The construction of facilities for major league sports facilities has continued in earnest for over two decades; PricewaterhouseCoopers (2017) estimates that, since 1996, $32B has been spent on major league sports facilities in North America. Thus, while the construction of facilities and debates over financing (Buist & Mason, 2010) and economic (Propheater, 2018) and intangible (Johnson, et al. 2012) benefits are not new, more recent arena development projects have been designed to anchor large-scale urban development projects that include retail, residential, and office space, with the owner of the team also serving as the master developer of the project (Rosentraub, 2010). In several cities, arena-anchored projects have been considered successful examples integrated urban (re)development, with broader implications for tourism, quality of life, and city status (Mason, 2016).

To this point, academic research examining sports facility development has largely focused on measuring economic and intangible impacts (Harger et al., 2016) or the media discourse surrounding the justification for construction (Sant et al., 2018; Saptotchne, 2012). Meanwhile, Mason, et al. (2015) used status to examine how and why proponents of a stadium initiative argued for the merits of facility construction, while the civic broader branding literature (see Anttiroiko, 2015) has examined how facilities become part of the local conditions that allow cities to develop their own images that can be leveraged to attract tourists and businesses, and improve the quality of life of residents. However, while these various arguments provide the means to argue for the merits of arena construction or to justify a city’s investment in them, what are the implications of facility development for stakeholders with regards to status and quality of life? In other words, who is benefiting locally from these projects and how are broader civic needs being serviced by these development projects?

Opened in 2017, Little Caesars Arena is the anchor of the larger District Detroit project in downtown Detroit, MI. The purpose of this paper is to examine the views of stakeholders in Detroit who are either involved with, or impacted by, the construction of Little Caesar’s Arena and District Detroit. This study is currently in progress; interviews are scheduled with key personnel, including those working in City planning, with the Detroit Metro Convention and Visitors Bureau, Detroit Economic Growth Corporation, and the Detroit Sports Commission. In addition, interviews will be undertaken with Council members, local media, academics, and other interest groups. In doing so, we hope to gain varied insights into the value of the project from various stakeholders. Interviews will be transcribed and coded using a modified version of qualitative content analysis which involves a systematic, theory-driven approach examining the manifest (physically present) and latent content (implicit meaning) of the materials, incorporating both inductive and deductive approaches (Mayring, 2000). Results will provide new insights into how cities that construct major sport facilities are able to impact local quality of life and the status of their respective cities.