review – A written synthesis of foundational texts on zoning history, legal structure, and evolving institutional roles
- U.S. Land Use Regulation Timeline – A curated timeline highlighting key legal, institutional, and federal-state developments in zoning

Module 2: Theories and Political Drivers of Zoning Variation

Objective: Critically evaluate theoretical explanations for zoning and regulatory variation. Compare frameworks that link zoning outcomes to political, institutional, and economic forces such as homeowner interests, local coalitions, and regional growth regimes.

Topics:

- The homevoter hypothesis and property rights politics
- Growth machine and regime theory
- Exclusionary zoning and racial/economic segregation
- Institutional and partisan determinants of regulatory policy

Key Readings:

- Logan & Molotch – *Urban Fortunes*
- Glaeser – *Triumph of the City* (excerpts)
- Selected peer-reviewed journal articles and working papers

Deliverable:

- Comparative Theory Essay – A written analysis comparing major zoning theories and assessing their explanatory power across regional and institutional contexts

Module 3: Empirical Approaches and Political Dynamics in Land Use Regulation

Objective: Develop a conceptual and practical foundation for analyzing zoning and land use empirically. Explore how political institutions and partisan dynamics influence regulatory intensity, affordability outcomes, and housing program implementation.

Topics:

- Measuring land use regulation using quantitative indices
- Regional and institutional variation in regulatory environments
- The role of state and local governance in housing policy
- Partisan politics and distributive allocation of housing subsidies
- Methodological considerations for empirical zoning research

Key Readings:

- Gyourko, Saiz & Summers – *A New Measure of the Local Regulatory Environment for Housing Markets (WRLURI)*
- Gay – “The Partisan Allocation of Affordable Housing” (*Urban Affairs Review*, 2017)
- Glaeser & Gyourko – *Rethinking Federal Housing Policy* (Chapters 5–6)
- Schleicher – “City Unplanning” (*Yale Law Journal*, 2012) – selected sections
- Supplementary articles and datasets (e.g., Zoning Atlas, LIHTC database)

Deliverable:

- Empirical Exploration Memo – A research memo identifying one or more datasets related to zoning or housing policy. The memo should outline potential research questions, describe relevant empirical strategies, and propose preliminary ideas for dissertation-level inquiry.