Problem
The arenas used by professional sports teams in the United States and Canada are increasingly tied to broader strategies for urban development in their host cities. Generally, these strategies seek to leverage the large audiences generated by arena events to support a cluster of entertainment, retail, housing, and commercial land uses—forming what are now commonly referred to as sports districts. Since sport and entertainment activities are particularly appealing to young, affluent, and well-educated persons, proponents of arena developments have found willing allies among urban development advocates hoping to woo these coveted demographics to live, work, and play in their cities.

Yet there is little research that investigates the effectiveness of these “arena-led” development strategies. Despite years of research from high profile sports economists, public funding for major leagues has continued, and new facilities continue to be built (Zimbalist & Long, 2006). While there is not a lot of research that specifically addresses sports-led urban development, there are a handful of studies that help frame this research study. Chapin (2005) provides an in depth analysis of the urban development outcomes in respect to Cleveland’s Gateway District and Baltimore’s Camden Yards. He evaluated the use of vacant land and buildings, new construction, and change in district imagery as evidence for the investment in sports facilities and their inclusion in urban redevelopment strategies, finding that there is mixed success of sports facilities catalyzing urban redevelopment. Despite years of research from high profile sports economists, public funding for major leagues has continued, and new facilities continue to be built (Zimbalist & Long, 2006). This research study is positioned to explore the urban development gap and examine urban development outcomes (Long, forthcoming; Rosentraub, 2014, 2007; Chapin, 2005, 2000; Euchner, 1993; Klobuchar, 1983).

Research
In response, this research study analyzes the success of sports-led urban development strategies. Using the case of major league arenas, specifically 26 major league arenas opened between 1990 and 1999, I investigate whether arena-led urban development strategies are successful and how urban development outcomes have been affected since the opening of these sports facilities.

In particular, I investigate how these strategies are manifested in different policies, such as a formal arena district plan, a plan within a special financing initiative (e.g. a tax increment financing district), a master developer agreement, a community benefits agreement, and so forth. More specifically, these strategies aim to attract new private investment to the area in three ways: 1) new private investment in the form of new construction and/or renovations, 2) a new land use mix (typically favoring a sport- and entertainment-orientation, alongside new housing and businesses), 3) increased property assessments and tax revenues. As such, the definition of “arena-led” development strategies can be tied to a set of physical urban development outcomes: an increase in the volume of built area, desired changes in the land use mix, and an increase in property values.

I begin by creating a record of urban development outcomes that is systematically and consistently measured across each of the 26 arena projects in the sample. I measure and categorize the urban development outcomes associated with each arena development, with a focus on three physical measures of success: changes in the volume of built area (square feet), changes in the composition of built area (land use mix), and changes in property values (assessed values). An arena-led district development is successful if there is evidence of new construction (or renovations), if
there are substantial shifts in land-use mix, and if there are increased values in district properties. To test the increase in total built area, shifts in land-use mix, GIS is used to digitally map the changes in land-use from 1990 to 2010 and assess the percentage of new construction in the area. Assessment data acquired from local municipal planning offices offer the capability in assessing the increase in property values over time. Finally, using GIS, I present a set of maps that summarize these and other physical changes in each arena district.

Preliminary Findings
While my research is currently underway, I expect to find that new arenas built as part of a formal planning effort are more successful in generating private investment as compared to those arena developments that were undertaken as stand-alone projects. Of the 50 new major league arenas built since 1990, just under half were either part of a formal district plan, or are part of an ongoing discussion to create a plan. I will discuss examples such as Cleveland’s Gateway District, that has attracted a higher amount of new construction, a more desirable land use mix, and higher property values, when compared to those same metrics for other arenas such as the United Center in Chicago, that were not part of formal planning effort.

Conclusions
As cities increasingly look to sports and entertainment districts as key element of their urban strategy, this research will provide a better understanding of this trend and its impact and is the first comprehensive and systematically measured analysis of their urban development outcomes.