FRAGMENTED BY DESIGN: WHY ST. LOUIS HAS SO MANY GOVERNMENTS

With almost 100 municipalities, the largest of which is also its own county, the structure of government in St. Louis is indeed unique and is one of the most frequently discussed and debated topics in the region. Critics claim its duplicated services are a wasteful use of resources and an obstacle to sound regional planning, while supporters praise the convenience, access, and quality of service received from the numerous small city governments. How this peculiar structure came about and why it survives are the focus of Fragmented by Design. Written by local political science scholar, educator, and author E. Terrence Jones, Fragmented by Design is the first book to fully chronicle the development of this structure and its implications for St. Louis.

"Only Terry Jones' new book offers a thorough elucidation and intelligent discussion of the multiplicity of local municipalities in the St. Louis region, and with a rational perspective and engaging purpose. There is literally nothing else like it. Thanks, Terry."

-Robert R. Archibald, President
Missouri Historical Society

"Terry Jones has written, with considerable wit and deep wisdom, a definitive study of the history of the relationship of the City of St. Louis and St. Louis County. Jones deftly threads his way through this very complex legal and political tangle with remarkable fairness. This book imparts a vast amount of information with a delightfully light touch."

-Carolyn W. Losos
Former Executive Director, Leadership Center of Greater St. Louis

"Terry Jones is by far one of the most knowledgeable and entertaining students of local government in the St. Louis region. Fragmented by Design is an easy read that chronicles the history of the true division of St. Louis City and County and how municipal governments have multiplied. Bottom line: people have the government they want and deserve."

-H.C. Milford
Former County Executive, St. Louis County

"Fragmented by Design is a well-researched and well-written description of the St. Louis City and County governments, complete with explanations of the hows and whys of their development. In easy-going style, Terry Jones, a keen observer of and commentator on St. Louis politics and government for 30 years, describes the incredible maze of county municipalities. This book is a must-read for anyone who wants to find out how and why the St. Louis region got into this predicament."

E. TERRENCE JONES
Praise For Fragmented By Design

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James Neal Primm, Historian
Author of The Lion of the Valley
“Fragmented by Design is a must read if you are a student of government, an official of local government, or an interested resident of the St. Louis area. It was like walking into the past for me, an official of local government for many years. I enjoyed the book because I know it is factual and the details are accurate. The author’s style of writing makes you want to read on and learn more about the St. Louis area, its many government entities, and the people who have shaped this region.”

James F. Eagan, Mayor
Florissant, Missouri

“Once again, Professor Jones displays his superior research, analytical and presentation skills in a colorful manner. Like a suspense novel, Fragmented by Design moves quickly from one scene to another as the governance of the metropolitan area unfolds. The plot depicts the actions of many so-called blue-ribbon committees that failed to discover the recipe for mixing local and regional sentiments into popular structure.”

Tim Fischesser, Executive Director
St. Louis County Municipal League

“St. Louis has a lot to be proud of; the Arch, the Cardinals, the Zoo, Shaw’s Garden, and much else. It also has an incredible mishmash of governments. Jones explains how this jerry-built structure came to be and how, against all the criticisms from the “experts,” it survives largely intact. In the process, he offers an important civics lesson and a good read as well.”

Robert H. Salisbury
Sauers Professor of American Government, Emeritus
Washington University
Fragmented by Design
Why St. Louis Has So Many Governments

by E. Terrence Jones
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Fragmented by Design

Why St. Louis Has So Many Governments

by

E. Terrence Jones
Dedication

This book is dedicated to my wife, Lois Hauck Pierce.
We share both a love for the region
and a life together enjoying it.
Preface

During my thirty-plus years as a practicing political scientist in the St. Louis area, I have received many invitations to speak. Perhaps it’s because people think I have something to offer but, I suspect, the price (usually a free lunch) and length (twenty minutes, tops) also matter. In these appearances, I am frequently asked “Why does St. Louis have so many governments?” It’s a good question and this book is my reply. At the heart of the answer, not surprisingly, is ourselves. Some demented outsider did not impose this structure on us. It has evolved to meet our preferences. We have the governments we want and, therefore, the ones we deserve.

The story of local governments, especially for the City of St. Louis and St. Louis County, is so intriguing because it reveals so much about the people who live here. It is a window through which we can witness our public values, our collective soul.

My thanks to Ann Morris and Doris Wesley, both from the University of Missouri Western Historical Manuscripts Collection, and to Jean Gosebrink of the St. Louis Public Library, for their skilled archival assistance, to Amy Nelson, research assistant extraordinaire, and to James Neal Primm and the late George D. Wendel, who have inspired and informed my curiosity about St. Louis.

I have been blessed with many mentors but, in writing this book, one stands out. Carolyn W. Losos has taught me so much about life, leadership, and the community. Her commitment to the region is unparalleled, her zest for life infectious, and her friendship invaluable.
Foreword

If you eavesdrop on civic leader conversations in the St. Louis region, you will inevitably hear talk about reforming the area's local governments. For the past one hundred and thirty years, ever since St. Louis became a major urban center, someone always had an idea about how to make things better. In the 1870s, it was separating the City of St. Louis from St. Louis County. Punctuating the twentieth century in the 1920s, 1950s, 1960s, and 1980s were attempts to reunite the two jurisdictions. As the region grew, it formed more municipalities, a lot more, and discovered both virtue and vice in governmental multiplicity. In the twentieth century's second half, the citizens established special districts for community colleges, cultural institutions, transportation, and wastewater collection and their governments forged hundreds of partnerships. As the century turns, many citizens are busy starting or expanding quasi-public organizations to address regional issues.

The discussions never cease. As this is written in the late spring of 2000, a group headed by Bert Walker and including all the living former City of St. Louis mayors is proposing a state constitutional amendment giving the City of St. Louis home rule over its county functions. In November 2000, voters in several counties within the region, some in Missouri and others in Illinois, will decide whether to establish a regional parks district and fund it with an earmarked sales tax. Looking ahead, the baseball Cardinals are floating trial balloons about transforming a private Busch Stadium into a public faux-historic ballpark.

Absent from many of these discussions is a full appreciation of who St. Louisans are, the values they hold and the institutions they prize. This book discusses what the region's citizens want from their local governments and how, for the most part, they have been able to achieve it. They desire governments that are comfortable, that like that old sweater in the closet feels so snug when you put it on each winter. Elected officials should be approachable, nearby so they can handle a problem when you need them. Changes should be fully justified and incrementally implemented. There is too much
risk in abandoning the familiar for the unknown, no matter what the experts might say.

Often missing, too, is an adequate awareness of earlier generations of reformers, about who succeeded, who failed, and why. This book tells that story from the 1870s through the present. Only one governmental transformation, the City's divorcing the County in 1876, can legitimately be labeled radical and revolutionary. Those who have tried to repeat reform on that scale have failed to realize just how much the stars and planets were favorably aligned then, a constellation rarer than the return of Halley's Comet. They have also relied too much on advice from some within my profession, political science, who, past and present, often prescribe before they analyze. St. Louisans do not want government handed down from a textbook, especially one derived from first principles rather than produced from practical experience.

Reformers also tend to get caught up in their own enthusiasm, convincing each other that they have discovered what ails the body politic and now understand what must be done to cure it. So what if the citizens do not fully comprehend their governmental plight, these groups decide. They must be made to take the medicine of reform and, if they will not, at least there was a valiant effort. Time after time, feasibility has been preached early in reform deliberations and then abandoned later.

St. Louisans are not a boastful lot, especially when it comes to our many local governments. We spend too much time apologizing for their flaws and too little celebrating their merits. Yes, there are a lot of them and, sure, it can be quite confusing. But we have them for an extremely good reason: it allows most of the area's diverse residents to find a municipality or a school district that feels right for them, that is comfortable and approachable. St. Louisans are not alienated from government, as they might be if there were just one or a few for the entire region. They understand, for some purposes, it makes sense to have larger units and, when the need is apparent and the proposal sound, they have approved them. They have struck a balance between keeping close that which should be nearby and joining forces with others in the region when most would benefit from cooperation. They have rejected being like someone else and, instead, decided to be distinctively St. Louis: fragmented by design.

E. Terrence Jones - May 2000
Chapter 1
The City Goes It Alone

It was 1870 and things were looking up for the City of St. Louis. The Census, possibly with some creative counting, showed that it ranked fourth among America's cities. The Civil War's personal pains and economic hardships were in the past, westward expansion had resumed, waterways were still key avenues of commerce, and a City located at the confluence of the Missouri and Mississippi Rivers had to be in the middle of the action. Despite some apprehension about that upstart Chicago, St. Louis's leaders were confident that the final third of the nineteenth century would bring even better fortunes.

There was, however, this nagging problem: elected officials and their civic backers had far from complete control of the City's public powers. Other people, folks different from the enlightened City leaders, individuals preoccupied with their own narrow interests, were hemming the City's authority and exploiting its prosperity. Who were these small-minded villains? The non-City members of the Missouri General Assembly and the St. Louis County Court.

The Problems with State Government

Then, as now, St. Louis residents saw their location within the larger State of Missouri as an accident of history. They were St. Louisans by choice, Missourians by geography. Moreover, St. Louisans did little to disguise their low opinions of those outside their boundaries. Rural residents were less civilized, part of the agricultural past rather than stalwarts of the industrial future. Those outstate, naturally,
had a different view both of themselves and of St. Louisians. And they had one indisputable advantage, especially important in a democracy: they outnumbered the St. Louisians by more than five to one.

As a result, they dominated the Missouri General Assembly and that gave them a hefty hammer. In 1868, an Iowa judge named John Dillon handed down a decision that immortalized him in municipal jurisprudence and transformed prevailing practice into legal principle. What has become known as “Dillon’s Rule” held that all local government units, including cities, were “creatures of the State.” They survived at the State’s pleasure and the State could dictate what they did, how they did it, and even whether they could continue to exist. A more than five-to-one majority combined with Dillon’s Rule meant rural Missouri could and did limit the City’s prerogatives. Even though the City was often successful in persuading the state legislature to grant it some authority, each attempt required it to mount an extensive lobbying effort. Trekking to Jefferson City, never an ideal journey for most St. Louisans, became both tiresome and humiliating.

The Problems with St. Louis County

If that were not enough, the City of St. Louis was also part of St. Louis County with the boundaries being essentially today’s combined City-County territories. The governing body was called the County Court, its members were County Judges, and despite the judicial nomenclature, it merged the executive and legislative functions. Today it would be called a county commission and it remains the prevailing form for most Missouri counties including, for example, Franklin and Jefferson Counties within the St. Louis region.

The City Goes It Alone

Over eighty percent of the County’s residents lived in the City but that did not mean that the City had effective control over the County. One-person, one-vote was not to be a constitutional principle until 1962 and legislative districts represented geography as much as they did people. In 1858, the County Judges from the districts outside the City made their first move, imposing a special tax on the entire County with the proceeds going largely for improvements in the rural parts. The City, powerless to react on its own, ran to the legislature the following year and had the action overturned.

Even though the City won the first clash, it realized that the underlying problem remained. In the decades ahead, the County’s rural areas would need roads, water supplies, sewers, and other public facilities. The rich City cousins would be forever taxing themselves to pay for the upkeep of their poorer County relations. Instead of investing in the prosperous core to reap even superior returns, funds would be diverted to the periphery. Something had to be done, governmentally, to prevent this calamity.

Stirs of Change

After the Civil War, the City succeeded in having the Missouri General Assembly restructure the County Court so that it had six judges elected by district, four from inside the City and two from outside, and a presiding judge elected at large. With the City having most of the population, presumably this office would always be held by a City resident.

At about the same time, some of the City’s leadership was urging that the legislature take the next step by combining the City and the County. The rhetoric of eliminating duplication of offices and achieving greater efficiency was used to advance this proposal, much as it would be in later
consolidation efforts, but the issue was more about City control. In a single City-County government, it would be even more likely that the City interests would prevail.

Others argued that even if the City had the representative advantage over the non-City residents, rural folks would still be at the governmental table. Why, fomented the Missouri Democrat on February 2, 1871:

> It is of vital necessity that the people of this city shall be left free and unembarrassed to maintain and promote her special welfare. Imagine the representatives from rural districts gathered in her council chambers, to decide and vote upon her necessities, bridges, wharf, ferries, railroad depots, water and gas works, street openings or widenings and repairs, her vast commercial and myriad fold mercantile interests—her questions of parks, city hall, police, fire protection, etc., etc., etc. What will they know of these things?

Even if majority control were assured, the thought that the “rural them” would be in the same government as the “urban us” was unacceptable.

Consolidation was too small a step. Separation made more sense. Not only would exclusively urban representatives determine policies for the City, but it also meant that the City would be relieved of any fiduciary responsibility for the expanding rural needs. In the words of Colonel David Armstrong, as quoted in the Missouri Republican, “a government would then be got rid of that which costs an immense amount of money and contributes nothing to the welfare and prosperity of the City.”

By 1874, the City's governmental reform agenda had become crystallized: (1) gain greater autonomy from state government oversight and (2) separate the City of St. Louis from St. Louis County. But how could this agenda be accomplished without years and perhaps decades of political wrangling and legal disputes? The answer was the fortuitous call for a new constitutional convention to redraft the existing Constitution of 1865.

**Constitutional Convention of 1875**

The driving forces for redoing the Missouri Constitution had virtually nothing to do with St. Louis’s governmental controversies. Other motives, including the desire to trim legislative authority and to limit local governments' ability to issue bonds, were at play instead. But the City's leaders seized the opportunity, and some of its delegates to the Constitutional Convention were able to convince the others that there should be a special Standing Committee on St. Louis Affairs. According to the Convention's minutes, this committee would be “composed of the St. Louis members, which shall elect its own chairman, and which shall take into consideration all matters that may be introduced into this Convention which shall have specific reference to the organization and government of the county and city of St. Louis and none other.” In short, this St. Louis faction had created its own convention-within-a-convention where St. Louisans, and only St. Louisans, could redesign their local governments under the guise of redrafting the Missouri Constitution.

Intellectually guided by Thomas Gantt, a former City Counselor and a talented specialist in municipal law, and politically aided by Colonel Armstrong, a past Chair of the Democratic State Committee, the Committee on St. Louis Affairs adopted a proposal on July 28, 1875. Two days
later, a strong majority of the entire Constitutional Convention approved it. Its provisions, which became parts of Article IX of the Missouri Constitution of 1875, adopted by the voters in late October of that year, gave the City constitutionally sanctioned methods for achieving its governmental goals.

Although the St. Louis Post-Dispatch has persistently advocated merging the City and County for the past several decades, its founder—Joseph Pulitzer—was one of the most outspoken proponents for separation in the 1870s. As a reporter for the Westliche Post, a state legislator, and a delegate to the Constitutional Convention of 1875, he fought for ridding the City of County influence and involvement. At the convention, he urged his fellow delegates to “give over to us those matters of business and vital necessity to the City of St. Louis (and) do not interfere, let us govern ourselves, carry out the true principles of local self-government (and) give us something we understand, that we can control ourselves and give us something which no one who has no right to do so can take away from us.”

First, Article IX, Section 16 said that “any city having a population of more than one hundred thousand inhabitants may frame a charter for its own government, consistent with and subject to the Constitution and laws of this State.” This meant that the City of St. Louis, the only jurisdiction then meeting the population threshold, could effectively write its own charter as long as none of the provisions overtly violated Missouri laws. Instead of having State statutes dictate what they could and could not do, now St. Louis could chart its own course. This provision, now commonly known as “home rule,” made Missouri the first state to authorize such

The City Goes It Alone

a high level of local government autonomy. Most other states subsequently instituted home rule and, in Missouri, it is now an option for all cities five thousand or larger and all counties with assessed valuations of $450,000,000 or greater. The Constitution of 1875 still maintained, however, that the State retain its ultimate leash even over charter or home rule cities, noting later in Article IX that “notwithstanding the provisions of this article, the General Assembly shall have the same power over the city and county of St. Louis that it has over other cities and counties of this State.”

Second, Article IX set forth a process whereby “the City and the County shall be independent of each other” and where the City “shall be entitled to the same representation in the General Assembly, collect the State revenue and perform all other functions as if it were a county.” The tangled Gordian knot previously confronting separation efforts could be cut with a single stroke. If successful, the City would be simultaneously a municipality and a county. The latter was especially important to ensure adequate representation in the legislature which, at that time, was determined both by county status and by number of inhabitants.

Third, the City wanted to acquire more territory before it separated from the County. At that time, the incorporated area went from the Mississippi River to approximately Grand Avenue. Given the City’s aspirations, these approximately twenty square miles would not be adequate to accommodate further growth. Thinking they were dreaming big, the City proponents decided tripling the acreage would be more than sufficient. Seeking to provide some rationale for this notion besides outright greed, this was translated into the Constitution as “the City of St. Louis may extend its limits so as to embrace the parks now with-
out its boundaries, and other convenient and contiguous territory.” Urban folks would need parks for recreation and Tower Grove Park and Forest Park were recent additions. It only made sense to include them in the expanded City and if some other land was included in the process, so much the better.

Fourth, since there was always the possibility that separation might not be achieved, the City decided that consolidation would be better than the status quo. In order to preserve this as an option, the Committee on St. Louis Affairs had another section added to Article IX stating that “in all counties having a city therein containing over one hundred thousand inhabitants, the city and county government thereof may be consolidated in such manner as may be provided by law.” Although the language is general, only the City of St. Louis and St. Louis County qualified under these conditions.

Fifth, Article IX set forth procedures for simultaneously writing a home rule charter for the City and separating the City and the County and for doing both swiftly. The process was triggered by the Mayor of the City of St. Louis. He was empowered to order “the Council of the City and County Court of the County of St. Louis (to) meet in joint session and order an election of a board of thirteen freeholders of such City or County.” This allowed the City to control the action. It would determine when separation and home rule charter discussions got underway. The Board of Freeholders could pursue a broad agenda (“propose a scheme for the enlargement and definition of the boundaries of the City, the reorganization of the government of the County, the adjustment of the relations between the City thus enlarged and the residue of St. Louis County, and the government of the City thus enlarged”) and, to avoid inter-

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ominable delays, they had only ninety days to write a plan. Once written, the plan had to be submitted to the voters within sixty days and, if a majority of the voters agreed, it became reality in another sixty days. It was governmental reorganization at flank speed.

In this age of English-as-the-official-language, it is interesting to note that Article IX required that any amendments to a city charter must be "published for at least thirty days in three newspapers of largest circulation in such city, one of which shall be a newspaper printed in the German language."

All these provisions were a clear victory for the City but, to gain the support of the County delegates to the Constitutional Convention, the City made considerable financial concessions. The Constitution of 1875 required that, if separation of City and County occurred, the City would assume all fiscal responsibility for the parks and, even more consequential for the County, take over all of its debt in exchange for the County buildings and property. Those structures were within the municipal boundaries but, once the City and County separated, they would no longer be in the new St. Louis County. Since the County owed its bondholders almost seven million dollars, petty cash in today’s governmental circles but real money in the 1870s, this shaped up as a great deal. If the City negotiated a divorce, the County would leave the marriage debt free.

The Board of Freeholders

Less than two months after the voters approved the new Constitution and just twenty days after it went into effect, City of St. Louis Mayor Henry Overstolz used his Article
IX prerogative and, on December 20, 1875, convened the joint session of the City Council and the County Court and instructed them to prepare an election for the Board of Freeholders. The City Councilmen argued for an early election date, April 1876, while the County judges preferred a later time, November 1876. Although County officials engaged in some passive-aggressive tactics, the City forces triumphed and maintained the rapid pace toward separation and home rule. Two slates of thirteen candidates apiece were put forward, one by the City’s business elite (“Citizens Charter Ticket”) and the other by the combined Democratic and Republican County Central Committees (“Joint Charter Ticket”) and, in a low turnout election, the Citizens Ticket won easily. The Board of Freeholders would today be labeled a blue-ribbon committee. Largely lawyers and business people, it had four veterans of the Constitutional Convention, eleven City residents, and two token members from outside the City.

Sensitive to the reality that it had only ninety days to complete its assignment, the Board held its first meeting on April 8, 1876, just four days after the election. There were fifty-one more sessions before the final assembly on the last possible date, July 3, 1876, and, in an inadvertent historical coincidence, the plan was made public on July 4, 1876. The City of St. Louis was to announce its independence from St. Louis County and the State of Missouri precisely one century after the United States had declared its freedom from England.

The Board spent less time designing what the Constitution labeled “the scheme of separation” than it did writing the City Charter. Although there were many details to attend to, most of the major points had been settled in the Constitutional Convention deliberations. The basic desire to separate was reaffirmed and the debt-for-buildings swap previewed in Article IX was consummated. The City would pay to maintain the parks and would be exempt from any County taxes.

The St. Louis County Courthouse was located at Fourth and Market, the site of what today is known as the “Old Courthouse.” Having traded it and other property to the City for assuming the County’s debt, the County had to find a new site. The competition was keen but Ralph Clayton and Martin Hanley made the County an offer it could not refuse: 104 acres of free land featuring a modest hill. The voters approved the location in 1877 and ever since County Government has occupied the site bounded by Central, Forsyth, Meramec, and Carondolet. As the County grew, it has also expanded to some adjoining blocks. For their donation, Clayton had the County seat and a major thoroughfare named after him while Hanley had to settle for just a road.

The most contentious issue was boundaries where the Constitution had been intentionally vague but quite permissive. Some freeholders argued for an futuristic perspective, noting that the boundaries would be permanent with no further opportunity to annex parts of what would become a separate County. Others had a more cautionary view, worried that the City could not afford to provide services to a significantly larger territory and questioning why any respectable urban municipality would want what were then, in the words of one freeholder, “diverse and sundry cornfields and melon patches.” The expansionists prevailed and, on June 20, 1876, the City-County lines were drawn where they remain to this day: just across Skinker to the west, curving north to the confluence of the Mississippi and
Missouri Rivers and south to where the Des Peres River flows into the Mississippi. In addition to including Forest Park and Tower Grove Park, these boundaries gave the City a long stretch of the Mississippi River containing all of the commercially viable riverfront property. In retrospect, of course, what seemed like big bang then appears like modest pop now. It would be just a few decades, not centuries, until the time when urbanization would extend beyond the City’s limits.

Drafting a city charter was a more complex task. Municipal home rule was in its infancy, so there was little to be learned from other cities. There was a city government in place and the freeholders had to be concerned about how much change the existing order would tolerate. There was a state government which, while persuaded that home rule was worth a try, would jealously guard any significant challenges to its authority.

The resulting proposal reflected both these cautions and an extraordinary desire to avoid concentrating power. The freeholders took the Madisonian checks and balances design philosophy and elevated it to the next level. Following the national and state example, the legislature was divided into two units: a 28-member House of Delegates, ward-based and elected for two-year terms, and a 13-member City Council, elected at large for four years. Although the Constitution of 1875 had mandated a two-house legislature, the freeholders appeared happy to oblige even though they had no choice in the matter. The delegates would be sensitive to neighborhood concerns since, with 28 wards, there would be ready popular access. The Council, it was hoped, would attract civic leaders who would block more petty proposals that, while benefitting one or another ward, would not serve the City’s overall well-being.

Drafting a charter is an open invitation for all those passionately pursuing their own agendas. Virginia L. Minor, an advocate for women’s suffrage, proposed that only those property owners with the right to vote should be taxed. It was "no taxation without representation" resurfacing at the local level although her aim, of course, was to break the male-only voting barrier. Ms. Minor’s initiative, while widely publicized, was not seriously debated.

There was even more concern about executive power. Although the mayor’s term was doubled, from two to four years, just about every other feature of the charter weakened the office. All major appointments required City Council confirmation. The number of separately elected executive departments, which already numbered nine, was increased to fourteen. This was both politically prudent, avoiding eliminating jobs held by elected officials who might otherwise oppose the Board of Freeholders proposal, but it also set the precedent that still prevails whereby the key County functions, such as recording deeds, are not supervised by the City’s chief elected executive, the Mayor, but instead are autonomous. Instead of using the City-County separation as an opportunity to merge these functions within municipal government, the freeholders decided to keep them independent from the City and allow them to have their own electoral base.

Modern City of St. Louis mayors have decried their lack of charter authority over two fundamental services: police and education. In 1876, the State of Missouri oversaw both. During the Civil War, the secessionist-minded State leaders passed legislation taking over the City’s police department in order to prevent it from being used by Union sympathizers in St. Louis. A five-member Board of Police
Commissioners governed the department, with four appointed by the Governor and the Mayor serving ex officio as the fifth. Although this seemed like an auspicious time to undo this arrangement, and returning the police to local control made sense to many of the freeholders, they feared upsetting state government leaders. Saying, as rhetorical cover, that the police department was doing a fine job and that therefore they should not tinker with its governance, the Board punted on returning police to local control. There was even less discussion about schools. The State signaled that, in its judgment, this was clearly a state function that should be organized separately from municipal government under guidelines promulgated by the State. The Board of Freeholders got the message and avoided mentioning education.

A merit system for City employees was the other issue that pitted the past against the future. Patronage was the accepted form of public hiring and firing in the City. If the party in power changed, then City jobs were a portion of the spoils of victory. Reformers around the country were beginning to talk about changing governmental employment at all levels to a more business-like approach with formal job descriptions, hiring based on demonstrable qualifications that did not include helping someone get elected, and a modicum of job security. The freeholders discussed whether the City should be one of the first in the nation to change from patronage to merit and decided, again with an eye to having their plan approved, that such an initiative would generate much more opposition than support.

Although it was not the Board’s intent, this at least left in place one mechanism—partisan machine politics—which could build coalitions that cut across the legislative and executive branches and also could link several of the executive departments. The formal governmental authority fragmented by the City Charter could at least be partially glued together by bargains struck within political parties in the pursuit of having their entire ticket elected. The decision not to adopt the merit system helped sustain machine politics in the City, making it a functional centrifugal force in an otherwise centripetal government.

The Election

Having completed their task in the ninety days assigned to them, no less and no more, the Board of Freeholders had little time to catch their collective breath. Within ten days, the City Council and County Court met in joint session and set the election for August 22, 1876. All City and County residents would vote on the separation issue while only those who would live in the expanded City would cast ballots on the proposed charter. Each element needed a simple majority to be approved.

The plan’s proponents came disproportionately from the more prosperous members of the community, almost all of whom were City residents. They saw the proposal as crucial for the City’s continued economic development which would, happiest of impacts, make them even more affluent. In the campaign itself, however, they downplayed this point and instead concentrated on two themes: lower taxes and enhanced checks and balances. Both, they thought, would have broader appeal than either boosterism or making the wealthy wealthier. To City residents, the proponents argued that separation would lower City taxes by up to fifteen percent and relieve the City from supporting future infrastructure projects in the County. As for assuming the County’s debt, why the City owed most of this anyway since it had over eighty percent of the assessed valuation. Taking
responsibility for the relatively small remainder was a bargain in order to be freed, once and for all, from any entanglement with the County.

The County voters were told they would also have their taxes reduced by about fifteen percent, even after paying to construct a courthouse and jail. The existing infrastructure, especially the road system, was in good shape so there was no immediate need for other public capital projects. Since, after separation, the County’s debt would vanish, there was ample capacity to issue bonds if any happened to be required.

As for the charter, the supporters stressed how American it all was, especially the bicameral legislature. If it was good enough for the national and state governments, it certainly made sense for the City of St. Louis. The City Council, the upper house, would attract a better sort of person who would look out for citywide interests and not become the prisoner of parochial concerns. Albert Todd, one of the freeholders, noted during the campaign that in the current unicameral council, “its business is called up by wards (and) many of the aldermen do not seem to have considered any other than ward interests and it seems to be understood that the aldermen of the different wards shall not interfere with each other in their special and exclusive work for their respective wards.” Another supporter was even less subtle, asking “who will assert that our ordinary type of alderman could be elected by the general (i.e., at-large) vote of the city?”

Overlaying both of these messages was a self-generated crisis atmosphere. The supporters had obtained a legal opinion that the Constitution of 1875’s provision for separating the City and the County only authorized a single attempt. If this election failed, there would be no opportu-

nity to try again without rewriting the Constitution and having that change approved in a statewide vote. This interpretation, unchallenged by the plan’s opponents, effectively forestalled an appeal to vote no this time so that one or another detail, such as the precise boundary lines, could be improved before having a second election.

Elected officials from both the City and the County led the opposition. They were, as Machiavelli put it in The Prince, those who profited from the “old order of things.” As such, they had the most to lose, exchanging the certainty of today’s advantage for the uncertainty of tomorrow’s. Having one’s livelihood at risk is a powerful motivator.

The opponents avoided arguing any of the proponents’ key points, tacitly conceding that separation and lower taxes were popular. Instead, they raised the specter of an all-powerful executive, contending that many of the specific charter provisions threatened to make the Mayor a mini-dictator. Some of their examples included extending the term of office from two to four years and the absence of term limits. They also injected a touch of class warfare into the campaign, suggesting that the plan, especially the charter, was a plot to allow the principal businesses and major landowners to manipulate the rules for their special advantage.

Election day stalled the separation steamroller. The measure to sever the City and County lost, with 14,142 (52.6%) no votes and 12,726 (47.4%) yes tallies. Although it passed narrowly in the expanded City, 11,878 (50.8%) to 11,525 (49.2%), that margin was overcome by substantial rejection in the County: 848 (24.5%) yes and 2,617 (75.5%) no. The charter won narrowly, 11,858 (51.2%) yes to 11,300 (48.8%) no, but without separation and the larger boundaries for the City, the approved charter applied to a
City which did not exist and hence was moot. The charter’s winning margin came from the City’s existing residents (11,424 yes and 9,549 no) and was strongly opposed by those living in the expanded area (434 yes and 1,751 no).

Reversing the Election

The advocates for separation and home rule were not conceding. They had fought too long to let one setback scuttle the entire initiative. Alleging widespread voting irregularities, they started legal proceedings to have what appeared to be a defeat instead declared a victory. County officials, largely against the plan, had been in charge of the electoral process and, even in the City, politicians against the proposal had more opportunities than business leaders to engage in ballot hanky-panky.

On October 13, 1876, they asked the courts to require the City of St. Louis Mayor Henry Overstolz and St. Louis County Court Presiding Judge Chauncey Schultz to certify that both separation and the charter had won. Fortunately and perhaps not coincidentally, the motion was heard by Judge Louis Gottschalk who, prior to being named to the bench, had been one of the St. Louis delegates to the 1875 Constitutional Convention advancing separation and home rule. While too cautious to declare victory outright, he did appoint a five-man commission to conduct a recount.

The opponents appealed Judge Gottschalk’s authority to even hear the case at all, arguing that the election was over and the results were final. By a 2-to-1 vote, a three-judge panel rejected this effort. One of the two judges in the majority was Thomas Gantt, still another St. Louis delegate to the 1875 Convention and, as has already been noted, the principal drafter of many of the provisions covering separation and home rule. The courts were a hospitable venue for the proponents of separation and home rule.

The recount commission began its work in mid-November and finished in late December. It identified numerous instances of fraud and mismanagement. Although it did not and could not turn no votes into yes, it was well able to disallow thousands of no tallies. In a few precincts where opposition was high and irregularities widespread, the commission decided simply to disallow any ballots from those jurisdictions. The adjusted result had separation winning 12,181 (52.7%) to 10,928 (47.3%) and the charter victorious by an even greater margin, 11,309 (58.3%) to 8,088 (41.7%).

Those trying to amass more no votes were not very bright about it, making the recount commission’s task easier. In one anti-separation precinct, for example, the number of ballots reportedly cast was 170 more than the total number of registered voters. Instead of altering votes one at a time, some election judges found that too time consuming and placed tens of "no" ballots, all folded in a single group, into the box. According to a November 25, 1876 report in the Missouri Republican, 128 out of 130 ballots opposing separation had the周年 on them. Despite these and other findings, no electro judge or clerk was ever charged with fraud or misconduct. The forces for separation and home rule wanted victory, not revenge.

Judge Gottschalk accepted the commission’s findings and that paved the way for Mayor Overstolz and County Presiding Judge Charles Speck to certify that both the scheme of separation and the new charter had been approved. Speck had been elected Presiding Judge in November 1876, while the dispute was still unresolved.
The pro-separation forces, foreseeing that it would be advantageous to have a friend at the top of County government, had been the key behind Speck’s victory and they received a speedy return on their campaign investment.

The anti-separation group continued to fight in the courts and also sought assistance from State elected officials but it was a losing battle. Wherever they went, the separation interests had the upper influential edge. By April 1877, a municipal government had been elected, the old seven-judge County Court was history, and awaiting the next general election, the Governor had appointed an interim three-judge County Court. In slightly less than two years, a brisk timetable for any complex venture, City-County separation and home rule had moved from aspiration to reality.

The Globe-Democrat, with editorial tongue in cheek, wrote this eulogy for the departing County Court Judges:

“Lay the seven sages down,
Each a bright and blessed martyr,
Wearing an immortal crown,
Done to death by scheme and charter.”

**Changing the City Charter**

Having rid itself of the County and embarked on home rule, the City has periodically reflected on the wisdom of its 1870s ways. Efforts at reconnecting the City and County, either in part or in whole, will be described later but, whatever its relationship with the County, the City has continued to debate how best to structure its own government.

The 1876 Charter, for some, had excessive fragmentation and hampered quick and decisive governmental action.

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In 1911, a group calling itself “The Civic League” proposed a new charter with stronger mayoral powers and a unicameral legislature with all of its members elected at large. The state constitutional requirement that the City have two legislative houses had been repealed in 1902. A majority of the electorate saw this as a thinly veiled attempt to place City government in the hands of the establishment, an interpretation amply supported by reviewing the contributors to the Civic League. An empowered executive, the rank-and-file voter feared, would be better able to carry out the wishes of the business and professional elite and an assembly elected citywide would not be sensitive to individual neighborhood concerns. The proposal was summarily defeated.

The charter reform forces persisted, trimmed their aspirations, and in 1914 managed to eke out a 51% to 49% victory. The Charter of 1914 included many of the then trendy progressive elements, including the initiative (voters could propose and pass ordinances), referendum (voters could reject recently passed legislation), and recall of elected officials. It split the difference between a council elected at large and one chosen by wards by specifying that the 28-member Board of Aldermen would be elected citywide but that the wards would be retained and each alderman would be assigned to an individual ward, thereby giving each district’s residents a designated legislator. The County offices, now numbering eight, were kept as separately elected positions and no effort was made to regain control of the police department. The most consequential change established a Board of Estimate and Apportionment with three members (Mayor, Comptroller, President of the Board of Aldermen) each elected citywide. This Board was given the budgeting and contractual powers, depriving the Mayor of the unilateral ability to manage the City’s financial affairs.
The Charter of 1914, with almost all its essential elements intact, survives to this day. The only significant structural modification came in 1941 when at-large elections for each member of the Board of Aldermen were abandoned and election by ward instituted. This reaffirmed and strengthened the centrality of ward-based politics in City governance.

Past and present mayors have chafed at their limited authority. The charter gives them few tools for making things happen and presents many obstacles that must be overcome. They have looked enviously at the chief executives in other cities, almost all of whom have vastly stronger powers, and asked why could that not be their lot.

Coalitions must often include elected officials from both the City posts and one or more of the county offices. In order to make the financial numbers on the Kiel Center project work, the City needed to pledge the revenues from the adjacent parking garage. You would think these would be considered City funds, under the control of the Board of Estimate and Apportionment and the Board of Aldermen. Wrong. Most of them fall under the authority of the Treasurer who, despite having “City” in the title, is actually a county office. So a bargain needed to be struck with the Treasurer in order to complete the Kiel Center.

Mayors have coped with these handicaps by using their extensive media coverage to create an aura of power and by engaging in widespread political coalition building, both inside government by, for example, allying with either the Comptroller or the Aldermanic Board President to insure a majority on the Board of Estimate and Apportionment, and outside government by, for instance, becoming a political party leader. These strategies, however, carry their own costs. Coalitions require time to maintain and favors to sustain, both commodities in short supply. As a result, periodically mayors have called for reform which, for them, has meant robust executive powers.

A report from a blue-ribbon commission in 1996, buttressed by subsequent discussions involving all living past and present mayors—James Conway, Vince Schoemehl, Freeman Bosley, Jr., and Clarence Harmon—have floated several recommendations, each of which would strengthen the hand of the mayor. The first is eliminating the Board of Estimate and Apportionment, including the elected comptroller, and assigning its function solely to the mayor. Second is having four county functions (treasurer, collector of revenues, license collector, recorder of deeds), each currently headed by a separately elected official, instead become part of the mayor’s office. Third is ending state control of the police department and making the police chief a mayoral appointment. These revisions face a tangled thicket of formal and informal impediments: charter changes requiring majority approval in a citywide vote, legislative changes by the Missouri General Assembly, possibly statewide votes to amend the Constitution, cooperation or at least acquiescence by those whose offices are being eliminated, and, most generically, allaying concerns about having too much power concentrated in any one office.

**Lessons and Patterns**

What happened more than one hundred years ago furnishes hints about the way St. Louisans are. If the problem is accommodating diverse interests, in this case urban in the City versus rural in the County, the answer is separate governments. The predisposition is not to seek win-win solu-
tions within a larger framework but instead for each set of interests to go its own governmental way. The fear of loss outweighs the potential for gain. Homogeneity trumps heterogeneity.

For dramatic change to occur, myriad stars have to be aligned in the political constellation. Those wanting to separate the City from the County and use a home rule charter to lessen state influence started with dollars and numbers on their side. The deep-pocket business and professional groups were behind it and the City had more than four-fifths of the combined City-County population. Added to this was the luck of having a constitutional convention at just the right time, friendly allies in Jefferson City and the courts, a manufactured sense of crisis, shrewd strategies, and tight organization. Even with all this, the outcome was in doubt until the very end.

When designing local governments, more elected officials are better than fewer and fragmenting authority is superior to concentrating it. These two principles reinforce one another. Each elected official has a stake in protecting his or her prerogatives or, as James Madison put it in Federalist Paper #51, “ambition must be made to counteract ambition.” Pushing this principle to its logical conclusion, as the St. Louis area became larger and more complex, its natural instincts were to create more governments and more elected officials, a mosaic fragmented by design.

Chapter 2

The Suburban Explosion

After separating from the City, St. Louis County’s population was slightly more than thirty thousand while the City’s exceeded three hundred thousand. Both grew steadily for the next five decades. By 1920, the County broke the one hundred thousand mark. That seemed large to the Countians but the City still dominated with more than three-quarters of a million residents.

All that was to change over the next half century. The County’s population went on an exponential fling, doubling during the 1920s, doubling again between 1930 and 1950, and doubling once more between 1950 and 1970. By that point the County had almost a million inhabitants and it has stayed in that range since then.

The City grew marginally for another three decades, peaking at about 850,000 in 1950. It then began a dizzying decline, shedding slightly more than one hundred thousand per decade until, by the late 1990s, its population was about 350,000. When the twentieth century began, there were more than ten City residents for every County inhabitant. As its end, there are about three Countians for every City dweller.

What Caused Suburbanization?

Suburbanization in the St. Louis area was propelled by the same factors operating in other metropolitan regions. It was a drive both to get away from the congestion and noise of urban life and a desire to attain an American ideal: a single-family home on land which could be cultivated, even if
the principal crop were grass. Immediately before and after World War II, the City had more than 13,000 persons per square mile, more dense than present-day Boston, Chicago, or Philadelphia. The adjacent County featured hundreds of square miles of developable land. The combination of dense City and open County was too alluring for many households. Beyond that, home construction technology was moving from a craft where each residence was a distinctive creation to a manufacturing process where subdivisions were look-alike sets of tens or hundreds of homes. The latter brought economic efficiencies and a lower price that broadened the market and generated substantial profits for homebuilders.

The national government did its part by shortening transportation times between City jobs and County homes and by expanding financial access. Federal highway dollars paid for building Interstate 70 to the northwest, Interstate 44 to the southwest, and Interstate 55 to the south. The same pot of money connected the missing link through Richmond Heights between U.S. 40, which had dead-ended at Brentwood Boulevard, and the Express Highway, which had stopped its westward path at Skinker. To make homeownership affordable for the middle class, the Federal Housing Administration and the Veterans Administration supplied mortgages with low down payments, subsidized interest rates, and insured protection.

As the migration to the suburbs accelerated, jobs began to follow residents. The growth of aircraft manufacturing around Lambert Airport in the 1930s was just a beginning. In the St. Louis area, as elsewhere, the answer to the chicken-and-egg debate over whether people move to be near jobs or do jobs shift to be closer to residents became clear: employers locate enterprises near the labor force.

The Municipality Boom

As the County filled up with people, going from one hundred thousand in 1920 to almost one million by 1970, one could envision three possible scenarios for structuring its local governments. One possibility would have been for the fifteen municipalities existing in 1920 to expand their boundaries to accommodate the growing numbers. From Fenton on the south to Bridgeton and Florissant on the north, from Maplewood and University City on the east to Kirkwood and Valley Park on the west, it would have been straightforward for each of these small cities (Webster Groves was the largest at 9,474) to reach out and annex the growing settlements around them. Had that happened, St. Louis County might now have twenty or so cities, each averaging about fifty thousand population. Missouri law certainly provided no obstacles to this approach. The residents in an annexed area had no say in the matter. Municipalities could reach out and touch their neighbors and, with a stroke of the pen, make them fellow citizens.

A second option would have been for the new suburbanites to opt for no municipalities at all. In 1920, almost two-thirds of the County residents lived in unincorporated areas. The newcomers might have chosen the same status, foregoing the possibility of having their own legal communities. Instead, the County itself would serve as the default supplier of local government services and, if the County decided not to provide a particular benefit, these residents would either do without, purchase it privately, or form a special governmental district. In fact, this has proved a popular choice. Although a majority of the County's residents have been inside municipal boundaries since 1940, a significant fraction, over one-third at the present, live in unincorporated areas that, geographically, constitute slight-
ly more than half of the County's territory.

The third alternative and, as we now know, the path most taken, would be to initiate municipalities at close to the same pace as the County added people. The ratio need not be one-to-one (if it had been, there would be about 150 cities today), but it should possess a high comfort level. Very large cities, those resembling the City of St. Louis, should be avoided and, within limits, the more municipalities, the merrier. When in doubt, form a government and that is what many suburbanites did. Although the County never hit the one hundred mark in cities, peaking at 98 in 1959, it has hovered around ninety since the 1950s.

Why so many? Ironically, the very legal device that might have made for fewer-but-larger municipalities, the ease of annexation, became the primary cause of incorporations. During the 1920s, the first two options took care of matters. As the County's population doubled from one hundred to two hundred thousand, the newcomers either moved into existing cities or unincorporated areas. Six cities alone accounted for almost half the increase: Clayton went from 3,028 to 9,613, Kirkwood from 4,422 to 9,169, Maplewood from 7,431 to 12,657, Richmond Heights from 2,136 to 9,150, University City from 6,792 to 25,809, and Webster Groves from 7,080 to 9,474. Most of this growth, however, occurred without annexation as the municipalities had room within their boundaries for this initial spurt.

All that changed in the 1930s. Some of the cities began to see the possibilities in annexation. It was the Depression, economic times were tough, and one way for cities to cope with financial adversity was to annex. The ideal solution was to grab a wealthier area but even spreading current costs over a broader tax base of similar value made sense. In Central County, for example, Clayton officials looked west and saw some magnificent estates along Ladue Road and other byways. It did not take long for them to calculate that Clayton plus these manors was better than Clayton alone.

As talk of annexation arose, the estate owners had only two choices: let Clayton take them in or, before an annexation decision could be made, incorporate themselves. Incorporating was not that much more difficult than annexation. All an area needed to do was gather signatures from fifty percent of the residents in the proposed new city, present the petition to the County government, and, presto, it was a done deal. Should the estate owners allow themselves to become part of a larger more diverse city or should they incorporate as a smaller more similar entity? The latter seemed much preferable and so, in 1936, Ladue was born.

Where is the Affton City Hall? Nowhere. It's not because the City of Affton has neglected to build one. The reason, rather, is that there has never been a City of Affton. Since certain names are commonly used to identify areas within St. Louis County — Lemay and Spanish Lake are two other examples — many people understandably assume that they constitute a municipality. The Census Bureau contributes to this confusion by counting numbers for these entities which it calls "unincorporated places." To complicate matters more, Maryland Heights once was another Census-blessed place without a municipal government but it incorporated in 1985.

The incorporation bug also broke out in North County during this same period. Several recently developed subdivisions, wanting to protect and maintain their homogeneity, decided that pre-emptive incorporation was the best way to handle any takeover threat.
So Bellerive, Bel-Nor, Beverly Hills, Glen Echo Park, Northwoods, Pasadena Hills, and Pasadena Park all put themselves into the incorporation column. If combined, these municipalities would cover just over two square miles, less than one-quarter the space, say, of Kirkwood. Along with a few others such as Crystal Lake Park (1938) and Twin Oaks (1938), they established the precedent that wherever a single subdivision exists, there incorporation can occur.

The most intensive burst of municipalities was right after World War II when, in St. Louis County, impregnation was the top indoor sport and incorporation the prevailing community pastime. Between 1945 and 1952, more than fifty cities formed. Some repeated the subdivision pattern of the 1930s, such as Bella Villa, Flor dell Hills, Lakeshore, Mackenzie, and Westwood. Others in this cohort, while originally having modest populations, have grown into units of ten thousand or more. Examples include Ballwin, Bellefontaine Neighbors, Crestwood, Creve Coeur, Hazelwood, Jennings, St. Ann, and Town and Country.

Not all these incorporations were straightforward defensive reactions to potential annexations. When St. Ann became a city in 1948, for example, its goal was to keep it the way it had recently become. Charles F. Vatterott, a devout Catholic and veteran real estate developer, saw a gap in the St. Louis County housing market: no affordable homes for large families, most of whom were Catholic. In what was a planned town before that term was used, during the 1940s he constructed more than five hundred homes in subdivisions featuring curvilinear roads and cul de sacs on property in Northwest St. Louis County east of Lindbergh and on both sides of St. Charles Rock Road. To reinforce the Catholic motif, he named most of the streets for saints and provided the Archdiocese with free land for churches and parochial schools. To make the town self-contained, he also implemented a business district near the intersection of Ashby Road and St. Charles Rock Road and built recreational facilities, including a nine-hole golf course that survives to this day. Vatterott's plan was a grand success. By the late 1940s, the residents looked around and liked what they saw: a community dominated by large Catholic families primarily of German and Irish descent. They decided the best way to preserve it was to incorporate. Reflecting Vatterott's special dedication to the Blessed Virgin Mary, they named the city after her mother: St. Ann.

With municipalities springing up throughout the County during the postwar era, one might conclude that birth by incorporation leads to eternal life. But municipalities do indeed fade away through annexation, dis-incorporation, or merger. Peerless Park, once located near the intersection of Interstate 44 and Woods Mill Road, was the latest demise. Born in 1935, its principal raison d'être for much of its existence was a liberal stance toward selling fireworks. Once that ended in 1993, there was just not much purpose to go on living and so, in 1999, it died by dis-incorporation. A moment of silence for it and some of the others who have departed: Arbor Terrace, Ber dell Hills, Bridgeton Terrace, Elnsdale, Goodfellow Terrace, Margona, Marvin Terrace, Mary Ridge, Meadowbrook Downs, Schuer mann Heights, and Times Beach.

Regulating Annexation and Incorporation

Fifty-plus incorporations in seven years caught the County's attention. The proportion of the residents living in unincorporated areas was plummeting from 48% in 1940 to
under 30% by the early 1950s. Since the County was the
supplier of city services such as police and street main-
tenance for the unincorporated areas, the rapid rate of new
cities meant a loss of its "municipal" population. This, in
turn, meant less clout and fewer employees for County gov-
ernment.

In the early 1950s, the County tried to assert control
over incorporations, ruling that it had to pass on their feasi-
bility and that, before that would happen, detailed proposals
must be prepared. But there was widespread doubt whether
the County had the legal authority to limit incorporations
and, worse yet, the separately elected County Counselor
was not on board, ruling that "if the area is properly the sub-
ject of incorporation, the petition must be granted whether
they (the County officials) approve or not."

Then someone had a superior idea: have the Missouri
General Assembly pass legislation making annexation more
difficult. Given Dillon's Rule, there was no questioning the
State's prerogative and, since most incorporations were
attempts to avoid an unwelcome annexation, making the lat-
ter more difficult would slow the former. In 1953, a new
law said all annexation efforts had to pass muster with the
respective county circuit court and that the courts had to
find that the initiative was "reasonable and necessary to the
proper development of said city" and that the city seeking to
add territory must demonstrate that it could "furnish normal
municipal services of said city to said unincorporated area
within a reasonable time after said annexation."

The law worked. It upped the annexation transaction
cost ante for municipalities, requiring them to allocate staff
time, secure consultants, and engage legal services. If that
were not enough, in a case pitting the City of Olivette
against St. Louis County, the Missouri Supreme Court came
down on the County's side. Olivette wanted to annex land
situated between its western boundary and the Monsanto
complex at Lindbergh Boulevard and Olive Street Road. The
County thought the property had splendid potential for
industrial and commercial development and had zoned it
accordingly. Olivette preferred to increase the residential
buffer between itself and Monsanto. But City of Olivette
versus Graeler II (1963) established that the County had
standing, noting that "in this instance the interests of the
county as a community outweigh the claims of Olivette."
In the same year, 1963, the Missouri General Assembly
made annexations even more difficult by requiring that they
would need a majority vote both in the acquiring munici-
pality and in the area to be annexed. Now voters on both
sides of the proposed marriage had to agree that the wed-
ding would take place. Given St. Louisans' penchant, not
only did it need to be a marriage of equals, as interpreted by
a third party, but each partner had to perceive it as such.
This is a rare event and, as a result, the number of annexa-
tion attempts since 1963 has plunged and, for those attempt-
ed, only a scattering have succeeded.

Post-1953 Incorporations: Sui Generis

Fewer annexations derailed the incorporation train.
There have been less than ten since 1953 with each tending
to have its own distinctive triggering mechanism. In 1959,
for example, a clever developer named Bill Bangert sought
to incorporate about half a square mile of Northwest St.
Louis County real estate as the Village of Champ. With his
own city, Bangert calculated, he could set the municipal
property tax rate, use the city's authority to issue tax-free
revenue bonds, and generally use the municipal powers for
his own private purposes. There were fewer than fifty per-
sons living in the proposed city and Bangert persuaded a majority to sign the petition to incorporate. Despite County and State protests, the courts upheld the proposal and, while the residential population had dropped to 11 by 1990, the village endures.

In 1970, to take another instance, avoiding racial and economic diversity was apparently the provocation for incorporating Black Jack. A year earlier, the Inter Religious Center for Urban Affairs announced plans to build a 108-unit multiple family housing project for low and moderate income households along Old Jamestown Road in what was unincorporated territory. On June 5, 1970, the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development threw its financial support behind the initiative, guaranteeing the subsidy which would make the project financially viable. Nearby residents, essentially all white, moved swiftly. Within three weeks, they had an incorporation petition with 1,425 valid signatures to the County Council and it approved the proposal in early August. By late October, the newly constituted Black Jack City Council passed a zoning ordinance banning any multifamily construction throughout the municipality. All this generated a flurry of civil rights litigation, and in U.S. versus City of Black Jack, Missouri (1974), the federal courts tossed out the ordinance. But the City of Black Jack, with this blotted legacy, remained incorporated. Ironically, its approximately six thousand population today is about evenly divided between blacks and whites.

A final example, one of the two incorporations in the 1990s, is the City of Wildwood. Thousands of upper income families built homes in the hilly westernmost section of St. Louis County during the 1980s and early 1990s. What attracted them was the blend of new housing, spacious lots, and wooded settings. As more of them arrived, fear arose that all this could end if zoning control remained with County Government. Moving aggressively, they proposed a 67-square-mile city, more than twice the size of any existing municipality in the County and about one-eighth of the County's total acreage, with a name, Wildwood, which reflected their values. By this time, state law required both a petition with a minimum number of signatures as well as a subsequent majority vote of the residents in the proposed jurisdiction. That happened in 1995 and Wildwood, now with more than 24,000 residents, is creating its own version of paradise.

Municipal Governments: Form and Style

Suburban municipalities see themselves as different from central cities like St. Louis where conflict reigns, parties compete, and patronage persists. Government is more about delivering public services efficiently than it is about resolving disputes amicably. In the City of St. Louis, a major police issue might be the racial mix in hiring officers. In a suburban municipality, it would be about whether to purchase Fords or Plymmouths for the police fleet.

In this setting, holding elected office is a volunteer activity, a public service, and full-time professionals are hired to oversee the day-to-day activities. The purest version is known as the council-manager form of government adopted in many of the County's larger municipalities such as Clayton, Ferguson, Maplewood, University City, and Webster Groves. Born in the progressive movement of the early 1900s, the typical "Reform Municipality" has an elected council setting overall policy but the ongoing executive function is handled by an appointed city manager. The mayor is elected citywide and serves as the council's
presiding officer but his or her executive functions are largely ceremonial, the cutter of ribbons and the dispenser of "keys to the City".

Florissant’s municipal government is the exception to the County norm. Like the traditional central city and unlike its suburban neighbors, it has a full-time mayor who runs the executive departments and forms a separate branch from the legislative council. Holding that office since 1963 has been James J. Eagan, the dean of St. Louis County mayors. During this period, Florissant has been the County’s largest municipality and presently has approximately fifty thousand residents. Eagan’s salary is about $100,000, similar to a city manager’s compensation for administering a comparably sized municipality. The father of ten and an inveterate Irishman, fond of green and a good yarn, Eagan is a modern legend in local government.

A variation on this form common in St. Louis County—Ballwin, Creve Coeur, Des Peres, Fenton, and Kirkwood for instance—has the chief appointed executive, typically called a city administrator, report just to the mayor rather than to the council as a whole. Councils still set policy and mayors continue to be part-time but, under this arrangement, they have more influence and tend to form a dual partnership with the administrator.

Being a city manager/administrator is not for those who prize job security. Multiple bosses, each with their own constituency, potentially changing with elections every two years, serving part-time, and not bashful about expressing strong opinions makes for what might be euphemistically called a dynamic environment. Many managers navigate this maelstrom well and remain in their posts for ten years or more. Others, either less skilled or more unlucky, have shorter longevities.

The twenty-or-so smallest towns, those with less than a thousand population and usually coterminous with a subdivision, cannot afford a professional executive. Typically, there is an elected board of trustees who conduct business around the dinner table at one of their homes and divide up the tasks, whether it be finding a contractor to repave the streets or hiring a firm to trim the trees. Although they possess legal municipal status, their governance style is almost identical with those of subdivision associations.

The Missouri Constitution of 1875 introduced municipal home rule to Missouri and now cities need just 5,001 residents to write their own charter. Only about half the County cities eligible for home rule have taken that path. The current home rule lineup has Berkeley, Bridgeton, Clayton, Crestwood, Creve Coeur, Ellisville, Ferguson, Florissant, Hazelwood, Kirkwood, Maplewood, Olivette, Richmond Heights, St. John University City, Webster Groves, and Wildwood. Why haven’t others sought more local autonomy? The most probable reasons are, first, seeing more risk than gain in inaugurating a discussion of governmental basics and, second, just plain inertia.

With the exception of the trustee-run towns, the remaining municipalities elect their councils from separate districts rather than at large. This organization makes it much more likely that council deliberations will focus on which ward’s needs receive what municipal resources rather than on what policies will best serve the city’s overall interests. Having so many municipalities brings local government decision making close to the people and a district-based electoral system takes it even further down to the grassroots.
St. Louis County Charter

At the end of World War II, St. Louis County's government was still the three-judge County Court plus more than ten separately elected offices, each carrying out one of the county functions like sheriff and recorder of deeds. This was the one-size-fits-all statewide approach to county government. Whether a county had a few thousand or a several hundred thousand population, state statutes mandated this governmental form.

To demonstrate that St. Louisans are not slaves to consistency, all of St. Louis County's school boards and, until very recently, the City of St. Louis board have been elected at large. Why the difference? It is generally considered impolitic to acknowledge publicly that educating children is anything other than promoting the overall good of the community. Fussing about territorially based differences would appear small-minded. Most prefer to pretend educational policy is above politics even when they know it is not.

The Constitution of 1945 changed that, authorizing home rule for counties with 85,000 residents or more. St. Louis County easily qualified and, while talk about doing it arose almost immediately after the new Constitution was approved, it was not until 1949 that an effective petition drive was launched. Over thirty thousand signed on, more than twice the number needed to have the County's circuit and probate judges appoint a fourteen-member Charter Commission.

In its deliberations, the Commission confronted two contradictory prescriptions. The good government crowd and the corporate mindset promoted a structure that mimicked a business enterprise: a powerful elected executive ("the CEO") and a relatively small legislative body ("the Board of Directors"). There would be clear lines of authority and less political squabbling. The current office holders as well as the political parties they represented argued the County should not abandon so much of its past and that there was great virtue in retaining autonomous County offices, each of which would be directly elected by the people.

The Commission handled this dilemma by choosing both options. They established a separate executive, the County Supervisor, and a seven-member County Council chosen by district. But they retained most of the County offices: Assessor, Circuit Clerk, Collector of Revenue, Constable (four of them), Coroner, County Clerk, Highway Engineer, Prosecuting Attorney, Public Administrator, Recorder of Deeds, Sheriff, Superintendent of Schools, and Treasurer. All offices would be partisan, with an August primary and a November general election. The Supervisor and Council reflected the Commission's ideology while the County offices demonstrated their prudence. Eliminating the latter would create political enemies which could defeat the charter proposal and open up the Commission to the charge that it was changing too much too soon.

On March 28, 1950, the electorate handily approved the charter, 22,816 to 12,576, in a low turnout election and, in November, Republican Luman F. Mathews, who had been the Presiding Judge since 1943, was chosen as the first County Supervisor, defeating Democrat Paul Fitzsimmons 72,872 to 54,293. He was re-elected by a narrower margin in 1954, winning over Democrat Daniel P. Williams by less than five thousand votes. Mathews did not run again in 1958 and the Democratic candidate, James McNary (unre-
lated both genetically and politically to a later holder of the office, Gene McNary), narrowly beat Republican A. Clifford Jones, later a state senator, by less than a thousand tallies. McNary's tenure was tainted by scandals and he did not survive the next Democratic Primary. In the 1962 general election, Republican Lawrence K. Roos routed Democrat Francis Kennedy, 152,385 to 94,792, starting a 12-year reign for himself and a 28-year streak for the Republican Party.

As County residents grew in number and prosperity, the days became numbered for the independent County offices. The corporate way of organizing was in the ascendancy and splintering executive authority was simply not a businesslike way to run a government. Every time one of the County elected offices stumbled, and there was no shortage of such events, calls went out to take that function out of partisan politics.

Law enforcement was the first to blunder and, after a series of mishaps in the Sheriff's office, a 1954 charter amendment eliminated the Sheriff and the constables, replacing them with the St. Louis County Department of Police, governed by a five-person bipartisan commission appointed by the County Supervisor with the consent of the County Council and the circuit judges. This provision passed handily by more than a four-to-one margin.

Next to go were the Assessor and the Collector of Revenues, victims of their own involvement in a snafu with tax bills. Once again the cure was clear: a charter amendment to establish a Department of Revenue with a professional director appointed by the County Supervisor with the confirmation of the County Council. After shifting the Highway Engineer from elected to appointed in 1966 and still having several remaining in the elected column, County Supervisor Roos and others decided to eliminate most of the remainder in one fell swoop by supporting another charter commission.

This commission began its work in early 1967 and, unlike its 1950 predecessor, decided that, as a self-respecting and thoroughly modern County, the County offices were, in their similarity to outstate counties, too rural and, in their partisanship, too urban. Only the prosecuting attorney would survive as a separately elected county-wide official. Most interests thought this was the right way to go. Good government groups like the League of Women Voters and both major newspapers felt it would create greater accountability. The County Supervisor and the County Council assumed, correctly, that it would increase their power. The big corporations supported it because its form looked like their stuctures and, naturally, that seemed a splendid idea.

Despite this civic juggernaut, the proposal was not a slam dunk at the polls. Most political party officials, including those who were about to lose their patronage playgrounds, claimed that it was too much concentration of power, too great a transformation from the past, and that the people would lose control over their local government. Organized as "Republicans and Democrats United for the Rights of Voters," even the Republican County Committee Chair worried that the County Supervisor, at that time a member of his own party, would be "all powerful with little control of government in the hands of the electorate." The case had a sympathetic hearing among many voters, but on April 2, 1968 the new Charter passed by a less-than-comfortable majority, 76,833 (54%) to 65,705 (46%) with the bulk of its support coming from upscale neighborhoods in the County's central corridor. A slightly revised charter was
approved in 1979 with the alterations more superficial (for example, changing the County Supervisor title to County Executive) than substantive.

**The County-Municipal War: Initial Skirmishes**

The 1968 victory for a more centralized County government was heady stuff and tempted County Supervisor Roos and his allies to go further. Having consolidated authority within County government, the next step, as they saw it, was to gain greater command over the ninety-plus municipalities especially the smaller ones which, in their view, had much too amateurish an approach to governmental management.

Before attacking this objective, however, the County needed a strengthened constitutional armory. The Constitution of 1945 did not give charter counties the authority to tell municipalities what services they could perform and at what levels they needed to supply them. The County would need a constitutional amendment to extend its rule. Roos skillfully built a coalition of state legislators and mayors of many of the larger municipalities and had an amendment placed on the November 1970 ballot stating that a county charter "may provide for the vesting and exercise of legislative power pertaining to any and all services and functions of any municipality or political subdivision, except school districts, throughout the entire county within as well as outside incorporated municipalities." This was sweeping stuff, with "any and all" just the adjectives the County desired.

The mayors of cities like Ferguson, Florissant, University City, and Webster Groves liked the notion that all County municipalities would need to match their performance. They took pride in their operations and did not want to be tarred with the same brush Roos was using to paint some of the less capable units. Framing the issue as efficient-government-by-professionals versus inefficient-government-by-amateurs, the amendment sailed to an easy victory, receiving 63% approval in St. Louis County and 57% throughout the state.

Having prevailed on principle, Roos next sought to apply it to particulars only to find out that, indeed, the devil is in the details. Working with and through a commission jointly established with the County Municipal League, a membership organization including most of the municipalities, the County sought to amend the charter to give it the authority to set standards for police departments, housing codes, and building and construction codes. All of this upset the smaller cities who thought it was up to them to decide these matters. They were joined by some of the upscale communities who feared that a minimum housing code would also become the maximum, thereby limiting their authority to insist on stricter standards. In a November 1971 election, the amendments all failed. The police proposal fared best, with 46%, while the building and housing code measures only mustered about 40% each. No one was confused by what a majority of the voters were saying: let us decide about services and standards at the municipal level. Variety is preferable to uniformity, even if it results in subpar government in neighboring municipalities.

The charter revision process in 1979 gave Roos's successor, fellow Republican Gene McNary, the opportunity to re-open these questions. Although the commission debated having the County assume responsibility for a wide range of services, including police and fire protection, prudence prevailed at the end. The revision enhanced the County's role in only two areas: solid waste disposal and firefighter stan-
dards. Neither was controversial for municipalities, including the smaller ones. Only the larger cities had their own fire departments while the rest of the County was part of one of the approximately twenty-five fire protection districts. All these units were large enough to meet the standards that were being proposed so there was no disruption of the status quo.

Also settled relatively amicably was how to implement and share sales tax revenue. Those municipalities with shopping centers or other major retail establishments had seized the opportunity to approve local sales taxes to reap the benefits from their great fortune. The County, itself the de facto municipality for hundreds of thousands of residents, also wished to tap this revenue stream. The Crestwoods and St. Anns resisted any encroachment on their flow but did agree to support a county-wide sales tax provided they could opt out and receive all the proceeds from within their jurisdictions. The remaining revenues would be divided per capita between the County and all other municipalities. Thus was born the distinction between "point-of-sale" cities and "pool" cities. The haves kept everything they possessed while the have-nots were able to sip modestly from the sales tax trough.

**The County-Municipal War: The Fighting Escalates**

By ruling in the 1963 Graeler case that St. Louis County's interests had legal standing in any municipal annexation, the Missouri Supreme Court had given the County leverage to resist attempts by cities to acquire attractive adjacent acreage. But what the Court had done it could undo and, in 1983 by a narrow 4-3 vote, that is just what happened. Town and Country was seeking to annex more than three thousand acres which, less than coinciden-

tally, contained some substantial property tax generators including a major Western Electric facility. Voting majorities in both Town and Country and the target area agreed to the proposal but the County, as had been its practice since Graeler, opposed it, saying that the revenue loss would threaten its ability to deliver services throughout its jurisdiction. In *City of Town and Country v. St. Louis County et al*, the Court said that since annexations now required majority approval in the sought-after unincorporated area, it no longer "fell to the judiciary to safeguard (their) interests." The Court expressed displeasure at the dispute between the County and one its municipalities, noting that they "are not competing governmental entities" and "their function is to serve the general interests..., not to engage in competition for the right to collect revenues."

This decision tempted several municipalities to covet neighboring territory. One of the most attractive sites was the unincorporated area known as Maryland Heights which had several taxable gems including the West Port complex with offices, shops, and hotels, a swath of distribution centers and offices west of Lindbergh between Page Avenue and Dorsett Road, and the emerging Earth City and Riverport developments. From three sides—Overland on the east, Creve Coeur from the south, and Bridgeton to the north—potential invaders began drawing up annexation plans. Left defenseless by the Town and Country decision, Maryland Heights residents rapidly initiated an incorporation process which was approved in the November 1984 election. By 1988 Chesterfield, faced with similar threats, also incorporated. Together, these two actions shifted over sixty thousand residents and more than ten million dollars in local tax revenues from the County to the new cities.

The unstable atmosphere created by leaving the County
out of the annexation process was a problem in search of a solution. It seemed inevitable that, inexorably, all the attractive parts of the County would become either annexed or incorporated, leaving the municipal component of County government responsible for a scattered set of undesirable pockets. This would be untenable since the remaining unincorporated territory would not produce enough revenue to cover the costs of servicing such an array. Beyond that, County government would be much smaller, not a pleasant thought for either its elected leaders or appointed officials.

Confluence St. Louis, a citizens league formed in 1983, saw this as just the kind of issue it should tackle. It formed a 22-person task force that began work in August 1985. Chaired by Fred Perabo, a Ralston Purina executive, the group included many prominent individuals. After a year-and-a-half of meetings and deliberations, it issued its report, entitled Too Many Governments?, in February 1987. The key recommendations were to "incorporate all of St. Louis County and clearly divide responsibilities between municipalities and County Government," "enlarge, merge, and form municipalities until each has 25,000 to 75,000 residents," and "reform revenue structures so that each unit of government has enough revenues to provide needed services." The group also thought that the City of St. Louis should re-enter the County as a distinct municipality, but acknowledged that such a move might not be politically feasible in the immediate future.

County Executive Gene McNary, like other governmental officials, was monitoring the Confluence discussions. Among other conduits, Ned Taddeucci, his former chief of staff, was a task force member. Eager to seize the moment, in 1986 he ordered the St. Louis County Department of Planning to prepare a specific plan that would implement what appeared, correctly, to be the principles Confluence would enunciate a few months later. In November 1987, the report, which quickly became known as the McNary Plan, was issued and it furnished specific details on the Confluence principles.

The McNary Plan divided the County into 21 cities ranging in population from about 7,000 to approximately 77,000, with all but a few being above 20,000. It eliminated all municipal fire departments as well as the self-standing twenty-plus fire protection districts and consolidated them into four fire protection districts. It drew relatively clear lines between County and municipal duties, with its most controversial recommendation targeted at zoning. The County would assume responsibility for "development and enforcement of a master plan in conjunction with municipalities" while the cities would conduct "local planning and zoning control within broad parameters of the countywide master plan." The County would be funded by a new one percent earnings tax, it would cede the property tax to municipalities, and the existing one percent sales tax, some of which went to the County, would all be distributed to the municipalities on a per capita basis.

A county-wide master plan was anathema for the municipalities. They understandably saw this as a stalking horse for the County gaining the upper hand on how land was used, one of the most precious decisions made by local government. Instead of cities having largely their own way on zoning, they feared the County would use a master plan to intervene with claims that a municipal decision did not conform to the overall scheme. In addition, the "point-of-sale" cities saw the per capita distribution as penalizing them for their courage to allow shopping centers to locate
within their municipality. Other cities, St. Ann argued, could have welcomed Northwest Plaza into its community but they chose not to do so. St. Ann did and therefore deserved all the tax revenue benefits.

Municipal leaders also worried about an annexation frenzy and sought to bring some order to the process. Working through the County Municipal League, they first successfully pushed state legislation which mandates that any sales tax gained by adding an unincorporated area goes into the county-wide pool and is divided per capita rather than being captured exclusively by the annexing municipality. This deterred cities from annexing areas simply to have a sales tax windfall. In 1987, the Municipal League also embraced total incorporation of the County as a desirable goal, but said it should be a gradual process over a decade rather than a sudden transformation. To facilitate the transition, they picked up on the concept of a boundary commission which had been recommended in 1985 by the St. Louis County Annexation Commission. Such an entity would have representation from both unincorporated and incorporated areas. At that time, most mayors had opposed such a body saying it transferred voters' rights of self-determination to an appointed group. Now, two years later, it looked like a reasonable way to forestall the momentum toward rapid change. Conversely, County Executive Gene McNary, who, in 1985, thought a boundary commission was about as much reform as might be possible now abandoned it in favor of a more comprehensive approach.

The major business interests, longtime proponents for streamlining local governmental structures, saw the combination of the Confluence report and a pro-reform County Executive as an irresistible opportunity to move ahead. They helped fund a petition drive to form a Board of Freeholders under Section 30 (a) of Article VI in the Missouri Constitution. The section had been added in 1924 to provide a mechanism to put together what has been torn asunder in 1876: the City and County. It was later broadened in 1945 to allow a Board "to establish a metropolitan district or districts for the functional administration of services " in the City and County and, in 1966, extended still further to empower a Board "to formulate and adopt any other plan for the partial or complete government of all or any part of the City and the County." With the informal understanding that a Board would restrict its purview to governmental reorganization within the County and one or more new City-County districts, City Mayor Vince Schoemehl agreed to cooperate both in the petition drive and in promptly appointing the City members.

By September 1987, the petitions had been submitted and approved and the Board of Freeholders, nineteen members strong, held its first meeting. By the time the Board had settled in, hired a staff, and re-asked the question, "what should we propose," there were the answers: Confluence's Too Many Governments?, issued a few months earlier, set forth the basic principles and the November 1987 County Department of Planning document delineated the particulars. The Board of Freeholders liked what they saw and decided to modify these plans rather than start from scratch.

The thorniest part of the McNary Plan was reducing 90-plus cities to 21. No entity stayed the same and there were far too many unwelcome combinations. To paraphrase the Boston ditty about the Cabots and Lodges, the Claytons spoke only to the Ladues and the Ladues spoke only to God. No one wanted to marry down and some were even reluctant to marry up. To give itself more bargaining room, the Board decided that forty, plus or minus a few, would both
satisfy the need for minimum size and enable more existing
cities to retain their identity. After much tweaking of metes
and burnishing of bounds, they ultimately arrived at 37.

The Board also worried that a County-only proposal
might not pass constitutional muster and that, to be legally
safe, its plan should have some City-County component.
So it recommended a joint Economic Development District
funded by a one percent utility tax on non-residential units
and the sales tax proceeds from Lambert International
Airport. It also provided a mechanism whereby the City
and County, either through their respective governments or
by voter petition, could establish ad hoc metropolitan com-
misions to consider other City-County initiatives.

Otherwise the Board stayed close to the McNary Plan:
four fire protection districts to replace the existing munici-
pal and autonomous fire units, a county-wide earnings tax
replacing its property tax levy, having municipal zoning be
consistent with a county-wide master plan, and distributing
most of the sales tax per capita. The point-of-sale cities
would be allowed to keep one-quarter of the proceeds.

By December 1987, the Board's ultimate direction was
becoming apparent and municipal opposition, already
poised to counterattack, emerged full blast. The Mayors of
Large Cities, representing the eighteen largest municipalities, issued a statement stating that "any attempt to change
municipal boundaries through forced consolidation or
merger of existing cities would be divisive" and noting that
bigger cities were unnecessary since "the size of a municip-
ality bears relatively little relationship to its fiscal well-
being." Velda Village Mayor Lottie Mae Williams injected
a racial dimension, answering "yes" to her own question "Is
there a secret, sinister plan in the works that would dis-
mantle all cities headed by black elected officials in St.
Louis County?"

In addition, the municipal forces opened up a second
front, filing suit in federal court. The litigation was brought
by two renters who claimed that since only property own-
ers, the formal meaning of "freeholders," could serve on the
Board, they were being deprived of their rights under the
Equal Protection Clause in the U.S. Constitution's
Fourteenth Amendment. Since one of the parties to the law-
suit was Robert Quinn, a state representative whose district
included some of the smaller North County cities and who
was himself a former member of the Ferguson City Council,
the assumption was that the municipalities were behind all
this. In a January 25, 1988 press release, Board Chair
Wayne Millsap charged "there is little doubt that this legal
maneuver was encouraged by a small group of municipal
officials whose portion of power might be threatened.
Drawing the battle lines even more sharply, Millsap added
"it is a sad day when local officials who fear the loss of their
positions are able to wreak havoc with the rights of voters."
Comity was over.

The suit rode a legal rollercoaster. In March 1988, the
U.S. District Court agreed with the plaintiffs and ordered
the Board disbanded even before it could issue its report. In
May, the U.S. Eighth Circuit Court of Appeals said that the
Missouri courts should rule first, thereby allowing the
Board to reappear, and on September 23, 1988 the Missouri
Supreme Court upheld the Board's legitimacy, finding in
Millsap vs. Quinn that although "membership was restrict-
ed to owners of real property," this did not violate the Equal
Protection Clause because the Board did not "exercise gen-
eral governmental powers." Having exhausted the state
courts, the municipalities headed for the U.S. Supreme
Court.

Meantime, after the Missouri Circuit Court reinstated
the Board of Freeholders and just before the Missouri Supreme Court affirmed that decision, the Board of Freeholders unanimously issued their plan on September 13, 1988, calling for an election on June 20, 1989. The Coalition for an Informed Electorate, an amalgamation of good government groups (Conference on Education, Confluence St. Louis, Junior League of St. Louis, Leadership St. Louis, League of Women Voters of St. Louis County) and business interests (Civic Progress, Real Estate Board of Metropolitan St. Louis, St. Louis Regional Commerce and Growth Association) as well as the Urban League of Metropolitan St. Louis implemented a community education effort that, essentially, was a soft-sell campaign on behalf of the Freeholders' plan. The principal opposition group, Countians Against High Taxes and Loss of Local Control, contained its themes in its title and included most municipal and fire protection officials.

Creating suspense and threatening to rain on the reformers' parade, however, was a United States Supreme Court decision on February 21, 1989, to take the case on appeal from the Missouri Supreme Court. The June 20, 1989 election was postponed, pending the Court's decision which, ironically, it handed down on June 15, 1989, just five days before the balloting would have been held. In a unanimous 9-0 decision (Quinn vs. Millsap), the Court threw out the Board of Freeholders, holding that "membership on the Board of Freeholders is a form of public service, even if the board only recommends a proposal to the electorate and does not enact laws directly" and "thus, the Equal Protection Clause protects appellants' rights to be considered for appointment to the Board."

When the Board's lawyers moved to defend the suit, they had an awkward fact to confront. Mayor Schoemehl had originally asked the Reverend Paul C. Reinert, S.J., former St. Louis University president, to serve on the Board and he had agreed to do so. Given his vow of poverty as a Jesuit priest, Father Reinert owned no property. The City of St. Louis Counsel told the Mayor that, to avoid a court challenge, the safest tack would be for all his appointments to be property owners and so the Mayor scratched Father Reinert and substituted another name. This undercut any defense that it was just a probabilistic accident that all nineteen Board members happened to be property owners, a point tartly stated by Justice Harry Blackmun in his opinion: "The absurdity of appellees' position is vividly demonstrated by the property-based exclusion of Father Reinert whose long experience as a professor and officer of a local university gave him a sufficient stake in the community and knowledge of local conditions to make him an appropriate choice for appointment."

Thus the Board's plan was aborted judicially before it had an opportunity to be born electorally. How might it have fared if the election had been held? Would it have achieved concurrent majorities in the City and the County? Probably not. A February 1988 poll commissioned by the Board and conducted by Rod Wright of Attitude Research Corporation found that, after hearing the pros and cons about the proposal, the trial heat was 48% yes/36% no in the City and 49% yes/44% no in the County. Although this seems superficially promising, it is difficult to pass a reform proposal without initial support being much higher. As the campaign intensifies, doubters are more apt to come down on the "no" side of the fence. This proposal violated a political axiom. If you inflict harm directly and spread benefits
ambiguously, those threatened with death will fight intensively while those blessed with mild advantages will invest little to make the change happen. Wright also found one Achilles heel: strong majorities saw the proposal as costing more money, with 64% in the City and 74% in the County thinking it would be very or moderately likely that "overall residents of the area will be forced to pay higher taxes to support the new forms of government created by the plan."

The attorneys for the municipal interests not only beat St. Louis County, the City of St. Louis, and the State of Missouri at the Supreme Court but, to add dollar insults to legal injuries, the losing jurisdictions were ordered to pick up the tab. On September 28, 1990, St. Louis County Circuit Judge Arthur Litz awarded $282,177 in legal fees to those challenging the Board of Freeholders' constitutionality. The biggest beneficiary was Kevin O'Keefe, a veteran municipal attorney, with $169,296 in fees and expenses.

The Boundary Commission Returns

With all the uncertainty enveloping the Board of Freeholders Plan, support grew early in 1989 for asking the state legislature to authorize a boundary commission to regulate annexations and incorporations. Municipalities saw it as a pre-emptive move to undercut backing for the Freeholders' proposal. County interests thought it was a meaningful backup in case the Freeholders' effort failed.

Under the legislative leadership of Senator Wayne Goode and Representative Quinn, the General Assembly passed a bill authorizing a boundary commission bill for "any county with a charter form of government where fifty or more cities, towns and villages have been established" or, to cut to the chase, for St. Louis County described generically. The Boundary Commission was established in early 1990 and has become a meaningful forum to resolve annexation issues and to prevent some of their negative effects. As presently constituted, the Commission delicately balances representation among large cities, small municipalities, and unincorporated areas. Members are not elected directly but instead are appointed by the leaders of their respective constituencies. There have been periodic revisions in its makeup, the most recent in 1999, but its essential elements remain much the same.

The Board of Freeholders did not stay dead but instead morphed into the Board of Electors. In June 1990, the Missouri courts ruled the process could be revived without another round of petition signatures as long as owning property was not a requirement for appointment. The Board of Electors had only one carry-over member and began its deliberations in August 1990. Both Interim County Executive H. L. Milford and his opponent in the upcoming November 1990 election, County Prosecuting Attorney Buzz Westfall, wanted municipal reorganization off the table. The Board limited itself to possible City-County cooperative ventures, ultimately recommending that the two jurisdictions jointly govern Forest Park with an earmarked property tax and that they form an economic development district funded by a tax on business utility bills. The measure, Proposition P, narrowly failed in an April 1992 election, receiving 47% yes in the City and 46% yes in the County.

The nightmare of a St. Louis County with only unwanted areas remaining unincorporated did not materialize. The Boundary Commission has employed its regulatory authority and negotiating skills to maintain orderly annexations.
Any municipality contemplating an addition knows its proposal will need to pass muster and, even if sound, will require significant staff time to prepare plans and shepherd them through the process. At the same time, the County has enhanced the quantity and quality of its municipal services to make the large unincorporated areas like Affton and Mehlville in South County and Spanish Lake in North County comfortable with retaining that status. As a consequence, at century’s end, a relatively amicable governmental stasis exists in St. Louis County: about ninety municipalities occupying approximately three-fifths of the land with the same share of the population cohabiting with the “City of St. Louis County,” an area with about two hundred square miles and almost four hundred thousand residents.

**The Collar Counties**

While much of the civic leadership has been preoccupied with governmental structures within and between the City of St. Louis and St. Louis County during the past few decades, most population growth was happening in the three collar counties: Franklin, Jefferson, and St. Charles. In 1950, the combined City-County contained 92% of the five-county population in the Missouri portion of the St. Louis region. Even in 1970, with St. Louis County’s spurt, the City-County share was 86%. But between 1970 and 1998, the City-County core has lost about 225,000 residents while the collar counties have added approximately 310,000 so that, today, three out of every ten Missourians within the St. Louis area live outside the City of St. Louis and St. Louis County.

Not only is this changing the dynamics of politics within the region but it has also placed governmental reform on the agenda in the two largest collar counties, Jefferson and St. Charles, both of which have been eligible for home rule status for more than twenty years. Changing from a three-commissioner government to something like the executive/council form in St. Louis County has never gained much traction in Jefferson County despite its being an occasional conversational topic. A laissez faire approach to planning and zoning with deep suspicions about the dangers of governmental interference have combined to make a charter movement a matter of talk, not action.

After several false starts, St. Charles County got serious about writing its own constitution and, in April 1992, over sixty percent of the electorate voted to adopt a charter that features a government resembling St. Louis County's. There is a full-time County Executive and a seven-member County Council chosen from separate districts, all with four-year terms. The charter maintained several of the county-wide elected offices, including prosecuting attorney and sheriff, but it also contains a process to phase out others, including circuit clerk. The County's municipalities, taking a lesson from the St. Louis County experience, lobbied successfully to have a charter provision stating that "the County shall not intervene, or otherwise participate, in favor of, or in opposition to, any annexation of territory to any city, village, or town."

**Lessons and Patterns**

Living with one's own kind and civically solemnizing the relationship with incorporation was and is what most St. Louis Countians prefer, continuing the self-determination preached by the City of St. Louis in 1876. Given an option between fewer or greater governments, between annexing with a neighbor or going it alone, the choice throughout the 1930s, 1940s, and 1950s was to incorporate into largely
homogeneous cities and villages or remain in similar subdivisions within the unincorporated area. Given an opportunity in the late 1980s to reshape the governmental landscape, the majority's answer to "Too Many Governments?" was "no." Even if the local tax tab is a bit higher to have smaller and less efficient cities, it is a price worth paying for the comfort of affinity.

But a reform constituency did emerge during this period and it had some success. St. Louis County Government now centralizes authority and concentrates accountability in a powerful chief executive and St. Charles County went to school on this model. As result, the two county executives are predisposed to articulate the interests of the whole, mindful that too aggressive an approach would not lead to re-election. Moreover, the pluses and minuses of governmental multiplicity has become an ongoing component of civic dialogue. It has joined the weather and the Cardinals as staples in community conversations.

Major business interests demonstrated a pragmatic streak about governmental reform. In the 1870s, when the City had all the meaningful action, autonomy for the City made sense. As people and jobs dispersed, consolidation and merger became more attractive. Even though business leaders might ideologically oppose unifying public power, they want to move swiftly. Time is indeed money and the more governmental entities that must be on board to make something happen, the higher the transaction costs. Throughout the twentieth century, as seen in this chapter and the next, the business elite dreams about one-stop deal-making with local government.

CHAPTER 3

REUNITING CITY AND COUNTY

The City of St. Louis boundaries drawn in 1876, designed to provide enough room to grow for centuries, began to pinch before they reached their fourth decade. During the last twenty-five years of the nineteenth century, the land between Grand Avenue and the western boundaries filled up and, by the early twentieth century, west-of-Skinker became a prime location. The 1904 Worlds Fair, centered in Forest Park, was a magnet for development, Washington University moved to its new hilltop campus overlooking the park, and enterprising entrepreneurs like E.G. Lewis capitalized on this westward expansion to build popular projects like the Parkview neighborhood in what, in 1906, became University City.

What seemed like a magnificent idea in the 1870s, getting rid of those pesky County rubes who were always wanting infrastructure handouts and, in the process, nipping off forty square miles of expansion territory, now appeared terribly short-sighted. The buffer between the urbanized City and the bucolic County had disappeared. Attractive residential properties competed with the City as desirable places to live as the advent of the automobile and the expansion of the trolley system made it easier to commute between a City job and a County home.

The emergence of the County led to periodic bursts of reunification initiatives throughout the twentieth century. About every thirty years, first in the 1920s, then in the late 1950s and early 1960s, and, less visibly, again in the 1980s, efforts have been made to rejoin the City and County. The terms and conditions change from one attempt to the next, depending in large part on which entity, the City or the
County, thinks it has the upper hand, but the ever elusive goal remained on the civic agenda for more than seventy years and still has not vanished completely.

**The City Reconsiders**

Having tentatively decided that the 1876 separation might have been a mistake, the City's approach in the 1910s and 1920s was more how to mount a hostile takeover of the County rather than how to pursue a friendly merger. The City still had most of the population (772,897 in 1920 compared to the County's 100,737) and almost all the business activity. Any reconciliation should, the City felt, be on its terms and to its advantage.

How, legally, could the City assume control of the County? In its haste to separate in 1876, the City interests had not left any statutory or constitutional mechanism for reuniting. The Constitution of 1875's Article IX had the provision that "in all counties having a city therein containing over one hundred thousand inhabitants, the city and the county government thereof may be consolidated." But that had been a backup in case separation had not succeeded. Once the City cast off the County, it was no longer "a city therein" and this clause had become moot.

Much as it had been in the late 1860s and early 1870s when separation was the objective, the City's initial strategy was to lobby the Missouri General Assembly. In this instance, it sought statutory authority to annex both unincorporated and incorporated territory in the County. Several times between 1915 and 1921, state legislators from the City introduced bills to enable such annexations but, each time, County legislators recruited allies from around the state to kill them. Forming an anti-City of St. Louis blocking coalition in the legislature, then and now, has never been that difficult.

Just as the statutory route was proving to be fruitless, Missouri's fondness for fiddling with its constitution created another avenue. In 1920, apart from any direct intervention by City forces, Missouri voters passed a constitutional amendment mandating that, every twenty years beginning in 1921, the electorate would decide whether to convene a constitutional convention. In August 1921, a majority thought that was a fine idea and the convention delegates began their deliberations in 1922.

As they had in 1875, the City seized the chance to change the rules of the game. At a time when legislatures represented both geography and people, the City had more power at the ballot box, where the fate of constitutional amendments would be determined, than it did in the General Assembly, where it lacked votes proportional to its share of the state's population.

Just as in 1875, the City's convention delegates succeeded in making the relationship between the City and St. Louis County an agenda item and, after more than a year of deliberations, generated adequate support for an amendment that provided three ways for the City and County to reconnect: (1) combining the two counties into a single county government if a majority in each jurisdiction approved; (2) allowing a city, including the City of St. Louis, to merge with cities in adjoining counties, again contingent upon concurrent majorities; and (3) electing a board of freeholders (six each from the City and the County) who could either propose having the City re-enter the County or submit a plan for partial or complete consolidation of the two units. Although the amendment passed in the City and
the County, it failed narrowly statewide ostensibly because of other provisions dealing with local government in rural areas.

Not to be deterred, those seeking to broaden the City boundaries quickly drafted a modified amendment that dealt only with the City and the County, thereby alleviating any rural concerns. They used the initiative process to get the measure on the November 1924 ballot. Under the leadership of civic groups like the Million Population Club, who saw a combined City-County as the best hope for passing the barrier that, in their view, separated the top cities from the rest of the pack, the amendment passed handily in November 1924 in the City (169,934 to 40,192) and the County (30,285 to 11,852) as well as statewide (477,766 to 385,516).

The Million Population Club’s motivation had been heightened by the 1920 Census which showed St. Louis slipping from fourth to sixth among the nation’s cities in number of inhabitants. Having grown accustomed to the status of being in the top five, St. Louis sought to return as soon as possible and, if the City and County had combined in the 1920s, the strategy would have worked: the 1930 census placed the combined City-County population at 1,033,553 while the City alone at 821,960 was well short of the mark. It was the million-sized city that never was.

The 1925-1926 Board of Freeholders

To activate the amendment, the first step was collecting signatures from registered voters totaling three percent of the turnout in the most recent general election, respectively, in the City and the County on a petition ordering the Mayor

of the City along with the City’s Circuit Judges and the County Court Judges (the elected officials in charge of County government) in conjunction with that jurisdiction’s circuit and probate judges each to appoint nine members to a Board of Freeholders. This was swiftly done and on June 25, 1925, the Board of Freeholders held its first meeting.

They had a little less than a year to complete their task. The amendment gave them three options:

(1) "A scheme by which the City shall extend its limits to include the entire County."

(2) "A scheme by which the County shall extend its limits to include St. Louis and then St. Louis can extend its limits under the present law."

(3) "A scheme by which the City may annex to it a part of the County under the exclusive jurisdiction of the City."

In short, the choices were having the City take over the County, the City re-enter the County, or the City annex parts of the County.

The City and County contingents never bonded and, as the once-a-month meetings wore on, they became more open about their antipathy for one another. At the December 1925 session, Clarence L. Shotwell, a West County attorney whose practice was largely farmers, expressed skepticism about the City's motives. Using a marital metaphor, he commented:

Some of the old timers tell me that (in 1876) the City secured a divorce from the County. Now after
about half a century, they want us to go back. Well, we may, but I want to tell you one thing. If there is one thing on earth that those staid old farmers of my section are suspicious of, it is a grass widow.

Shotwell also voiced the County’s suspicion about the City’s alleged political corruption:

While we appreciate very much the invitation that has been extended us by the City to merge and make up and to go together again, we believe that the City ought to have done a little house cleaning before they invited us back. Down in your City you have two great political parties, represented by the usual party committees. A member of one of those committees is a guest of the United States at Leavenworth Penitentiary and the Mayor of the City claims that a member of the other committee ought also to be there.

All this was too much for Henry S. Caulfield, a City member who chaired the Board and was later Governor of Missouri from 1929 to 1933:

Mr. Shotwell sort of gets under my hide. I revere the City and I want to say to you that we have our bad men and you have your bad men and everywhere in the world they got bad men. But if you want culture, if you want religion, if you want charity, you can find it in the City of St. Louis. We have wonderful churches and cathedrals, great libraries and art galleries, zoological gardens, and parks—and all you can see is Dinty Colbeck.

Colbeck, of course, was the party leader temporarily housed in Leavenworth.

Some of the County freeholders also sounded the cry of autonomy and expressed the desire to control their own affairs. Robert A. Roessel, a Webster Groves resident, commented:

My neighbors in Webster have a certain community interest with respect to local matters. We have a situation there wherein poolrooms and dance halls, wherein soft drink parlors and gambling dens and things of that sort are absolutely prohibited. Just because a large sister city, for its own particular aggrandizement, desires to extend out, I do not see, as a matter of principle, why all those things that we have in Webster should be sacrificed.

Rather than respond seriously to this point, the City delegates ridiculed it. Maurice J. Cassidy, a City member, replied to Roessel with mock concern:

I would like to ask Mr. Roessel where the young folks of Webster Groves do their dancing? Since you have banned the dance hall, where do they Charleston?

Then, in exasperation, he asked one more rhetorical question:

"Is the intermarriage of the citizens of St. Louis and St. Louis County permissible?"

With the deadline approaching, in March 1926 the City freeholders introduced a plan that had the City taking over all of the County’s territory. It made the City Charter the governing document for the expanded area, eliminated all offices in the County and transferred their authority to their counterparts in the City, transferred all County property to the City, eliminated all County municipalities, gave the City Police Department jurisdiction over the entire area, and abolished all County school districts and placed them under...
the City of St. Louis Board of Education.

The only apparent concessions in this in-your-face proposal were that the City would assume all financial obligations of the various governments it had exterminated, that the County's agricultural land, then about two-thirds of its overall acreage, would be taxed at no more than one-half the urban rate, and that the formerly County territory would have six seats on the Board of Aldermen, expanding that body from 28 to 34. At that time, however, the Board was still being elected at-large so that although the six additional aldermen would be residents of what once had been St. Louis County, most of the voters choosing them would be from the City.

Although various County freeholders presented proposals, including one plan to have the City re-enter the County and another which would have formed a metropolitan commission, the City members were not in a compromising mood. Even though they needed one County vote to put their plan on the ballot, they did not suggest moving toward some middle ground. At the May 1926 meeting, the County members, assuming that they could block any proposal, sought the historical high ground, issuing a statement "for the purpose of clearly showing that the St. Louis City freeholders are responsible for the fact that no plan has been agreed upon" and that they were "willing to vote for the submission of a proposition providing for the return of the City to the County." They went on to raise several objections about the City's proposal, using such rhetoric as "destroy the right of local self-government" and "taxation without representation."

Striking an anti-diversity theme that resonates throughout governmental debates in the St. Louis region for the past century and a half, they argued that the City's plan "would create a super-city larger (in territory) than any other city in the world (and) the heterogeneous and varied conditions of rural, suburban and urban life would not work for unity but would lead to problems of government which would be disastrous."

Anticipating an impasse, the County moved for adjournment without any future meeting date, thereby ending any chances of a plan. Without tipping their hand, the City freeholders suggested a June 3 session to wrap up the final logistical details. At that meeting, the City members presented the County delegates with a fait accompli: the previous day they had secured the signature of one of the County freeholders, Julius O. Trampe, for their plan. They had taken the document, now possessing the required ten signers, to the appropriate authorities and the election was set for October 26, 1926.

The rest of the County freeholders were outraged, claiming that they had not been consulted about the date of the election. They accused the City members of using their political influence to obtain Trampe's signature, of violating both the spirit and the letter of the law, and of being just plain deceitful. The Chair, Henry Caulfield from the City, listened but kept repeating that all was settled. When, at the end, the time arrived for the perfunctory closing motions, including one thanking Caulfield for "his uniform courtesy and ability while presiding," one of the County members, Joseph C. McAtee, retorted that he "cannot vote for this motion because when a man refuses to let us vote on the proposition, the very matter for which we were appointed, I say there is nothing courteous about it." The motion passed, but the minutes, tactfully, did not record the vote.
Later Boards of Freeholders spent hundreds of thousands of dollars on staff, consultants, attorneys, and other expenses. By contrast, the initial 1925-1926 Board tried to set a precedent for frugality. Even adjusting for inflation, their total outlay of $14,166.30 seems remarkably low. As conscientious stewards of the public treasury, they dutifully listed their expenditures as the final item in their journal. Here are the details:

Clerk, 8/1/25 - 8/31/26: $3,250.00
Stenographer to secretary, 8/1/25 - 8/31/26: 1,329.40
Statistician, 12/7/25 - 5/31/26: 2,412.04
Engineer, 12/7/25 - 5/31/26: 2,412.04
Attorney, 2/4/26 - 5/31/26: 1,586.85
Reporters, 6/25/25 - 6/3/26: 453.84
Janitor, Clayton meetings: 33.00
Office expenses: 1,703.73
Printing: 985.40

The City forces, perhaps mislead by the County electorate's support for adopting the enabling amendment and, as reflected in their remarks during the Board's deliberations, believing that it should be considered an honor to be invited to be part of such a progressive City, did not run an aggressive campaign. The County elements, on the other hand, had both fear of a takeover and revenge for the City's tactics to stimulate them. Municipal officials, County officeholders, and the County Chamber of Commerce aligned in active opposition to the proposal. While it passed easily in the City, 54,558 yes to 8,067 no, it was firmly rejected in the County, 10,955 yes and 22,148 no. The County turnout was 67%, remarkably high for a special election.

The Metropolitan Federation

After letting the animosities dissipate for about a year, business interests, coordinated by the Chambers of Commerce in the City and County, reopened a discussion in late 1927 of how the two entities could be part of the same governmental team. Hoping to have the dialogue more open and more civil than it had been with the Board of Freeholders, they formed numerous committees and councils, ultimately involving several hundred leaders. They also determined that an out-of-town expert would defuse tensions and promote credibility, hiring Professor Thomas H. Reed, Chair of the Political Science Department at the University of Michigan.

All this consumed time and it was Spring 1930 before the final proposal was released. True to his scholarly profession, Reed's plan was detailed and complex. His 3,000-word document, supposedly designed as an amendment to the Missouri Constitution, also appeared to legislate. Reed proposed an overarching metropolitan government called "Greater St. Louis," responsible for various area-wide functions such as sewage, water, and major parks. The City, the County, and the suburban municipalities would continue but their respective roles would be seriously diminished.

Assuming that the Board of Freeholder process was flawed, in part because the equal numbers of members from the City and County made stalemate a likely outcome, the metropolitan federation decided that a state-wide vote on a constitutional amendment offered better prospects for approval. They secured the initiative signatures to get it on the November 1930 ballot and, with the slogan, "Make It a Greater St. Louis in a Greater Missouri," launched their campaign. Vocal opposition arose in St. Louis County,
again sparked by the fear that the larger and more prosperous City would dominate the federation. Using phrases like "dangerous experiment in municipal government" and "depriving our people of the last vestige of local self-government," the Save St. Louis County League marshaled support from most of the County's elected officials and political party leaders. Crippled by the misfortune of having six other amendments on the same ballot, each with its own set of enemies, the amendment lost statewide 218,381 yes to 378,718 no. Although it carried narrowly in the City by 4,698 votes, it lost badly in the County with the 14,669 favorable votes overwhelmed by 21,699 negative tallies.

Professor Reed suffered a hemorrhage during the 1930 campaign and was not able to participate actively in the debate about his own proposal. One of the earliest advocates for metropolitan government, he lived to plan for another day and, in 1949, his scheme for combining the City of Baton Rouge, Louisiana, with its county was approved.

**The 1958 - 1959 Board of Freeholders**

Surviving the Depression and waging World War II put local government reform on St. Louis' and the nation's back burner for the next two decades but, with the war won and the economy revived, civic attention returned. The proposals took two distinct paths: forming single purpose or special governmental districts, the topic for the next chapter, and revisiting City-County relationships across a wider range of services and functions. Although groups like the Metropolitan Plan Association, which described itself as "progressive businessmen who recognize that the profits of their business are interwoven with the progress and prosperity of the metropolitan area," and the City and County Leagues of Women Voters sponsored study groups and forums on the topics during the early 1950s, it took an enterprising City politician, Alfonso J. Cervantes, to precipitate action.

The chief elected executives of the City and County have not always lived compatibly but, in one devastating case, they died together. On August 1, 1943, St. Louis County Presiding Judge Henry L. Mueller and City of St. Louis Mayor William Dee Becker were killed in a glider crash at Lambert Field. The accident also claimed the lives of St. Louis Chamber of Commerce President Thomas N. Dysart, City Deputy Comptroller Charles L. Cunningham, and Robertson Aircraft Corporation President William B. Robertson.

Then the Fifteenth Ward Alderman, Cervantes was seeking the Board Presidency (he later would become Mayor of St. Louis from 1969 to 1973) and metropolitan reform looked like just the issue to boost his profile in the community. He convened a February 16, 1955 meeting at the Kiel Auditorium, attracted over 150 to the gathering, and announced his intention to start a petition drive for a Board of Freeholders. By June 9, 1955, the Cervantes-backed "Citizens Committee for City-County Cooperation" held its first organizational meeting at Medart's Restaurant, suitably located just west of Skinker near the City-County boundary, now the site for the Cheshire Inn.

The establishment was not keen on having a semi-loose cannon like Cervantes leading the charge for change and quickly moved to back an idea for a major study of metro-
politician government which had been percolating at St. Louis University and Washington University. On June 10, 1955, the same day the newspapers covered the petition drive story, the two universities announced their plans to seek funding from both national and local foundations, a move endorsed by City of St. Louis Mayor Raymond Tucker and St. Louis County Supervisor Luman Matthews and then supported by business interests including the recently formed Civic Progress. The Citizens Committee for City-County Cooperation prudenty announced it would not push ahead until the study was completed.

A politician ahead of his time, Cervantes had commissioned Edward G. Doody, a local market researcher, to do a poll prior to the February session. The sample size was adequate, five hundred each from the City and the County, but the selection process was more convenience than random chance and the core question ("Would you like to see some fair arrangement worked out that would enable St. Louis and St. Louis County to merge?") was leading. In the City, the responses were 42% yes, 15% no, and 43% undecided while in the County the margin was closer: 32% yes, 28% no, and 40% undecided. Since undecided responses to civic initiatives are quite often closet nos, this was hardly an encouraging set of results. Nonetheless, by the time he testified to the Board of Freeholders on July 1, 1958, Cervantes, never one to avoid gilding a lily, said that the survey "showed that over 53% of County residents and 71% of City residents favored some type of coordination."

With a substantial $250,000 grant from the Ford Foundation and another $50,000 from the McDonnell Aircraft Corporation Charitable Trust, the project was underway a year later. The eleven-scholar team called itself the Metropolitan St. Louis Survey. Headed by Dr. John Bollens, a UCLA faculty member and prominent local government researcher, it included both home-grown and imported talent and cut across three disciplines: economics, political science, and sociology.

They did not begin with a blank slate. Before they had collected a single datum, their July 16, 1956 plan of action set forth what they termed "basic assumptions," namely that the existing governmental structure in the City and County "impairs effectiveness of services and efficiency of operation," "dilutes responsibility to the public," "impedes the orderly and healthy development of the expanding community," "lacks sufficient flexibility to meet changing conditions," "fosters wide variations between service needs and financial resources," and, as a result, "a number of major public needs, both area-wide and local, which government is expected to meet, are not being and cannot be adequately met by the present uncoordinated pattern of government." The social science doctors had declared the patient grievously ill before they had conducted any diagnostic tests.

The only decision left was what cure to prescribe. In the Summer of 1957, the team issued a 121-page report, *Path of Progress for Metropolitan St. Louis*, which proposed a new metropolitan government for the City-County which would assume responsibility for seven functions: arterial roads, public transit regulation, land use planning, economic development, wastewater sewers, civil defense (remember, it was the decade of the bomb shelters), and property assessment. Running this government would be a "metropolitan president," elected by the City and County for a four-year term, along with a fourteen-member legislative council.
evenly divided between City and County, with six elected at large, six chosen by districts, and one each appointed, respectively, by the City of St. Louis Mayor and the St. Louis County Supervisor. All legislative terms would be four years and all contests would be nonpartisan.

Although the Citizens Committee for City-County Cooperation had collected petition signatures to create a Board of Freeholders while the Metropolitan St. Louis Survey was underway, some of the County materials were flawed. It was not until April 1958, eight months after the report, that the petitions were approved. When the Missouri Constitution had been redrafted in the mid-1940s, a nineteenth freeholder, appointed by the Governor, had been added to the eighteen appointed, nine apiece, by the City and the County in order to lessen the chance of a City-County stalemate. More importantly, the Constitution had added a fourth alternative—formation of a metropolitan district—to the three which had been listed earlier: City takes over County, City re-enters County, or City annexes part of the County. This meant that a new board could consider the Metropolitan St. Louis Survey proposal as one of its options.

The appointing authorities moved expeditiously and the Board of Freeholders held its first meeting on May 19, 1958. Its chairman was Charles F. Vatterott, the developer of St. Ann and a County resident, and the vice-chair was Richard Sheumaker, past president of the St. Louis Bar Association and a City resident. Overall, the freeholders were respectable citizens with established backgrounds who had the time to devote to the effort and included two women and one African-American. With the 1920s experience of the City using the freeholder process to attempt a takeover of the County, it was thought that a County chair would make any proposal more palatable for that jurisdiction’s electorate. Also in contrast to the 1925-1926 Board, which featured closed meetings and input from only a handful of experts, the 1950s model decided to make the proceedings an ongoing civics lesson, convening more than ten public hearings during the summer of 1958 and televising many of its meetings on KETC, the public station.

As the debate proceeded through the winter of 1958 and the early spring of 1959, two competing proposals emerged as the leading alternatives. One was a modified version of the Metropolitan St. Louis Survey recommendation, a metropolitan district for seven functions (property assessment was dropped from the Survey’s list and cooperative law enforcement facilities such as a crime laboratory and police academy were added). This plan retained the president elected for a four-year term, but gave the legislature more of a geographic orientation with eleven chosen by district and three at large. In another departure from the Survey, elections were to be partisan. The second proposal was a full-blown merger, consolidating all the general purpose governments into a single entity referred to as a "municipal county."

The district approach won out, ten votes to nine, in the final decision made on April 15, 1958. Personal beliefs, rather than constituency or party interests, were the prevailing factors. The City freeholders voted four for district, five for merger while the County delegates were six for district, three for merger. Democrats and Republicans were even more equally divided. Nor was the outstate freeholder, Veryl Riddle from Maldon, a tiebreaker. He voted for the merger alternative, making the margin closer but not chang-
ing the outcome. Ultimately, fourteen freeholders signed the plan while five of the merger backers remained intransigent.

The election was set for November 3, 1959 and active support and opposition groups formed almost immediately. The City-County Partnership Committee held its first meeting on May 22, 1959. Funded by Civic Progress and other business interests, including both the City and County Chambers of Commerce, it also drew support from good government groups like the League of Women Voters and the American Association of University Women. Both the Globe-Democrat and the Post-Dispatch promoted the plan and it was also endorsed by the St. Louis Review, the official newspaper for the Catholic Archdiocese.

The case for adoption rested largely on arguments deduced, first principle fashion, from the assumptions outlined in the Metropolitan St. Louis Survey's plan of work. Small governments could not cope with area-wide problems, overall planning was necessary to prevent chaos, and economic competition with other metropolitan areas required a unified approach.

The opposition operated on two fronts. One element, the Citizens Committee Against the District Plan, formed around the pro-merger freeholders and, as quoted in the October 8, 1959 Post-Dispatch, asked the rhetorical question will "the people have the vision to reject the timid and tragically inadequate district proposal in order to achieve the right solution to the real problem of government in our growing city-county community: a single, unified great city."

The other group, the Citizens Committee for Self-Government, took the reverse tack and argued that the proposal went too far. Composed primarily of County interes,
ests, it included many municipal elected officials, suburban newspaper publishers, and most Republican and Democratic party leaders. Its attacks on the plan played on several doubts and fears and, as a consequence, the proponents spent much of their time saying what the proposal would not do rather than what it would accomplish. For example, one of the pro-plan campaign brochures ("Do You Know These Facts About Your District Plan?") was devoted entirely to counterclaims such as "this is not a merger," "neither the City nor County is footing the bill for the other one," "this is not a super government designed by people who want the City to run the County," "the District will not arbitrarily change residential areas to industrial areas," and "the present police and fire departments will not be replaced by the District."

In its efforts to push the District Plan, the Post-Dispatch went out of its way to minimize the opposition. In its October 2, 1959, issue, it published two pictures. The caption for one was "four spectators and one moderator surrounded by empty seats last night at a meeting in University City City Hall opening the campaign of the Citizens Committee for Self-Government to defeat the Metropolitan District Plan for City-County Coordination" while beneath the other photo was "Tillman Hardy dressed as 'town crier' ringing bell and calling people to Kirkwood Library for meeting of group opposed to the Metropolitan District Plan...only five persons attended."

Further crippling chances for approval was Mayor Tucker's October 3, 1959 announcement that he was against the measure after it appeared he would remain neutral dur-
ing the campaign. Despite his close ties to Civic Progress, he decided to oppose them on this one. In his statement, he gave ammunition both to those who thought the plan too revolutionary, agreeing that it would create another layer of government, and to those who thought it was too fainthearted, saying that it would not accomplish that much improvement.

With all this baggage, the District Plan lost heavily. The City vote was 21,343 yes (33%) and 43,478 no (67%) and the County was even more opposed: 27,633 yes (25%) and 82,738 no (75%). In retrospect, even beyond the fact that the campaign dynamics went badly for the proponents, the defeat should have come as no surprise especially when re-examining the results of a scientifically rigorous poll conducted by the Metropolitan St. Louis Survey as part of their background research.

Strong majorities of City residents (62%) and County municipal dwellers (72%) evaluated their respective government's performance as either very good or good and only 5% of each group thought it was poor. From the voters' perspective, local government was not broke so why, then, should they fix it? To sell a solution, you must first convince the public that there is a problem.

Another indicator that all was not conducive to change should have been the responses to a series of questions about support for each of five alternative governmental structure scenarios. Here are the favorable percentages for the County residents: "merger of all general governmental units into one" (42%), "re-entry of the City into St. Louis County" (41%), "establishment of a federal system through continuing all general governments and creating a metropolitan government to handle the most pressing area-wide problems" (50%), "consolidation of municipalities in the County into a smaller number" (53%), and "retention of the existing governmental pattern" (41%). Interpreters of these findings made much of the fact that the status quo was tied for the least popular option, failing to note that none of the options had any significant cushion beyond a bare majority. Voters, when in doubt, tend to opt for the certainty of the present over the ambiguity of the unknown.

The 1962 Borough Plan

The freeholders and their allies who supported the complete consolidation of the City and County remained convinced that theirs was the superior approach. Although a few had signed the District Plan, others actively campaigned against it. For them, the November 1959 defeat was ample vindication that the situation called for more reform, not less. With a core of five pro-merger freeholders--Mrs. Rogers Deakin, Russel Egan, James McKeel, Shewmaker, and Vatterott--they along with a few others decided to continue the struggle. What had begun as fulfilling a citizen obligation, serving on the Board of Freeholders, had become a mission.

With the exception of an attempt to involve Mayor Tucker, there was little effort to solicit backing from either prominent civic leaders or major interest groups with the exception of labor unions. This small band met regularly throughout 1960 and into 1961, with the debate being more about means than ends. They were not bent on half-measures and timidity was the ultimate sin. But they also wanted to produce a winner and there were some legal obstacles to overcome and certain political realities to consider.

They were especially reluctant to form another board of
freeholders. They wanted the surviving government to look much more like St. Louis County than like the City of St. Louis but, as then written, Article VI, Section 30 (a) had some troublesome wording. Although one of the four alternatives for a board of freeholders was "to consolidate the territories and governments of the City and County into one political subdivision," the Constitution explicitly stated that this would be "under the municipal government of the City of St. Louis." (As noted in the previous chapter, it was not until 1966 that an amendment added a much more open-ended fifth option "to formulate and adopt any other plan for the partial or complete government of all or any part of the City and County." ) In addition, as they had already learned, boards of freeholders develop their own ideas and, once again, the pro-merger perspective might not prevail.

Imitating the 1930 metropolitan federation proposal, they decided altering the Missouri Constitution offered greater control over the reform's content, since a later amendment would receive precedence over any potentially conflicting early constitutional passages as well as any contradictory statutes. They would not need to cede control over the plan's elements to another board nor, even if such a board saw it the same way they did, wait a year for it to deliberate. The primary downside was the requirement for a statewide election, necessitating higher campaign expenses and letting the rest of Missouri in on deciding how the City and County were to be governed, but the group assured itself that this was manageable.

The two issues where they conceded to political prudence were whether to create a single school district and whether to return authority over the police force from the State of Missouri to the new government. The purists argued that what was good for general purpose governments was also fitting for educational units. Saying "consolidate except" would confuse the message and undercut the reformers' what's-best-for-the-community image. The pragmatists, conversely, thought school districts were the third rail of metropolitan reform. Inserting them into the plan would doom any chances for County support, especially in the more upscale parts, a claim grudgingly accepted by the group. There was broader agreement on the police issue, with the lawyers expressing doubt that using the amendment for that purpose would withstand a court challenge.

In November 1961, two years after the District Plan's defeat, the all-or-nothing contingent, now incorporated as the Missouri Committee for the Borough Plan To Revitalize St. Louis, went public with their proposal. The first four sentences showed its broad sweep:

*There is hereby created a single new political subdivision and body corporate named The "Municipal County" of St. Louis' referred to herein as the Municipal County." It is both a city and a county. It consists of all the territory heretofore comprised in the City of St. Louis and all the territory comprised in St. Louis County. The City of St. Louis and St. Louis County and all other consolidating governmental bodies hereinafter specified shall by force of the Constitution be consolidated into The Municipal County of St. Louis.*

All other governments meant all municipalities, all fire protection districts, and all sewer districts, including the recently created Metropolitan Sewer District. In addition, the two separate City and County judicial circuits were to
be combined. What had been many would become one.

In part to avoid having the plan look like either the County or the City was absorbing the other, the proposal called for twenty-two boroughs, eight within the former City, seven within the former County, and seven having portions of each jurisdiction. Unaware that *Baker vs. Carr*, the U.S. Supreme Court one-person-one-vote decision mandating equal populations for state and local government legislative districts, was about to be handed down in 1962, the proposal opted for respecting neighborhood boundaries over equivalent population counts and, as a consequence, the number of residents in each borough ranged from about 46,000 to over 97,000.

They weren't Manhattan, Staten Island, the Bronx, and Brooklyn, but the 1962 plan did include specific names for each of the boroughs. If it had been adopted, you might be living in one of them: Bellefontaine, Cabanne, Carondolet, Clayson, Ferguson, Florissant, Kirkwood, Ladue, Marquette, Mullanphy, Normandy-Jennings, O'Fallon, Pierre Chouteau, Rolla Wells, St. Ann and St. John, St. Louis Hills, Shaw's Garden, Thomas Jefferson, Tower Grove, University City, or Webster Groves.

Each borough would elect two representatives to a legislative council and the entire electorate would choose a mayor, with all terms being four years. To encourage greater participation in selecting these local officials, the contests were to be partisan and scheduled at the same time as the national elections.

It took six months for the Borough Plan Committee to collect the tens of thousands of signatures required to place the initiative on the November 1962 ballot. Naively thinking that volunteers could handle most of the tasks, the Committee soon discovered that it would require a substantial budget ($150,000, over half contributed directly or indirectly by Vatterott) and experienced professionals like Edward Doody in St. Louis and Jack Stapleton outstate, to get the job done. They succeeded, submitting more than the needed number to the Secretary of State on June 29, 1962, but at a heavy price. There would be fewer dollars and less energy left for the adoption campaign.

To some extent, the backers of the Borough Plan interpreted their obligation as confined to putting forth the best possible proposal so that the voters would have an opportunity to do the right thing. For them, the goal--placing the amendment on the ballot--had been achieved and it was now up to the electorate to decide. Others, steadfast soldiers to the end, saw a need to put forth an educational campaign but not one that would be expensive or flashy. When added to the post-climactic atmosphere after the petition drive, the result was a lackluster effort. Few notables, the exceptions being Washington University Chancellor Ethan Shepley and St. Louis University President Paul C. Reinert, S.J., the latter a close friend of Vatterott's, signed on and most civic leaders and elected officials either stayed on the sidelines or joined the opposition. Among the media, only the *Globe-Democrat* advocated passage, perhaps because the publisher's wife, Mrs. G. Duncan Baumann, had chaired the volunteer forces for the petition signatures.

County businesses and elected officials led the opposition. Organized as Citizens for Home Rule and Opposed to the Borough Plan, they raised about $75,000, using much of
it for an intensive round of newspaper, radio, and television advertisements in the last few days before the November 6 election. They appealed to the sanctity of local autonomy, the fear that a handful of elected officials would dominate one-third of the State (Governor John Dalton suggested that the plan "would create a political Frankenstein in which two or three politicians might possibly control the City and County"), the threat that the City earnings tax would be extended to the County, and the inherent resistance to the notion that a bigger government would be a better one.

African-American political interests made their consolidation debut in the 1962 contest. At that point, blacks constituted about one-third of the City's registered voters and held six of the twenty-eight seats on the Board of Aldermen. They saw, correctly, that their collective power would be significantly diluted on the 44-member legislative council. Under the leadership of State Senator Theodore D. McNeal and two Democratic ward committeemen, Norman R. Seay and Frederick N. Weathers, and organized as the Midtown Committee Against the Borough Plan, they campaigned against the measure.

The proposal was trounced statewide--633,011 no (74%) to 217,744 yes (26%)--and lost by an even larger margin in St. Louis County: 180,661 no (79%) to 47,432 yes (21%). The City electorate was less resitant--67,321 no (55%) to 55,160 yes (45%)--but it only carried in four of the City's twenty-eight wards. Voter turnout in the County was quite high (68%) and the electorate's answer to joining forces with the City was exceedingly clear: no, no, no.

The Phantom Board of Freeholders

At the time of the District Plan and the Borough Plan, Civic Progress was in its first decade. Even though it included the chief executive officers of the region's largest business enterprises, with access to talented people and substantial dollars, it was still a newcomer to the governmental arena and was cautious about what issues it championed. Neither the proponents nor the opponents of these measures had courted Civic Progress nor, with the exception of a modest donation to the 1959 District Plan campaign, had the business leaders injected themselves into the fray.

By the late 1970s, Civic Progress had become the most prominent player in metropolitan affairs and, for at least two reasons, some of its members were eager to revisit the proposition of combining the City and the County. The first motivation was, once again, control. The business leaders remained doers and having so many governments made achieving anything comprehensive difficult. Getting a critical mass of elected officials behind any proposal requiring public involvement was time consuming and, as often as not, impossible. If there were fewer governments, if public authority were more hierarchical like, say, a corporation, if ideally there was just one government for the City and the County, then getting things accomplished would be so much simpler.

Moving to the second factor, collective regional action had never been more imperative. The City's population had fallen by about 230,000 between 1950 and 1970 and was losing another 170,000 during the 1970s, drawing national attention to it as the foremost example of urban distress. The Rand Corporation, seeking to diversify its consulting business by adding metropolitan development to defense
strategy, came to town in 1972 and, supported by a National Science Foundation grant, published a report a year later that read like an autopsy. It proclaimed that, although many older central cities were in trouble, St. Louis had an "unusual rate of decline" and that one of the primary causes was that "its political boundaries, frozen since 1876, have prevented the city from expanding its resource base as its proportion of disadvantaged residents increased." It recommended that the city start thinking of itself as a "large suburban center" and forget about "reviving the traditional central city functions."

The Rand report received much national media coverage and, repeatedly, when trend stories about central city travails appeared, the St. Louis experience was prominently cited. In 1981, the Brookings Institution, a prestigious Washington think tank, named St. Louis "the most distressed city in America." Media vied for finding clever ways to sound the City's death knell: "The Gateway to the West is now the Gateway Out" (Newsweek, May 9, 1981), "St. Louis is singing the blues" (Time, May 9, 1981), "By 2012, St. Louis will become a 61-square-mile parking lot" (Boston Globe, March 22, 1981), "St. Louis: From Gateway to Ghost Town" (Washington Post, March 13, 1981). In 1982, the New York Times's spin on the Cardinals' winning the World Series was that it "gives St. Louis a boost in troubled times."

The region's leaders saw this coverage as unfair. It was only part of the region—the City—which was having problems. If its statistics could be combined with those from the County, a direct consequence of some type of City-County merger, the numbers would immediately look better and

St. Louis's standing on all the national rankings would jump significantly.

The Borough Plan's devastating defeat had driven City-County consolidation off the realistic regional agenda. To help revitalize the concept, in 1977 St. Louis Mayor John Poelker and St. Louis County Supervisor Gene McNary asked the Governmental Research Institute, a St. Louis non-profit consulting entity, to study the pro's and con's of having the City re-enter the County, with Civic Progress picking up the tab for the project. The report saw only roses in the consolidation garden, among them "improved image nationally," "re-awakening of civic interest and pride," and "elimination of duplication saving $5.4 million."

The discussion stayed on the back burner for the next five years. Then, in 1982, under the leadership of Monsanto CEO John W. Hanley, Civic Progress commissioned reports from several consultants, including faculty from St. Louis University, the University of Missouri-St. Louis, and Washington University, as grist for a report, Fostering Development in Metropolitan St. Louis, written by Dana L. Spitzer, a former Post-Dispatch reporter then working as a governmental affairs specialist for Monsanto.

The diagnosis was straightforward: the region's economic development was lagging behind other metropolitan areas, fragmented government handicapped the region's ability "to act decisively on major problems," there was no ongoing public or private financing for area-wide projects, and a mismatch existed within the region between fiscal capacity and service needs.

The report rejected a complete City-County consolidation as the appropriate response, both because it was seen as politically infeasible and would also deprive citizens of
easy access to the currently diverse set of governments. Instead, it supported having the City re-enter the County, retaining its identity as a home rule municipality but shedding its patronage-filled county offices, arguing that this "would provide the core area of the metropolitan region with an expanded jurisdictional base for addressing problems and delivering services (and) could also unify and strengthen the political and civic voice of St. Louis." It also advocated establishing a metropolitan economic development authority and instituting a tax-sharing plan which would shift some tax revenues from wealthier to poorer jurisdictions within the region.

Although this report was made publicly available, the discussion reverted to the closed sessions of Civic Progress and no overt proposals or actions emerged. However documents contained in the 1987-1988 Board of Freeholders archives indicate that the corporate leaders continued to pursue the matter, asking one of the area's top law firms--Bryan, Cave, McPheeters and McRoberts--to prepare a "Legal Feasibility Study of the Combination of the City and County of St. Louis" and requesting that another major legal group, Thompson and Mitchell, research some allied issues.

Both reports were sent to Civic Progress on December 21, 1984 and neither was a back-of-the-envelope job. The Bryan Cave memorandum was more than one hundred pages, stating that it "is intended for the purpose of giving legal advice to Civic Progress, Inc. (for) a plan of combination which Civic Progress is considering developing and promoting " and that "it is anticipated that the plan for the combination of the City and the County will be developed and presented to the voters for approval."

Ignoring the 1982 advice to pursue the middle path having the City re-enter the County, the scheme was to go for complete consolidation. Here, in the memorandum's words, was the essence of the proposal:

The plan will preserve the fundamental structure of the County, and will thus provide for the survival of the County government as the basis for the new entity. The City, the municipalities in the County, and various other political subdivisions located in the City and County will be merged into and consol- idated with the County so that the County succeeds to the powers, rights, and authorities of such enti- ties. As a result of such consolidation, the County will assume the characteristics of a city as well as a county, so that it can be described as a charter county and city, or perhaps a charter municipal county.

School districts and special districts such as the Metropolitan Sewer District and the Zoo-Museum District were to retain their independence but fire protection districts would be eliminated. Bowing to the State's century-plus governance of the City's police, the plan conceded that "existing precedent may more strongly support the argument that the State will retain control over the police department of the resulting entity."

A new board of freeholders was to be the vehicle for this proposal but the report fretted about how to make certain that this board did what Civic Progress wanted. On the one hand, Bryan-Cave attorneys acknowledged that the board:

...cannot act as a rubber stamp, mechanically approving a plan prepared or proposed by someone else. This does not mean that they cannot be given
such a plan for their consideration; they will, however, have to assess such a plan independently and reach their own conclusion that such a plan is appropriate. Any attempt to preclude the board of freeholders from exercising their independent judgment in this regard could leave any plan which they might adopt subject to challenge.

Their two-pronged strategy to maintain control was to have the petitions forming the board of freeholders have limiting language ("for the purpose of formulating and adopting a plan for the consolidation of the territories and governments and other political subdivisions of the City and County into one political subdivision and thereby to provide for the government of the City and County") and, as further protection, to give the board only three months to produce a plan, making it less likely they would devise some alternative.

Bryan-Cave and Thompson and Mitchell gave the effort their due diligence best, contacting federal agencies to confirm that the tens of millions in federal grants would not be jeopardized as well as researching debt assumption and pension plan issues. They were especially concerned about potential interplay with the just-implemented Voluntary Interdistrict Transfer Plan between most of the County school districts and the City's public school students, fearing that some school desegregation proponents might sue, asking if one general purpose government is good for the City and County, why not also have one school district with a racially balanced attendance program? Anticipating discomfort that the Ladies of this world, home to many of the corporate executives, might be hesitant to grant zoning authority to this single government, Civic Progress also asked whether zoning decisions could be decentralized and, said the Thompson and Mitchell attorneys, "we believe there is sufficient latitude under Missouri law to provide for neighborhood organizations which exercise non-legislative power over various aspects of the zoning process."

Here is how the proposition was described to the survey respondents:

The St. Louis area currently has separate governments for the City of St. Louis, St. Louis County, and ninety cities and towns in the county. It has been suggested that all these governments be replaced with a single new government that would operate under the county charter. This new form of government would not affect school districts. Would you say that in general you would favor or oppose this idea of forming a new government that would replace all the current city and county governments?

The completed sample size was 400 in the City and 600 in the County.

Mindful that success would require majority approval in both the City and the County, Civic Progress also had Market Opinion Research, a Michigan-based polling firm, assess support for consolidation and, signaling they were in a campaign mode, test arguments for the measure. The survey, conducted in November 1984, found that voters' initial reactions to the proposal was close in the City (45% favor, 42% oppose) but unpopular in the County (29% favor, 61% oppose). After hearing ten arguments (e.g., "less cost to operate one government," "St. Louis would gain a better national image," "improvement in ability to attract new
businesses"), the respondents became more positive (61% favor, 24% oppose in the City and 41% favor, 44% oppose in the County), but the County backing still fell well short of the required majority.

For reasons that remain unclear to this day, Civic Progress decided not to move ahead. Perhaps the polling results were too discouraging, perhaps one or more key political leaders were not on board, perhaps those counseling gradual change over radical transformation carried the day, perhaps all these factors were at play. In any event, it turned out to be the board of freeholders that might have been but never was.

**Lessons and Patterns**

During the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s, four U.S. metropolitan areas did consolidate their governments: Indianapolis joined with Marion County, Jacksonville with Duval County, Miami with Dade County, and Nashville with Davidson County. Why did St. Louis fail when these others succeeded? There are multiple explanations but two carry the most weight.

First, none of these others involved two totally separated governments. In the four successful consolidations, the major city already existed within the principal county. There was no earlier history, like St. Louis's 1876 experience, of the central city having jettisoned its more rural surroundings. Since the city was already within the county and the latter was providing some services to the municipal area, the negotiations could commence with who does what, not who marries whom under what conditions.

Second, at the times these consolidations occurred, there were at most modest socioeconomic differences between the combining governments' populations. Since it was more a merger of equals, there was less tendency for one of the units to drive a hard bargain. In each of the St. Louis cases, conversely, either the City (e.g., the 1920s) or the County (e.g., the 1980s) felt it held the stronger hand and typically overplayed the advantage. The other side, feeling rebuffed and exploited, used the concurrent majority requirement to squelch the deal. The mind set was more win-lose than win-win.

In retrospect, the City and County were closest to parity during the 1950s and 1960s, but neither then perceived it that way. The City, looking backward, still saw itself as preeminent while, the County, gazing forward, knew that its future was brighter. Now, as the next century begins, the City lags far behind the County on many dimensions, most notably economic. In 1950, for example, the median household income in the City was eighty percent that of the County's. By 2000, is now half or less. Marriages between unequals, especially when they must be arranged by multiple interests, are extraordinarily difficult to consummate.
CHAPTER 4
INCREMENTAL METROPOLITANISM:
SPECIAL DISTRICTS

St. Louisans' reluctance to approve sweeping changes in local government structure during the postwar years did not mean they were resistant to more modest steps toward City-County cooperation. For functions like public transportation, sewers, community colleges, and cultural institutions, the City and the County adopted special purpose governments to assume responsibility.

What Are Special Purpose Governments?

As their name implies, special purpose governments do a limited number of things, typically only one or a few which are closely interrelated. They are the opposite of general purpose governments, like the City of St. Louis and St. Louis County, which deliver a wide variety of services. Although special purpose government boards may be appointed by one or more general purpose governments, they operate autonomously. They may have the power to tax, in which case they are typically called special districts, or their revenues might be confined to fees or bond receipts, technically known as public authorities. There are lots of them.

Excluding school districts, the most common type, there are still many more special purpose governments, about 32,000, than there are municipalities (slightly more than 12,000) or counties (a little over 3,000). And their numbers have been growing rapidly during the past half century, especially in metropolitan areas, going from 4,943 in 1952 to 13,343 in 1992. The typical metropolitan region has over forty special districts and, true to its tradition that one can
never have too many governments, the St. Louis area has even more. Both Missouri and Illinois laws make it relatively easy to form such units and, as a result, Missouri has more than fourteen hundred and Illinois almost three thousand.

Public Transportation: Bi-State Development Agency

Although the Bi-State Development Agency now operates most of the region's public transit system as well as other facilities and has almost two thousand employees and a nine-figure annual operating budget, its origins were much humbler. Its birthing began when the Metropolitan Plan Association, a business-dominated group formed just after World War II, unanimously recommended after a one-year study that "some kind of Illinois-Missouri government agency was required to cope efficiently with the critical interrelated development problems."

In 1948, the Bi-State Commission identified the number one infrastructure problem as not having an airport within ten minutes of downtown. Lambert Field was an hour's drive and, even with anticipated improvements in Natural Bridge Road, the trip would still take at least forty-five minutes. That, warned William Connett, First National Bank executive vice president and a commission member, was too long and, unless action were taken, "St. Louis is in danger of being left off the nation's air routes in the future." This analysis ultimately led to the development of Parks Airport just south of East St. Louis although, in today's context, Lambert is a "close-in" airport.

This was the first step in an ably orchestrated strategy. The next phase was having resolutions passed in the two states' 1948 legislative sessions to form a commission to study the matter further. Within less than six months, the commission, composed largely of business leaders from both sides of the river and staffed by the Metropolitan Plan Association, surprised no one by adopting essentially the latter group's recommendation. On December 17, 1948, the commission convened a meeting of governmental, business, and civic leaders at the Missouri Athletic Club and they, to a person, endorsed the concept of a bi-state entity.

With this region-wide civic unity, the proposed bi-state compact sped through the two state legislatures during the 1949 sessions, was signed by Governors Forrest Smith of Missouri and Adlai Stevenson of Illinois in September 1949, ratified by the U.S. Congress in 1950 and then signed by President Harry S. Truman on August 31 of that year.

The compact was more feel-good metropolitanism than it was meaningful restructuring. As originally designed, Bi-State was a governmental wimp. Although it was empowered to "maintain, own, and operate" selected transportation infrastructure ("bridges, tunnels, airports, and terminal facilities"), its primary initial role was permission to "make plans," not policies. It could not tax although it was allowed to charge for its services and facilities and to issue revenue bonds and it did not have unilateral jurisdiction over anything. The agency was, and is, governed by ten commissioners, five from each state, all of whom had to reside within the agency's territory: the City of St. Louis and Jefferson, St. Charles, and St. Louis Counties in Missouri and Madison, Monroe, and St. Clair Counties in Illinois. These individuals serve five-year terms and are appointed by the respective governors with the advice and consent of each state's senate. They are on a very short leash since,
according to the compact, the governor can veto any action taken by a commissioner from that state.

In its early years, Bi-State was little more than a storefront operation, planning away and operating a wharf facility on the Mississippi River. One sign of its irrelevancy to matters metropolitan came in 1952 when the question of who should own and operate public transit became a major item on the region's agenda. At that time, approximately fifteen private companies, with the St. Louis Public Service Company by far the largest, provided the area's bus and streetcar service with their rates subject to approval by the respective states' regulatory commissions. Ridership averaged over four hundred thousand daily, more than double current levels.

St. Louis Mayor Joseph Darst and St. Louis County Supervisor Luman Matthews first charted a joint approach, forming a Metropolitan Mass Transportation Commission to study a proposed public takeover through a yet-to-be-established City-County transportation district. Within two weeks of this announcement, Bi-State's commissioners passed a resolution expressing their eager willingness to run such a system. Since public transportation was not included as one of Bi-State's roles in the original compact, they urged the local elected leaders to have the state legislatures add this to their authority. The leaders did not even bother to oppose this resolution and simply treated it as a trivial interruption.

After Mayor Darst flirted with the possibility of having the City Charter amended so that the City could unilaterally assume responsibility for public transit (Supervisor Mathews labeled this a "cold-blooded effort to withdraw from the County"), the spirit of partnership prevailed. As described in the previous chapter, the Missouri Constitution of 1945 had added forming one or more metropolitan special purpose districts as one of the options available to a Board of Freeholders and, with widespread cooperation, petitions were gathered and, by Spring 1953, the Board was appointed and meeting.

In its plan approved March 25, 1954, the Board decided to delay the decision of public ownership to another time, settling for shifting the regulatory oversight over bus and streetcar fares from the state to a new "Metropolitan St. Louis Transit District." The District would assume responsibility for mass transit and traffic planning and could, no more than once every two years, ask voter permission "to acquire mass transit facilities." The District was to be governed by six commissioners, three appointed by the Mayor and three by the Supervisor. These six would then appoint a seventh individual to chair the District.

This half measure satisfied almost no one. The proposed District was portrayed as largely a study group and taking regulatory control away from the state was constitutionally suspect. Why construct a brand new governmental entity, complete with commissioners and staff and which could live forever, to examine the feasibility and desirability of public ownership. Either it should be done directly or not done at all, opponents argued. Both the City Mayor, now Raymond Tucker, and County Supervisor Mathews came out against it, along with business groups like the Chamber of Commerce of Metropolitan St. Louis, and, on January 25, 1955, it was defeated both in the City and the County.

While the governmental reform spotlight in 1959 shone on the Board of Freeholders debate about the merits of a
metropolitan district versus City-County consolidation, Illinois and Missouri passed legislation expanding Bi-State's potential portfolio to include "passenger transportation facilities." By the early 1960s, more St. Louisans had shifted from public transit to the automobile. The fifteen private firms supplying local bus and streetcar service within the region were having a hard time breaking even. The always haphazard interline connections were even worse, quality was slipping, and it seemed like a good time to sell. Using revenue bonds, Bi-State bought them all out and a small planning agency, overnight, became a substantial transportation public authority serving the City of St. Louis, St. Louis County, and St. Clair County. Expansion continued throughout the 1960s, with the agency opening Bi-State Parks Airport in 1965 and securing the operating contract for the tram system within the Gateway Arch in 1967.

As Bi-State became an important participant in metropolitan policy-making, the City and the County began to squabble more over where the five Missouri commissioners lived. Because the Agency has never extended many services to either Jefferson or St. Charles Counties, they have never lobbied for any commissioners. But two (City plus County) into five (the number of Missouri commissioners) does not go evenly and each thought it should get the third seat. In addition, both chief elected officials were agitated by having the governor control one of the important local public services. Ultimately, a truce was reached in 1980 and now Missouri law specifies, first, that the fifth or odd appointment rotates between the City and County and, second, that the appointments are made from a "panel of three nominees" submitted by either the Mayor or the County Executive, depending on whose turn it is.

When Bi-State went into the public transportation field, it thought that farebox revenues would cover both operating costs and debt retirement. Even though passenger levels had been slipping, as a public enterprise Bi-State would be tax-exempt and those savings should transform a red-ink private balance sheet into a break-even public one. That scenario had a shorter life than Bi-State had imagined.

Despite the unanticipated but welcome passage by the federal government of the Urban Mass Transportation Act of 1964 and the consequent aid it generated, by the early 1970s Bi-State needed some additional tax dollars. But according to the compact, it could not raise them itself and, although fare increases were an option, raising them too high would be counterproductive, either making public transit unaffordable for the very poor or causing it to be less attractive to those who could choose to drive their own car. Thus began an ongoing Bi-State saga still underway, running from government to government, tin cup in hand, trying to make ends meet.

Since the Missouri side of the river receives the most service, it has been the most frequent target. In 1973 the General Assembly authorized the City and the County to institute a one-half cent sales tax for "transportation purposes." Although this was a victory for Bi-State, the package came with significant strings. The State only authorizes this action for two years at a time so, biennially, it needs to be re-enacted. It has been ever since 1973 but the funding uncertainty hampers Bi-State's planning and bonding capacity. The City and County are not required to give Bi-State any of the money and can, if they choose, spend it on other transportation needs. Even the amounts allocated to Bi-State are year-to-year. All this makes Bi-State a peren-
nial supplicant, dependent upon State, City, and County politics. In recent years, the City has been giving all of its sales tax proceeds (about $17 million) to Bi-State. The County, conversely, has only been appropriating about half (approximately $30 million), retaining the remaining $30-plus million for various road projects.

In 1994, after St. Louis cleverly had traded some otherwise worthless railroad right-of-way and a few other tokens to the federal government in return for its footing the bill for a light rail line from East St. Louis to Lambert Field, Bi-State realized that it had no money to operate Metrolink. Even federal largesse has its limits.

Bi-State was a co-opted participant in an abortive attempt in the early 1970s to form the “St. Louis Area Council of Governments” or, as it became known, SLACOG. In 1972, the Illinois and Missouri Governors established a task force “to study and recommend ways and means of strengthening and improving existing regional organizational structures in the St. Louis metropolitan area.” Chaired by St. Louis County Supervisor Lawrence K. Roos, the group proposed an agency which would be responsible for planning for housing, health, manpower, air quality, law enforcement, solid waste disposal, and economic development and would assume all of Bi-State’s operations. Its governing board would have representatives from the component local governments and, rumor had it, would be asked to appoint Mr. Roos, about to step down from his County post, as its first executive director so he could bring County-style efficiency and values to SLACOG’s many roles. The proposal never got to first base but it did dominate the too-many-governments discussion for more than a year.

The Missouri General Assembly came to the rescue with authorization for City and County voters to pass up to a one-half cent sales tax which could only be used for “public transportation purposes,” with the adjective “public” being the key word for Bi-State.

In August 1994, less than three months after the legislative session had ended, a measure for half this amount (one-quarter cent) was on the ballot and it passed easily in both the City (68% yes) and the County (60% yes). Even these funds go through those jurisdictions instead of directly to Bi-State. A November 1997 attempt to approve the remaining one-quarter cent passed narrowly in the City (50.4% yes) but failed in the County (42% yes). According to the legislation, the measure must be passed in both jurisdictions so Bi-State is still waiting for the other sales tax shoe to fall.

Illinois funds come both directly from the state as well as through the St. Clair County Transit District. The latter passed a one-half cent sales tax in November 1993 and it is being paid to Bi-State to build and, ultimately, to operate the light rail extension which will run from East St. Louis to Belleville Area College and, at a later date, on to Mid-America Airport and Scott Air Force Base.

As for the remaining counties, Madison County has its own public transportation unit, St. Charles County has twice rejected a sales tax measure that would have enabled it to connect to the Bi-State system, and the remainder still see no special urgency to become part of a transportation authority.

**Sewers: Metropolitan St. Louis Sewer District**

As St. Louis County’s urbanization accelerated in the years following World War II, City residents were remind-
ed of an essential law of nature: water flows downhill. As acre after acre of County land was paved over, more of the stormwater ran off instead of being absorbed into the ground. For the most part, the then-concretized County was within the Mississippi watershed and the only way for the water to get from the County to the river was to go through the City.

Waste sewage flow, the commodities you talk about delicately in polite company, was a bit more complex. Some County jurisdictions paid the City for connections to its system but others had inadequate facilities and raw sewage entered County creeks which ultimately either flowed into the City or, in North County, went through Coldwater Creek into the Missouri River just above its confluence with the Mississippi. The City drew its drinking water from the east side of the Mississippi, a few miles south of the rivers joining. Although the river is called the Mississippi at that point, most of the water on the eastern bank comes from the Missouri. So, whatever nasty stuff went into Coldwater Creek quickly ended up having to be removed by the City as part of its water purification process.

The 1849 cholera epidemic, which killed almost one out of every ten St. Louisans, had made sewers a top public priority and, over the years, the City had developed one of the best sets of urban sewers in the country. Although the City was reluctant to share this gem with the upstart County, two essential facts—stormwater and wastewater follow watersheds, not governmental boundaries and the County was uphill and the City downhill—meant it was in the City's interest to find a way to integrate its and the County's sewers.

For its part, the County realized that its sewer hodge-

odge—15 municipal systems, 24 sewer districts, 75 sub-
division systems, and thousands of individual septic tanks—was a health hazard and a deterrent to growth. Those providing adequate services, the exception rather than the rule, were paying the City hefty annual sums (Olivette's tab in the early 1950s was over $140,000) to send waste through the City's system. Sewers are a capital intensive enterprise, requiring substantial investments in treatment facilities and underground collectors. It would be financial folly to have tens or hundreds of them and even within the County, only a few could be at the top of the hill. The inner suburbs also had raw sewage passing through and, as the County expanded outward, the problem would only become worse.

Within this propitious climate, in 1952 the City and County formed a Metropolitan Sewer Commission to study the issue. It recommended forming a board of freeholders to develop a plan for a special purpose sewer district and, before the year was out, the requisite petition signatures had been collected and, by January 1953, the new Board was at work. Chaired by J. Eugene Auckley, a County resident who had served on the Commission, and with a City resident, John R. Shepley, as vice chair, the group had a proposal drafted by August.

It was special purpose government, St. Louis style. The Board recommended establishing the Metropolitan St. Louis Sewer District (now known as MSD) whose boundaries would include all of the City of St. Louis but only those parts of St. Louis County (roughly everything inside Lindbergh Boulevard) which drained into the Mississippi or into Coldwater Creek. The City freeholders saw no need to assume responsibility for those portions of the County, about two-thirds of the acreage, in the Meramec River or
upper Missouri River watersheds. Nor was the City prepared to pay the bill to modernize the County's sewers. The District was kept out of the redistribution role since any capital improvements would have to be paid exclusively by "those lots or parcels of ground...as are benefited by said construction, improvement, or extension." Even in these situations, two-thirds approval would be needed for general obligation debt and four-sevenths for revenue bonds. The District was empowered to levy a property tax for operations and maintenance, but the upper limit was capped at ten cents per one hundred dollars assessed valuation.

The Freeholders proposed a six-member Board of Trustees, three appointed by the City of St. Louis Mayor and three by the St. Louis County Supervisor, all with four-year terms. In order to minimize having one jurisdiction prevail, the charter required that "an affirmative vote by two members appointed from the City of St. Louis and two members appointed from St. Louis County shall be necessary to pass any ordinance, resolution, regulation, rule, or order."

The campaign to establish MSD went smoothly. The organizing group, "Citizens Committee for the Metropolitan St. Louis Sewer District," was a civic who's-who, with its letterhead including the Chair of the Chamber of Commerce of Metropolitan St. Louis, the Mayor and the County Supervisor, the Roman Catholic Archbishop, the head of Civic Progress, the President of the St. Louis County Municipal League, the Urban League's executive director, and the presidents of the major medical societies. The campaign literature made it abundantly clear that the City was not being asked to subsidize the County:

*Question: If we have good sewers, will we have*

*to pay for the sewers for others?*

*Answer: No. The Metropolitan District will be divided into subdistricts, each taxed according to its sewer needs. Only those who need new sewers will pay for them.*

Officially it is Article X, Section 22 of the Missouri Constitution but, to friend and foe alike, Missouri's tax limitations are known as the Hancock Amendment. That's Hancock as in Mel, the Springfield businessman who rode the movement to a seat in Congress, not Hancock as in John, he of the flourishing signature. In addition to giving voters near complete control over local tax levels, it also restricts the state's expenditure growth to the increase in personal income. Interpreting the Hancock Amendment and inventing ways to avoid its constraints have been boon for attorneys both inside and outside government. Despite being the object of curses galore from those who must abide by it, it remains popular with the citizenry thereby forestalling any efforts to get rid of it.

With vivid newspaper pictures, including some graphic color shots of raw sewage, and an intense get-out-the-vote effort staffed largely through the League of Women Voters, the February 9, 1954 election was a cakewalk: 52,854 yes (77%) and 16,140 no (23%) in the City and 64,441 yes (75%) and 21,907 no (25%) in the County. MSD took control on January 1, 1956 and quickly gained citizen confidence. In November 1962, voters living in the Mississippi River watershed gave 80%-plus support for a $95 million bond issue to build the Bissell Point and Lemay Treatment Plants. Bond issues for smaller components were also
almost always successful. Others wanted to join and, in 1977, most of the remainder of St. Louis County voted, almost six-to-one, to become part of MSD.

Life was challenging but encouraging for MSD until Missourians enlisted in the tax limitation wars in 1980, passing a constitutional amendment that, among other provisions, prohibited local jurisdictions from raising most taxes without a popular vote. Just when MSD needed higher rates to operate its expanding system, an increasingly taxpayer-resistant public now had to be persuaded to go along. MSD was also being more hamstrung by its charter requirement that only those who benefited from a capital improvement could be taxed to pay for it.

Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, the District tried a mix of legal and campaign tactics to cope with its financing dilemmas. It argued in the early 1980s that federal clean water mandates meant it had to raise rates, even if the voters did not approve. No, said the courts. In 1984, it successfully passed a district-wide bond issue for capital projects which would only directly serve part of the jurisdiction and hoped no one would notice. Some taxpayers were alert to the end run and successfully sued to have part of the bond issue refunded. Okay, said MSD, we will ask the electorate to amend the Charter to allow district-wide bonds and, while we are at it, seek approval for higher operating rates. No, in 1987, replied the voters.

MSD received a temporary reprieve in 1988 when, in March, voters gave ex post facto approval to an operating rate increase imposed in 1984 and, in August, passed a $436 million bond issue for several major capital projects that, put together, would enable it to meet more stringent federal and state clean water standards. But as deferred mainte-

nance mounted and the system aged, a 1990 effort to raise operating rates by over sixty percent was soundly rejected by the voters.

In 1991, the Missouri Supreme Court held that certain fees for services were not subject to the constitutional amendment's voter approval requirement as long as they met a set of five requirements. Maybe that could be us, thought MSD, and in 1992 the Board of Trustees unilaterally almost doubled the rate's wastewater component. Once again, MSD was back in court and, in 1993, the state judiciary said that, as then designed, the charges were taxes and not fees. The largest flaw was that, in St. Louis County, MSD was imposing a flat amount for each household. That's a tax, ruled the Missouri Supreme Court, since a fee should be based on usage.

MSD then went to work on the how-to-measure-wastewater-usage problem and decided that, at least during the winter months, wastewater out should approximately equal fresh water in. Since the St. Louis County Water Company tracked incoming water, MSD used winter water consumption to determine sewer charges. For homes without meters, largely the case in the City of St. Louis, a formula estimating the number of water outlets was employed. Good enough, ruled the appellate court in 1997. As a consequence, MSD now has control over a significant part of its operating revenue needs. But the capital problems remain and, in addition, no one has devised procedures for gauging stormwater usage. MSD charges each property owner 24 cents a month for stormwater services, be it a shopping center or bungalow. The collected funds fall far short of what is needed to control runoff and the District is contemplating a payment linked to how much impervious surface a prop-
property has. Such a change, however, would probably require voter approval. All this has made MSD the object of intensive reform discussions. Confluence St. Louis, the region’s citizens league, studied the matter for two years. Its report, issued in 1996, recommended that MSD be privatized, becoming "an investor-owned public utility company regulated by the Missouri Public Service Commission." This transformation would retain some governmental control over rates, as is the case with natural gas and electricity, but also would enable the new entity to have better access to capital markets.

Responding to the Confluence report, City of St. Louis Mayor Freeman Bosley, Jr., and St. Louis County Executive Buzz Westfall formed a MSD Conversion Implementation Committee. In its March 1997 report, the Committee concluded that the privatization path had too many obstacles. Instead, it proposed a series of charter amendments, including expanding the Board of Trustees from six to ten, enabling the Missouri Public Service Commission to regulate those MSD rates which are fees and do not require voter approval, and authorizing district-wide bonds and lowering the approval margin to a simple majority. None of these have yet to reach the ballot. Although most agree that MSD’s financing is partially broke, there is not yet consensus about how to fix it.

St. Louis Junior College District

While topography propelled the development of a sewer district, it was demography that triggered the establishment of a community college system. By the late 1950s, the baby boom was well underway. The spike in the birth rate had started in 1946 and it showed no signs of abating. The Class of 1962 at the City and County’s high schools would have about twelve thousand graduates but, just four years ahead, the Class of 1966 would produce twenty-one thousand.

Originally “junior college” was both the accepted and preferred term for two-year post-secondary institutions. Over time, however, “junior” developed negative connotations such as inferior and sub-par. Ever sensitive to image, junior colleges around the country began referring to themselves as “community colleges,” avoiding the second-class inferences conveyed by “junior” and stressing the commitment to serve their constituency. St. Louis joined in this movement, now calling itself St. Louis Community Colleges but its legal birth certificate still has it as the Junior College District.

Having one’s children go to college was becoming part of the American Dream but would there be enough slots for the boomers and, even if there were, could their parents afford the tab? The Missouri component of the St. Louis region had numerous private universities and colleges but, in the public realm, there was only Harris-Stowe, then a small teachers college owned and operated by the St. Louis Public School District whose principal role was to supply elementary school teachers for the City’s schools. In 1958, these institutions had a combined enrollment of about twenty-six thousand. Even under the rosier of projections, their expansion could only accommodate another ten to fifteen thousand students but, under the most conservative estimates, demand would be more than twice that by the late 1960s. Among the nation’s thirty-three largest metropolitan areas, St. Louis already ranked near the bottom at thirtieth
in the proportion of college graduates. If it did not react to
the challenge of meeting the enhanced need, it would slip
even further behind.

Although the problem was more acute in the St. Louis
area, it was also evident throughout Missouri. In keeping
with the play-it-politically-cautious tradition of when-in-
doubt-form-a-task-force, Governor James T. Blair, Jr. did
just that. Its report, issued in November 1960, recommend-
ed that the state authorize and subsidize junior colleges
throughout Missouri. St. Louis seized this opportunity.
Under the leadership of Teresa Fischer, a prominent com-

munity volunteer and one of the prime heirs to the fortunes
made by the Sigma Chemical Company, civic notables had
already formed the Committee for the Study of Higher
Educational Needs for Metropolitan St. Louis and, building
on its own investigations as well as the Governor's Missouri
Committee on Education Beyond the High School, actively
lobbied the General Assembly to put the state in the junior
college business.

The legislature saw community colleges as an inexpen-
sive way to meet the need and respond to constituent con-
cerns. They were far less expensive than expanding four-
year colleges and universities, although growth there would
also be imperative, and junior colleges meant that local
jurisdictions would pay part of the expenses. In addition to
furnishing the first half of a baccalaureate program, they
could also offer technical programs and adult education. In
the Spring of 1961, it authorized that "a junior college dis-

trict may be established in any public school district or in
any two or more contiguous public school districts, whether
in the same county or not." The cost would be split three
ways: $200 per fulltime student from the state, $200 in

annual tuition from the student, and the remainder from a
ten cents per one hundred dollars property tax within the
district.

Because civic leaders had spurred the junior college
movement, localism was largely by-passed and a single
entity comprising both City and County was proposed as
the best approach. In the words of the advocates, "one
large, wealthy area-wide district will have the status and
prestige to attract the best-qualified staff and will enable us
to make the most efficient use of available professional
talent." Particularism was served, however, by the governance
scheme: six trustees elected on a district basis, initially two
from the City of St. Louis and four from distinct segments
of St. Louis County. Plans for the number of campuses and
their locations were kept purposefully vague prior to the
election in order to avoid being caught up in local disputes,
but the public was assured that they would be of "equal
excellence, strategically located, and geographically acces-
sible."

The campaign committee covered all the bases. Co-
chaired by Oscar Ehrhardt, head of the St. Louis AFL-CIO
and Mrs. Fischer, it included all components of the educa-
tional establishment: the heads of St. Louis University and
Washington University, superintendents of the Catholic and
Lutheran schools, and the superintendent of the City
schools and several of his County counterparts. The busi-
ness community, represented by the Chamber of Commerce
of Metropolitan St. Louis and Civic Progress, was on board
as was the Urban League and the League of Women Voters.
Knowing that the University of Missouri had just estab-
lished a residence center in Normandy, a possible public
competitor for any new junior college, the campaign sought
and received a strong endorsement from UM President Elmer Ellis.

The only organized opposition came from the Citizens for Educational Freedom which argued for a voucher approach where students would be able to use public funds to attend private institutions. In its campaign statement, the CEF worried that a junior college district would "encourage a state monopoly in higher education by compelling more and more students to attend state colleges."

On April 3, 1962, the measure passed easily, winning by more than two-to-one in the County and by three-to-two in the City. In the same election, the first six trustees were also chosen. They moved quickly to hire an experienced community college administrator, Joseph P. Cosand, then head of the Santa Barbara City Junior College. Within a year, classes had started at two temporary sites—rented space in Roosevelt High School in the City and McCluer High School in the County—and land was purchased for two sites. The moribund St. Joseph’s College at Geyer and Big Bend opted for the Junior College District over subdivision developers and, having recently been devastated by fire, the Forest Park Highlands Amusement Park was delighted to have a customer for its property. Not long thereafter, seventy-nine undeveloped acres along Pershall Road were acquired, finalizing the locations for the three campuses: Meramec, Forest Park, and Florissant Valley.

The Junior College District quickly became a victim of its own overpromises. The 1962 campaign literature had claimed the venture was "bargain day for taxpayers," with the State of Missouri and the student paying two-thirds of the educational costs. That was fine for operating expenses but it had overlooked the price tag for building three cam-
puses. A year later, on April 2, 1963, it asked the voters for a supplemental ten cents per hundred dollars levy for the "Permanent Plan Building Program," only to have the measure rejected. A similar attempt failed in 1964 and it was not until November 1965 that the District received voter endorsement, by a three-to-one margin, for a $47,200,000 bond issue, paid for by a twenty-year seven cents per one hundred dollars property tax.

Only then was the District, now with an enrollment of more than six thousand, able to move from temporary structures and rented space toward permanent facilities. By the end of the twentieth century, the three campuses educate more than twenty-five thousand annually. Tuition remains relatively inexpensive, less than $1,400 a year for a full-time student, while the public share has risen, with the local property tax now at twenty-four cents per one hundred dollars and state aid, assuming available revenues, at fifty percent of operating expenses.

Zoo-Museum District

Howard Baer had a problem. For the better part of the 1960s he had been President of the St. Louis Zoo Board and he took his responsibilities seriously. The Zoo belonged to the City of St. Louis and had an earmarked property tax that had been increased from two cents to four cents per one hundred dollars assessed valuation in 1962 and then to five cents in 1968. But expenses were mounting, buildings and exhibits were becoming shabby and, with the City's tax base stagnating and possibly even declining, the future looked bleak.

As Baer describes it in his 1978 autobiography, Saint Louis To Me, there were four possible solutions: "(1) reduce
the size and quality of the Zoo; (2) charge admission; (3) charge non-St. Louisans only; and (4) gain district support." Baer found the first option unacceptable, the second unrealistic (area residents regarded free admission to the Zoo as a birthright), and the third financially inadequate and administratively problematic. That left him with the final alternative: establishing a special district which would give the Zoo access to St. Louis County's expanding wealth.

Baer, some cynics have noted, conveniently omitted a fifth possibility: having the region's corporations and philanthropies donate the necessary capital contributions and operating subsidies. But, others might reply, why subject the community's deepest pockets to an indefinite obligation when, with a modest investment by the same interests for legislative lobbying and a referendum campaign, public taxes could be used instead.

With the Saint Louis Art Museum as its partner and with Baer as point person, the Missouri General Assembly passed legislation in Spring 1970 authorizing a Zoo-Museum District "in any constitutional charter city not located within a county and a constitutional charter county adjoining such city" or, more specifically, in the City of St. Louis and St. Louis County, the only combination which fit the legal definition. To furnish some protection against the charge that the new district was simply a tax grab on the County's prosperity, the proposal also included the Museum of Science and Natural History, then a struggling effort housed in a mansion on Oak Knoll at the northwest corner of Clayton and Big Bend Roads in the County.

As structured by the law, the District was a coalition rather than a combination. Each entity would have its own distinct earmarked tax—up to four cents each for the Zoo and the Art Museum and no more than one cent for the Museum of Science—and each proposal would require a separate vote with concurrent majorities in the City and County. To insure that the funds flowed into the institution's coffers, the legislation mandated that no more than five percent could be spent on administration.

Howard Baer's heart belonged to the Zoo but his head told him that the Art Museum should be a partner in the Zoo-Museum District effort. It was an association that occasionally upset his stomach. Not only was Baer contemptuous about the Board's unwillingness to link itself with the community, he was also bothered by its political tin ear. Less than two weeks before the election to approve and fund the District, amidst all the campaign pleas about deteriorating buildings and overstretched budgets, the Art Museum proudly announced purchasing a Renaissance-era masterpiece for $160,000. Wrote Baer in his memoir, "I could cheerfully have seen Buckley (the Art Museum Director) and his staff drawn and quartered."

Business interests led the fight for approval at the April 6, 1971 election. The campaign, funded almost completely with contributions from Civic Progress and wealthy individuals, stressed that the institutions were in steep decline. The newspapers and television coverage featured picture upon photograph of peeling paint and ramshackle roofs. Unless the County stepped in, the story line went, the prognosis was a slow but inevitable death.

City of St. Louis Mayor Alfonso Cervantes, less than thrilled about losing two of the City's more prestigious assets to a new district, remained passive throughout the campaign. St. Louis County Supervisor Lawrence Roos, a
close ally of the corporate leadership, was persuaded to endorse the initiative, but in his public pronouncements he always talked tough about the County's achieving equal control. The municipal mayors split, with some (Clayton's Hy Waltuch, Ferguson's John Brawley, Kirkwood's Robert Reim, University City's Nathan Kaufmann) being vigorous advocates and others (Florissant's James Eagan, Webster Groves's John Cooper) being outspoken opponents.

There were a few who wanted the Zoo-Museum District Board to have some budgetary discretion, proposing that the allocation be three cents each for the Zoo and the Art Museum, one penny for the Museum of Science and Natural History, and two cents available to distribute to any of the three on a year-by-year basis. A letter from Joseph L. Tucker, longtime St. Louis art connoisseur, in the Western Historical Manuscript Archives, describes a meeting at the St. Louis Club called to squash this raid on universal earmarking. Tucker himself opposed the District, calling it "socialism for the rich."

The City voters responded quite favorably to the three proposals, giving each more than seventy-five percent approval. The margin was much closer in the County, with the Art Museum passing most narrowly with 51% yes and the Museum of Science (52%) and the Zoo (53%) achieving only slightly higher shares. The key to success in the County came from the central segment where the yes-to-no ratio exceeded three-to-one. In the southern and northern areas, on the other hand, the measures failed to carry a single township.

The Zoo-Museum District's Board has eight members, four each appointed by the City's and County's elected exec-utiveutives. In the spirit that the more district commissioners the better, each institution within the District has its own subdistrict board, with five members apiece from the City and the County, also appointed by the respective executives but only after nomination by the current members. These appointments carry more prestige than they do power for several of the members. The legislation and the ballot language both require that the tax revenues pass through to the institutions and, for some, separate non-governmental boards make important calls like hiring and firing directors. Although, in principle, the commissioners could refuse to distribute the funds, such an action would be legally challenged and publicly decried.

What seemed like heavenly manna in 1971, initial access to property taxes for the Museum of Science and adding the County to the Zoo's and Art Museum's tax base had become mundane crumbs by the early 1980s. Double-digit inflation was fueling cost hikes and, once again, the institutions' leadership saw the public treasury as the best place to head for help. They had prepared the way by convincing the legislature to raise the cap from four cents to eight cents for the Zoo and Art Museum and from one cent to six cents for the Museum of Science and Natural History. In addition, Dr. Peter Raven, the visionary head of the Missouri Botanical Garden, had successfully lobbied to have the General Assembly authorize its joining the Zoo-Museum District with a maximum levy of four cents per one hundred dollars assessed valuation.

So, in April 1983, the four facilities asked the voters to up the ante, doubling the rate (four to eight cents) for the Zoo and Art Museum, quadrupling it (one cent to four cents) for the Museum of Science, and initiating a four-cent
levy for the Garden. The quartet joined forces for a unified campaign, funded by the same mix—Civic Progress and wealthy supporters—that underwrote the 1971 election. The appeals were something old (repair deteriorating structures), something new (a Science Center on Oakland Avenue linked to the McDonnell Planetarium), and something educational (expanded programs to aid the area's schools).

The election was a squeaker. Although the Zoo proposition passed comfortably, receiving 56% yes in both the City and the County, the Museum of Science had 52% in the City and 53% in the County, the Art Museum 52% in the City and 51% in the County, and the Garden 52% in the City and just over 50% in the County. Once again, it was the central corridor in both the City and the County which made the difference, providing margins ranging from two-to-one to three-to-one for all the measures. With the imminent departure of the Museum of Science from Oak Knoll Park to the edge of Forest Park, all the Zoo-Museum District institutions would be City-located entities supported by both City and County taxes.

In 1984 the Museum of Transport, located in west St. Louis County, was able to have the legislature add it to the Zoo-Museum authorization list and, a year later, the Missouri Historical Society, housed in the Jefferson Memorial in Forest Park, joined them on the eligibility register. The Museum of Transport spent the next seven years testing the political and electoral waters but never found a time when it felt the forces would be with them.

The Missouri Historical Society, conversely, moved swiftly from authorization to approval. In a campaign handicapped by news that the then director, Raymond Pisney, was being investigated by the federal government for allegedly selling off some of the artifacts for his own personal gain, the Society won a narrow 58,698 to 58,151 approval in the County and a more comfortable 24,530 to 18,835 in the City in a November 3, 1987 election, gaining its own ten-member subdistrict board with power to institute up to a four-cent levy.

The Historical Society's success was music to the St. Louis Symphony's troubled financial ears. It, too, was relying on the area's private pockets to subsidize its chronic operating deficits. Much of this burden could be lifted from the corporate treasuries and the individual philanthropists if the Symphony could join the Zoo-Museum District. The Missouri General Assembly passed authorizing legislation and, accompanied by a trumpet flourish from a grateful Symphony performer, Governor John Ashcroft signed the bill in June 1989. Not only was the Symphony included, but the maximum levy caps were raised for those institutions already belonging to the District.

The Symphony did not skip a beat in attempting to translate the possibility of membership into reality. Joining forces with the Garden and the Science Center, both seeking increases, the Symphony went for its four cents in a November 7, 1989 election. The three mounted a unified campaign, emphasizing educational outreach and building repairs. Worried that it might have a snobbish image, the Symphony pledged to open its doors to one hundred free patrons each performance. Concerned that the public might be unsympathetic to a performance group paying its principal conductor, Leonard Slatkin, about $400,000 a year, the Symphony played the baseball card, noting that outstanding performers, whether on the diamond or in the concert hall,
commanded top salaries.

The electorate was not in a buying mood, rejecting the Symphony by two-to-one margins in both the City and the County. Even though the Garden and Science Center proposals were voted on separately, the negative fallout doomed them with each barely exceeding forty percent yes. Although the Symphony has never asked again for District membership, the embarrassing defeat caused much internal soul-searching at Powell Hall, culminating in a series of privately supported initiatives such as the multiple sites for the Community Music Schools and the In Unison Program linked with many African American churches.

If music failed, could sports succeed? The legislature gave amateur sports their turn at the plate by authorizing a sports subdistrict during its 1990 session. It took two years to assemble a package, but by April 1992 the measure for four cents for amateur sports went on the ballot. The funds would go for new and improved facilities to attract national and international competitions, with locations sprinkled about the area in an attempt to attract widespread support. Again, it was no sale with only 38% voting yes in the County and 39% in the City. Two resounding defeats in a row made the institutions more cautious and they took to testing the electoral waters with polling toes before diving into a campaign. In February 1993, for example, the Zoo announced it would go for a tax hike in April. Less than a week later, after a survey showed the odds were against them, they abruptly withdrew. Despite an increasingly uncertain political climate, the Garden decided to go for an three-cent hike later that same year. Once again, the measure was soundly defeated: 67% no in the County and 63% against in the City. Thrice burned, the Zoo-Museum

District members have become permanently shy and have not returned to the ballot box since.

Lessons and Patterns

The establishment of so many multi-county special purpose governments since World War II demonstrates that St. Louisans' responses to cooperative public ventures is far from no way, no where, no time. They are open to considering proposals on a function-by-function basis, buying governmental reform retail rather than purchasing it wholesale. This is especially so when the proposal does not threaten an existing entrenched force. Bi-State's initial charter was so ineffectual that few local governments saw it as jeopardizing their authority. Even though it had invested in a quality sewer operation, the City of St. Louis understood its topographical vulnerability and ceded this function to a special district. The University of Missouri and the major private institutions saw community colleges as both relieving them of coping with semi-prepared students and generating enrollments for upper division classes. Speaking out against such venerated institutions as the St. Louis Zoo, at least in the beginning, was sufficiently unpopular that the Zoo-Museum District was able to get underway.

Special districts, however, bring their own set of governance challenges. When directly elected, such as the St. Louis Junior College District, turnout is low and knowledge about candidates meager. When appointed by elected executives, public oversight is even less. With minimal media coverage of special district meetings, citizen oversight is further depressed and special purpose governments become vulnerable to becoming captive of the private interests-
contractors, goods suppliers, employee unions—who most directly benefit from them. It is difficult enough to keep track of general purpose governments—national, state, and local—in a federal system. Adding special districts to the mix makes a tough job even more burdensome.

The St. Louis region's existing multi-county districts only include two of its twelve counties: the City of St. Louis and St. Louis County. When most lived in that pair, this made sense but those days have passed. If, for example, the Zoo-Museum District institutions are truly regional, then tax support should extend outward to capture some or all of the remaining counties. A March 1999 East-West Gateway Coordinating Council survey shows the voters in those jurisdictions might be receptive to picking up some of the burden with 72% initially indicating that would favor such a proposal. The most recent special district initiative, a metropolitan parks and recreation district authorized by both the Illinois and Missouri legislatures during their 1999 sessions, is the first to allow all twelve counties within the St. Louis metropolitan area the opportunity to be included within its boundaries.

CHAPTER 5

LET US NOW PRAISE MULTIPLICITY

Somewhere in the metropolitan area, perhaps in one of St. Louis County's smaller municipalities, there should be a shrine to Charles Tiebout, the patron saint for governmental multiplicity. But one would search in vain for such a memorial and, indeed, for anyone outside academe who would even recognize his name.

Governmental Multiplicity: The Theory

In 1956, Tiebout published a scholarly essay, "The Pure Theory of Local Expenditures," which contended that if competition produced better goods and services in the private sector, why would not the same logic apply to local governments. Two political scientists, Vincent Ostrom and Robert Warren, thought that Tiebout's economic perspective was a healthy antidote to metropolitan consolidators and, in 1961, they co-authored an article with him. In their essay entitled "The Organization of Government in Metropolitan Areas: A Theoretical Inquiry," they argued that a multiplicity of governments promotes choice, a value exceedingly compatible with American individualism. The ability of citizens to select locations within a metropolitan region causes the many governments to compete to have them live, work, and shop within their jurisdictions. Multiplicity engages the forces of the marketplace and the outcome is a greater public good.

Instead of generating chaos, fragmentation creates choice. If there were but one government for an entire metropolitan region, then there would be equal levels of public services in each and every neighborhood within the area: one police force with its distinctive patrolling style, one
school district with its particular curricular approach, one parks and recreation department with its set of leisure preferences, and so forth. Just as consumers frequently rebel against monopolies in the private sector, so too they might chafe under one in a metropolitan area. Governmental arrangements, these scholars assert, should promote public choice, not stifle it. Just as people have differing tastes in foods and diverging favorites in automobiles, so too they are not all alike when it comes to the quantity and style of public goods and services they desire from their local governments.

The longtime intellectual home for the local government public choice advocates has been the Workshop in Political Theory and Policy Analysis at Indiana University. Bloomington’s geographic proximity to St. Louis has made it even more convenient for them to keep track of one of their favorite metropolitan regions. Under the longtime leadership of the Professors Ostrom, Elinor and Vincent, as well as their colleague, Roger Parks, the Workshop continues to publish both theoretical arguments for and empirical assessments of governmental multiplicity.

**Governmental Multiplicity: The St. Louis Test Case**

All this sounded fine in theory, especially if one’s philosophic values ran toward radical individualism and rational choice, but would it work out in practice? Embarking on a search for a test case, it was not too long before the advocates for local government multiplicity happened upon the St. Louis region in general and St. Louis County in particular. By any measure, the number of general purpose local governments per capita being the most prevalent, only the Pittsburgh region competes with the St. Louis area for first place in the fragmentation league.

Looking at St. Louis County from the outside in, options abound. Want a racially diverse municipality with environmental sensitivity (separate containers for newspapers and cans) and lots of governmental services? It’s over there, on the inner aisle, labeled University City. Perhaps you would prefer an upscale community with no-nonsense zoning standards and few public amenities (why have a municipal swimming pool when you belong to a country club). It’s here, in the center of the store, called Ladue. Have a more casual attitude toward residential property? Willing to have your neighbor put his 1957 Chevrolet on blocks in the backyard if you can have those lovely pink flamingo statues sticking out among the two-foot high weeds in your front yard? There are a few cities much more relaxed about zoning requirements and code enforcement and they would welcome you, flamingos and all. The point is clear. Whatever you want—small/medium/large population, low/high taxes, white/black/mixed, strict/lenient regulations, swimming pool/hockey rink/nothing—you can find it in St. Louis County.

One-size-fits-all metropolitan government, absent any benefits it might provide or problems it might solve, would not be the favored alternative for the majority of Americans who are suspicious about concentrating too much power in any single jurisdiction. But do too many governments produce too many problems? Yes, respond the critics of fragmented government. Their reasons, argued more deductively from first principles than inductively from empirical evidence, are that having so many governments creates
inefficiencies, lack of accountability, inequities, and neglect of the overall regional good.

The most recently available tax rates give a glimpse of the variety among St. Louis County's municipalities. Property taxes range from none (e.g., Ballwin, Des Peres, Maryland Heights, Moline Acres, Town and Country, Wildwood) to one dollar or more per one hundred dollars assessed valuation (e.g., Berkeley, Jennings, Maplewood, Olivette, University City, Webster Groves). Gross receipts utilities tax, essentially a special sales tax on electric, natural gas, telephone, and water usage, goes from none (e.g., Black Jack, County Life Acres, Huntleigh, Norwood Court, Twin Oaks, Wilbur Park) to eight percent or higher (e.g., Berkeley, Beverly Hills, Charlack, Clayton, Maplewood, Normandy, Northwoods, Olivette, University City, Warson Woods). In some cases (e.g., University City), high taxes are a reflection of residents deciding to purchase collectively more municipal goods and services. In others (e.g., Berkeley), it's a way to sock it to a major property owner and utility user (e.g., Boeing) within its boundaries.

The defenders of multiplicity make a point-by-point rebuttal. As for inefficiency, having say tens of police departments instead of a single unit, they contend that economies of scale—the notion that the more you produce of something, the lower the per unit cost—apply only to certain public goods and services. For others, a municipality of a few thousand can be almost as efficient as one ten times its size. Moreover, even if does cost a bit more, say, for police service in the smaller jurisdiction, having a greater familiarity with the police officers and enhanced control over the enforcement style make it a price worth paying. Better to have Officer Friendly, protective toward residents and suspicious about outsiders, than to be stuck with Officer Distant, entangled in the bureaucracy of a force of hundreds. Items which a smaller unit cannot afford to produce on its own, such as an expensive street repaving apparatus, can always be leased or outsourced. Functions which clearly demand large capital investments, sewer systems and wastewater treatment plants being a common example, can be handled through special districts.

What about the confusion in knowing who is responsible for what? With overlapping jurisdictions and multiple layers, what prevents local governments from engaging in endless finger pointing? Who is held accountable? Government in the United States is intentionally complex, reply the advocates of multiplicity. That's what separation of powers, checks and balances, and suspicion of concentrated power is all about. One way to cope with this is to have nearby representatives, a councilperson just down the street and a mayor a block or two over, ready and available to fight on behalf of local interests. St. Louisans prize familiarity in their public officials and having many municipalities makes that possible. In the same spirit, the City of St. Louis has kept its wards small, now less than fifteen thousand per alderperson, and each Missouri House of Representative district has fewer than forty thousand residents, thereby providing other means for bringing government closer to the people.

Combating inequity is a tougher task. Having so many municipalities allows the wealthier ones to keep it all for themselves and not share their good fortune. Why should Crestwood or St. Ann, for example, keep all the local sales tax revenues from their major shopping centers when so
many of the patrons come from outside their boundaries? The favored municipalities, not surprisingly, defend their largesse as the just rewards for having the wisdom to attract such developments. The municipal winners, they suggest, merit their tax revenue spoils and, moreover, the competition for resources help spur progress. Those championing many local governments suggest that larger units—counties, states, and the national government—can and do help correct for the mismatch between revenue base and service needs by reallocating their tax receipts. St. Louis County taxes its entire property base, for example, to provide public health services, with the disproportionate share going to lower income households.

Fiscal inequity is an even steeper challenge for school districts. Despite the Outstanding Schools Act of 1993 intent to use Missouri state-wide tax dollars to lessen between-district inequality, huge gaps remain among the area’s school districts. To take one 1997-1998 comparison, St. Charles County’s Ft. Zumwalt District, despite a $4.49 levy, spent $4,983 per student while St. Louis County’s Clayton District, with a lower $3.91 rate, allocated $10,499 for each pupil. Another example: Mehlville with $5,072 per student and a $3.94 rate contrasted with Ladue at $8,921 per pupil and a $2.77 levy. In short, assessed valuation matters.

But what about the larger regional interest? With every municipality preoccupied with getting its fair share, and then some, who is looking out for the greater good? Is there not the danger that St. Louisans will be so absorbed in deciding who gets what within the metropolitan area, so worried that some other municipality will gain at its expense, that St. Louis will not have its collective act together and, as a consequence, fall behind in the intensifying competition with other metropolitan areas? This is a legitimate concern, reply the fans of multiplicity. But, they contend, having fewer but larger governments is no guarantee that a regional spirit will prevail nor an assurance that those governments will make wiser decisions. It is certainly true that the region must act as a region on many matters, but this can be accomplished through voluntary alliances such as councils of governments and public-private partnerships, entities like the East-West Gateway Coordinating Council and St. Louis 2004, both described in the next chapter. It is more prudent to evolve incrementally, joining coalitions in specific situations where they make sense, rather than to transform dramatically, abandoning local autonomy and placing one's destiny permanently in some metropolitan-wide government.

Working Together: The Case of Law Enforcement

Those valuing governmental diversity point to the evolution of law enforcement in the City of St. Louis and St. Louis County to demonstrate how multiple governments can adapt to achieve economies of scale and meet broader needs without abandoning local control. Certainly there is no shortage of police units: the City of St. Louis has its own department (interestingly enough, it has "metropolitan" as part of its title), St. Louis County has its own force, and more than sixty of the ninety-plus municipalities mount their individual units. Especially in the case of the latter, this allows a variety of policing approaches, ranging from the officer-as-social-worker to the officer-as-code-regulator to the officer-as-crime-fighter. For better or worse, it also
permits differential law enforcement: a kind and forgiving approach for residents, a stern and confrontational one for outsiders.

What about suburban municipalities too small to afford their own police department? The answer is straightforward: they buy it from either an adjoining municipality or from St. Louis County. The contract can specify the number of patrols, when they are conducted, and where they go. Nor is the price all that high. The provider departments have already recovered all their fixed expenses for items such as buildings and administration, so they do not need to charge their average cost. As long as they can recuperate something higher than the marginal cost of adding an officer here and purchasing a patrol car there, they come out ahead. The result is win-win: the provider government makes a little extra and the purchaser saves by paying less than average cost.

What about investigations of complex cases, especially those crossing two or more jurisdictions? The Major Case Squad of the Greater St. Louis Metropolitan Area, formed in 1964, is on the job. Including specialists from the City, St. Louis County, the County's municipalities, and the sheriff's departments in most of the surrounding counties, all contributed by their respective home agencies, it will stay on the task for days, months, or even years.

With so many police departments, not to mention another set of fire and emergency medical service suppliers, how is someone to know whom to call for what, especially during an emergency? The two larger units, the City and the County, have developed and funded the 911 system, a single number linked to an automated routing system which uses a series of dispatching offices and a computerized geocoding algorithm to direct the call to the appropriate unit.

What about an extraordinary event which might swamp the personnel in one of the police departments? This might happen relatively frequently for the smaller units but could also occur for the medium forces. The answer is a web of mutual aid agreements specifying both procedures and situations for deploying police both from nearby municipalities as well as from the City and County department.

What about training new recruits and updating current officers? To be done well, this requires a permanent academy with modern facilities and a qualified staff. For many years, all the departments in the County used the City's Greater St. Louis Police Academy. More recently, the County established its own police and fire academy in Wellston and now provides these services for all governments within the County.

What about maintaining accurate records and retrieving them rapidly? Effective law enforcement requires officers to obtain quickly stolen vehicle reports, check outstanding arrest warrants, and the like. What's to prevent an officer in one municipality stopping someone for a minor traffic violation and not knowing that they are wanted for a felony offense in another jurisdiction? Recognizing the need for a common information base, the City and the County entered into a joint agreement in 1975 to form the Regional Justice Information System (REJIS), governed by a seven member commission, three each from the City and County and the seventh appointed jointly by the two chief elected executives. Physically located in the City's Central West End, its data services are now used throughout the metropolitan area on both sides of the river.
The theme underlying the law enforcement story is that local control is the default option, but that cooperation can and does occur when appropriate. It evolves on a case-by-case basis, experimentally and incrementally. It is an intentionally cautious approach, avoiding the risk of permanent commitments and elaborate structures. As further proof that fragmented government does not need fixing, the multiplicity proponents note that survey after survey of St. Louis County residents reveal very high levels of satisfaction with their police services and that these opinions are uniformly positive regardless of the size of the police force in any given respondent's jurisdiction.

One of the advantages of cooperative agreements like REJIS is that separation is fairly painless. The contract provides that “either party thereto may by ordinance cancel its participation effective December 31 of any year so long as written notice has been given to the other party not less than ninety days immediately preceding the date of proposed cancellation.” It is the government equivalent of a prenuptial agreement, only briefer.

City-County Joint Ventures: Tourism and the Arts

Tourism in general, and business meetings and conventions in particular, have become big business in the United States. By the early 1990s, associations and corporations alone were spending more than $60 billion dollars a year getting together. Where once small towns survived on taking in each other’s laundry, now metropolitan areas are competing on attracting each other residents to come, visit, and --most important of all--spend.

Let Us Now Praise Multiplicity

Until the mid-1980s, the City and County went their separate ways in seeking a piece of this expanding enterprise. The City had its Convention and Tourism Bureau while the County had a Committee on Tourism. Although they often talked cooperation, it was not uncommon to open a business magazine and see competing ads from each. Sensing that having two adjoining governments conducting separate pitches in public signaled that the region was a long way from having its convention act together, the City and County merged the operations in 1983 and had the union blessed by state legislation a year later.

Although, superficially and technically, the combined entity is a special district, it is more accurately described as a joint venture featuring both public and private interests. The original governing board had eleven members, five appointed by the City Mayor and six by the County Executive. But not just anyone could qualify and tourism industry representatives constitute a majority; six (three each from the City and County) "shall be individuals actively engaged in the hotel and motel industry" and one other of the City's members "shall be a representative of the restaurant industry."

As pursuing conventions was becoming part of the economic race among metropolitan areas, government support for the arts, long a tradition in Europe, was starting to take hold in the United States. The National Endowment for the Arts had begun during the Kennedy Administration and it, in turn, spawned state councils of arts. Those seeking more funds for the region's diverse arts and cultural organizations, especially units without ready access to private angels, saw tourism as giving them an economic rationale for enhancing culture.
They joined political forces with the convention crowd and the same legislation authorizing a merged Convention and Visitors Commission also sanctioned a new Regional Arts Commission for the City and the County. Its board would have fifteen members, eight named by the County Executive and seven by the City Mayor. The two entities would share a single tax (3.75 percent) on hotel and motel rooms in both the City and the County, with 11/15 of the proceeds going to promote tourism and 4/15 to support the arts. The voters thought all this was a splendid idea, especially since transient outsiders would be footing most of the bill, and readily passed the tax.

Giving the County a majority of members on both the Convention and Visitors Commission and the Regional Arts Commission showed that the City was no longer the County's political or economic equal, a fact accepted by even the City's state legislators. Representative Thomas Villa, sponsor of the legislation in 1984 and later a Board of Aldermen President, admitted in a Post-Dispatch interview that "the City just doesn't have the same tax base as the county and any time we can be cooperative with them on something that will generate revenue, we should." Another sign of County dominance was that the Commission's first director, John Walsh, came from its tourism operation.

By the late 1990s, the funds amounted to slightly more than nine million dollars for the Convention and Visitors Commission. It uses the funds to woo groups, large and small, to hold their conventions in St. Louis and the number doing so has risen impressively during the past decade. Since each convention delegate spends about two hundred dollars a day, it is a nice way for the region to pick off some welcome dollars from outsiders. The commission also uses both direct sales and media advertisements to attract group tours and individual visitors to the region, importing still more funds. For the past several years, it has also managed the America's Center convention complex.

The Regional Arts Commission's receipts now enable it to make about three million dollars in grants each year to more than two hundred area arts organizations. The process is competitive, with citizen panels reviewing the applications and making recommendations to the Commission's board and staff. In a recent year, 1999, about half the allocations went to major organizations like the St. Louis Symphony, the Repertory Theatre of St. Louis, and the Opera Theatre while the remainder were given to smaller entities such as the Compton Heights Concert Band and Off the Cuff Productions.

City-County Joint Ventures: The Stadium

In 1987 Bill Bidwill, unable to get anyone else to build him a modern football facility and unwilling to pay for it himself, took his National Football League Cardinals to Phoenix, earning him permanent membership on the region's all-time most despised list and leaving the area without an entry in the most testosterone of sports. Thus began a nine-year odyssey to find another NFL franchise, a journey that ended with the Los Angeles Rams moving to St. Louis in 1996.

After two years of debate and discussion, the consensus was that a new stadium—preferably domed, seating sixty thousand or more, replete with luxury boxes, and located in Downtown St. Louis—was the sine qua non for obtaining
another team. The NFL, it was felt, would not give the region more than a passing glance unless it was committed to contributing the venue. The City had the largest stake in making this happen but its finances could not come close to affording such an enterprise. This was a $3 million project and, studies indicated, it would require $24 million a year for thirty years to cover construction costs, interest payments, and operation expenses. Since the new stadium itself would produce additional revenues for the City, it could manage to devote them to the effort but those would amount to about $6 million, about one-quarter of the total needed.

What about asking the County to match the City’s commitment? Major league sports were a regional asset, the County had more of the area’s wealth than any other entity and therefore more interest in protecting its stature, and Interim County Executive H.C. Milford was committed to having his jurisdiction play a leadership role within the region. But Milford was also a political realist, sensitive to potential charges that he would be shipping County’s residents’ hard-earned dollars to the City without getting much in return. Although the County had its share of football fanatics, they probably fell considerably short of an electoral majority.

The solution followed the old political adage: don’t tax me, don’t tax thee, tax the fellow behind the tree. In this instance, the behind-the-tree contingent were outsiders occupying the County’s hotel and motel rooms (presumably locals using them for more illicit purposes would either be too busy to notice or too embarrassed to complain). In April 1990, by a two-to-one margin, County voters approved increasing the tax from 3.75 percent (the amount dedicated to the Convention and Visitors Commission and the Regional Arts Commission) to 7.25 percent, enough for the County’s $6,000,000 match with a little left over for the general fund.

Those proposing the new stadium were careful to characterize it not just as a playing field but as a key component to expanding the Cervantes Convention Center. It would furnish marvelous exhibit space and, if the Pope or Billy Graham ever came to town, a swell place to have a really well-attended religious service. That made the project an economic and community development initiative and, if it were good for St. Louis, it would be even greater for the State of Missouri. Using the combined forces of the City and County state legislative delegations and the business
community's access to Republican Governor John Ashcroft, the area was able to get the State to contribute the remaining annual $12,000,000.

Not wanting to leave the national government out of what was already an example of state-local federalism, local and state officials, working primarily through the bipartisan team of Republican Senator John Danforth and Democratic Representative Richard Gephardt, were able to exempt the project from the Tax Reform Act of 1986 which, in a moment of legislative purity, had prohibited exploiting the state and local tax exclusion from federal taxes as a device to lower interest rates for bonds which, ultimately, would go to benefit private interests. This kept the stadium's price tag within the budgeted $300,000,000.

Lessons and Patterns

Just as the formation of special districts revealed that citizens were open to forming multi-county governments when it made sense to do so, the pattern of intergovernmental cooperation shows their elected representatives are also willing to work together on mutually beneficial initiatives.

What first strikes one as hundreds of local governments, each pursuing its own parochial interests while ignoring its neighbors, becomes, on closer inspection, an intricate web of interconnected partnerships. Those calling for a single metropolitan government had a certain preoccupation with structural neatness, a governmental strain of anal compulsiveness, which engendered an instinctive negative response to the apparent messiness of the region's counties, municipalities, and special districts. They tended to look at government mechanistically and saw St. Louis as a Rube Goldberg contraption gone amok. Throw it away, they reacted, start over again and build a much simpler machine, one with a single set of controls that can be easily steered. That will be more efficient and more accountable.

Where the metropolitan reformers pictured a machine, the multiplicity advocates perceive an organism. That analogy leads them to adopt an evolutionary paradigm. Why did such a system develop in this setting? What is it about these people in this place that caused them to prefer many local governments over a few? How well do these governmental practices adapt to changes in their environment? Do they modify their structure and behavior as circumstances warrant? In the process, what core values do they protect and which are they willing to bargain about? When they apply this perspective to the St. Louis case, especially in the City of St. Louis and St. Louis County, they find a people who cherish autonomy and find comfort in homogeneity.

But those values are not prized so much that they prevent these same individuals from frequently cooperating with others, either by joining together in single-function special districts or having their respective local governments operate cooperatively. As a result, they conclude, they have held onto what matters most but adapted when necessary in order to survive.

The question still remains, however, whether evolutionary adaptation, cooperation by accretion, an agreement here and a joint venture there, is and will be sufficient to meet the growing challenges facing the St. Louis region. If the external environment is changing slowly, then, arguably, an evolutionary approach, rooted in tradition and respectful of values, will work just fine. But if the pace is quickening, if the competition among and between metropolitan areas not just
within the United States but across the globe, is what the present and future is all about, then the race will indeed belong to the swift, to the regions which are nimble, which embrace change, not resist it. The latter hardly reads like an apt description of present-day St. Louis. It might be many positive things, and it is, but swift and nimble are not among them.

There is ample evidence that this is precisely what the world has become: a global quality-of-life contest where the principal players are metropolitan regions. They contain most of the planet’s population (about eighty percent in the United States), they are their psychological home (“I’m from St. Louis,” not “I’m from Missouri” or “I’m from Illinois”), and they constitute natural economies where everyone’s destiny is intertwined.

To succeed in this setting, many suggest, St. Louis’s governmental process must either become more centralized or the evolutionary changes must accelerate. Even those who call for moving toward a more centralized local government acknowledge that it lacks feasibility. They understand the history of past failures, the state of current public opinion, and the resistance of the status quo. They wish it were not so but realize it is.

That then leaves the second path. Can St. Louis’s institutions—public, private, non-profit—redefine themselves to be more regional and less local? Where needed, can the area form additional organizations to facilitate cooperative action? Can it retain what it values so much and what makes it so special and prosper in the coming metropolitan age?

Chapter 6

The New Regionalism

Just as the St. Louis region has no shortage of governments, so too it has not wanted for organizations to answer the call for greater regionalism. During the past five decades, as additional City-County consolidations failed, as special districts formed, and as interlocal agreements expanded, several existing entities have transformed themselves into regional actors and still others have been formed for that purpose. As the century turns, the list includes business groups (Civic Progress, Regional Chamber and Growth Association), citizens leagues (Focus St. Louis), civic initiatives (St. Louis 2004), councils of governments (East-West Gateway Coordinating Council), philanthropic organizations (Danforth Foundation), and public-private partnerships (Greater St. Louis Economic Development Council, Leadership Council Southwestern Illinois).

Although some of the entities are more self-consciously regional than others, each spends at least part of its energy on one or more pieces of the metropolitan policy agenda. None is a formal government, (although East-West Gateway is an assembly of governments), but each has grown comfortable, at some times and on certain topics, speaking out on behalf of what it sees as the community interest and, in the process, claiming that it represents the good of the whole. Since it is not government in the traditional sense, analysts have modified that word to describe it better. They call it governance.

Civic Progress

The business sector is usually the first to recognize a region’s interconnectedness. Economic flows pay little
attention to local government boundaries. Employees live one place, suppliers and customers another, and the plant, office, or store is in still a different location. As was seen, for example, in the City's 1876 separation from the County and the later attempts to reunite, growth is a powerful motivator for business. To the extent that governmental arrangements encapsulate the status quo and provide resistance to economic expansion, then business thinks it must organize civically so that the community progresses. Hence the name: Civic Progress.

Mayor Joseph Darst encouraged corporate leaders to form the organization in 1953. His successor, Raymond Tucker, was a Washington University professor who had not risen through the ward political ranks. He embraced the infant Civic Progress both to strengthen his political base and to engage business leaders in downtown redevelopment. At that point, and for more than a decade thereafter, there had not been a new office building constructed since 1930 and the riverfront was a set of ad hoc parking lots in search of a monument and a park.

In its early years, Civic Progress concentrated on City issues, especially downtown revitalization, infrastructure improvements, and governmental reform. Its primary regional venture in the 1950s was to transform a series of annual charitable drives into what has become the United Way of Greater St. Louis. In so doing, Civic Progress took on the principal responsibility both for raising and dispensing the funds for numerous social service agencies within the region. Many of the dollars come from the corporate coffers and from appeals to employees who, with a blend of community concern and enlightened career interest, respond generously. Having done more than their share to generate the funds, Civic Progress has much to say about how they are allocated and, each year, the United Way Board of Directors is amply sprinkled with the CEO's and other top officers from Civic Progress firms.

Can't identify the civic elite without a scorecard? Here's the current Civic Progress company line-up, with some of the pre-merger or buyout identities in parentheses: A.G. Edwards, Ameren (Union Electric), Anheuser-Busch, Bank of America Midwest (NationsBank Midwest, Boatmen's), Boeing (McDonnell Douglas), Brown Group, Commerce Bancshares, Earthgrains, Edison Brothers, Edward Jones, Emerson Electric, Enterprise Rent-A-Car, Firstar (Mercantile), General American, Harbour Group, Jefferson Smurfit, Kroenke Group, Laclede Gas, Mallinckrodt, Maritz, May Company, Monsanto, Ralston Purina, Schnucks, Southwestern Bell, Sverdrup, TWA, and Unigroup. With corporate America in such a flux, any list will probably be outdated within a year. The non-voting members, three universities (St. Louis University, University of Missouri-St. Louis, Washington University) and four counties (City of St. Louis, St. Charles County, and St. Louis County in Missouri and St. Clair County in Illinois) are more stable components.

As the decades passed, Civic Progress broadened both its issue agenda and its geographic reach. Arts, education, and housing became part of its portfolio as well as selected bond issues and referenda campaigns. It became the place to go with an proposal which required a quick infusion of significant capital. Have an intriguing idea for increasing the supply of affordable housing but need a few hundred thousand to get the project off the ground? Civic Progress
supplies it and the St. Louis Equity Fund is born in 1988. Need someone to underwrite the risk for redoing the Washington University Medical Center complex? Civic Progress purchases the debentures in 1977. Require about half a million to educate the electorate about the benefits of an earmarked tax for Metrolink and other public transportation equipment? Civic Progress contributes most of the funds for the successful Proposition M campaign in 1994.

In these venues, Civic Progress reacted more than it acted. The process became an unwritten but widely known routine. Supplicants convince one or two Civic Progress members that an idea has merit. They are granted a hearing at one of the behind-closed-doors monthly breakfast sessions. They then wait anxiously for a thumbs-up decision and, if it comes, are told what each Civic Progress member would contribute based, typically, on an internal formula determining each firm's pro rata share of the burden.

By the mid-1990s, many Civic Progress members had growing misgivings about how it was conducting its affairs. Keeping its role highly secretive meant that its influence was overstated but its contributions undervalued. Confining its membership to locally headquartered firms was problematic when several of the region's principal enterprises were either relocating their main office or being acquired by non-St. Louis companies. Restricting itself largely to picking among proposals brought to it meant others were controlling a significant part of its agenda. Only having elected official ex-officio members from the City of St. Louis and St. Louis County left it with little input from the rest of the region.

Under the leadership of two successive presidents, William Maritz (1995-1997) and Richard Liddy (1997-1999), Civic Progress made some noticeable changes. It partially lifted the veil of secrecy, issuing annual reports about its priorities and actions. Without much fanfare, it quietly allowed acquiring firms like Boeing and NationsBank to assume the memberships of their predecessors and let Southwestern Bell stay within the fold after it moved its headquarters to San Antonio. In November 1998, it announced that, henceforth, it would be a "pro-active catalyst" and that its chief arenas would be education, race relations, regionalism, infrastructure, and economic development. At the same time, it added St. Charles County's and St. Clair County's chief elected executives to its non-voting ranks.

**East-West Gateway Coordinating Council**

After the urban vote had provided the narrow margin for John F. Kennedy's presidential victory in 1960, the national government embarked on an expanded set of grant-in-aid programs for metropolitan areas. Through these grants, the federal government allocated funds to state and local governments which could only be used for designated purposes such as building sewers or expanding public transit. Concern soon arose among federal officials that both political conflicts and program duplication might occur if national agencies dealt separately with each government within any given metropolitan area.

The bureaucratic answer was to mandate a clearinghouse, called a metropolitan planning organization or MPO, for each region which would screen and coordinate local jurisdictions' applications for various programs. To accompany this stick, promulgated in 1968 and known as the A-95 review requirement, the feds offered a carrot: funding to
help support the MPO's operations.

Three years earlier, City of St. Louis Mayor A.J. Cervantes, East St. Louis Mayor Alvin Fields, and St. Louis County Supervisor Lawrence Roos had incorporated a council of governments and asked the chief elected officials from Madison, St. Charles, and St. Clair Counties as well as one of the St. Louis County municipal mayors to join them on the initial Board of Directors. This informal council, intended both as a discussion forum and a long-range planning body, was called the East-West Gateway Coordinating Council and it seemed a natural for also being the region's MPO.

East-West Gateway flourished in the 1970s as federal funds enabled it to add quality staff, and national mandates made it the place local elected officials had to convene and agree so that the St. Louis region could nab its fair share, or perhaps a bit more, of federal project funds. It became a vital player in those policy areas--air quality, housing, transportation, and water quality--where the national government wanted coordination. Its board expanded to include still other local governments and, as part of the federal guidelines, the member jurisdictions had to provide a per capita tax (a few cents per person) to support the council.

This influence was aided by East-West Gateway's near monopoly on relevant information and policy analysis. Knowledge is not complete power, for no one had elected the Council's staff. But issues like environmental quality and transportation are inordinately data-dependent and the Council could and did use its deep familiarity with the subject matter to affect outcomes.

All this changed when Ronald Reagan became president. He eliminated the A-95 review requirement and cut federal support to MPO's by upwards of eighty percent. This deprived East-West Gateway of its two greatest assets: federal mandates and expert knowledge. The member local jurisdictions rejected the option to increase their pennies-per-citizen dues and build a coordinating mechanism from the bottom up rather than from the top down. As a result, by 1990, the Council had been reduced to doing little more than a bit of transportation planning.

Even though four counties—Lincoln and Warren in Missouri and Clinton and Jersey in Illinois—have been added to the St. Louis Metropolitan Statistical Area during the past two decades, the East-West Gateway Coordinating Council has stayed with the eight counties which formed the MSA during the 1960's. Its Board of Directors has eighteen ex-officio slots and six appointed citizens and, more than any other regional body, comes closest to having representational parity between the two states. The ex-officio group includes the chief elected executives from the eight counties (the City of St. Louis Mayor is the de facto equivalent), two mayors selected by the Southwestern Illinois Council of Mayors, the East St. Louis Mayor, the St. Louis County Municipal League President, the President of the City of St. Louis Board of Aldermen, the Bi-State Development Agency Chair, and the President of the Southwestern Illinois Metropolitan and Regional Planning Commission. The appointees, all named by elected officials and therefore not fully independent from them, are divided evenly between Illinois and Missouri.

Its fortunes changed when the national government passed the Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act in 1991. Since few wanted to say that mouthful regularly, the legislation became known by its acronym (ISTEA)
and its oral equivalent ("ice tea"). It both increased the size of the transportation pie and changed the conditions and processes for slicing it within metropolitan areas. It allowed regions to shift funds from highways to mass transit and environmental improvement programs, encouraged them to coordinate transportation planning for all modes (air, rail, road, water), required broader public participation in the planning process, and made the MPO’s the focal point for reaching decisions within each region. Its successor legislation, labeled TEA-21, keeps most of the original’s punch.

East-West Gateway has used this federal policy shift to re-establish itself as a key factor in regional decisionmaking on environmental and transportation issues. Controversial decisions, such as the Metrolink extension route from the existing line’s Forest Park station through Clayton to South County, are made by its Board of Directors with the policy analysis and citizen participation conducted by its staff. Under the astute leadership of its longtime executive director, Les Sterman, the Council has also used its information skills to influence regional agenda-setting, publishing Where We Stand: The Strategic Assessment of the St. Louis Region approximately every three years. It has also become more entrepreneurial, securing foundation grants as well as government support to link its transportation expertise with the welfare-to-work transformation. It has recently embarked on an even more ambitious task, "Initiative for a Metropolitan Community," to explore the nettlesome issue of growth management, a neutral term for what some call "urban sprawl" and others "urban choice."

Regional Chamber and Growth Association

The City of St. Louis and St. Louis County Chambers of Commerce merged into a single metropolitan unit in 1963 but, ten years later, realized that the two-county umbrella failed to cover all the metropolitan area’s economy. Deciding both to broaden its geography to embrace all the region’s counties and to include labor, government, and non-profit organizations within its membership, the entity became truly regional in 1973, naming itself the Regional Commerce and Growth Association. In 1999, it substituted “Chamber” for “Commerce” in its title.

For the next two decades, the RCGA saw its external role as primarily promotional, beating the drum about St. Louis with slick marketing campaigns. "Sold on St. Louis," "The State of St. Louis," and other pithy slogans were used to tout the area’s selling points in hopes that businesses from across the country would move to the region. At home, the three presidents—Harry Morley (1973–1978), Jim O’Flynn (1978–1986), and Ned Taddeucci (1986–1994)—were savvy locals who had occupied key staff positions (Morley and Taddeucci with St. Louis County government, O’Flynn in banking). They worked primarily behind the scenes, manning the linkage between the major corporations and state and local governments, while making certain that services were efficiently and effectively delivered to the RCGA members.

The early 1990s brought economic hard times, both for the nation and for the St. Louis region. Already caught up in a national recession, the post-Cold War military cutbacks eliminated more than ten thousand aircraft production jobs and the effects rippled throughout the region. Although, under the coordination of the St. Louis County Economic
Council and its skilled director, Dennis Coleman, the area implemented transition programs to assist the laidoff workers, efforts that had high re-employment success rates, overall job growth continued to lag.

Within Civic Progress, Monsanto CEO Richard Mahoney and one of his top executives, Earle Harbison, Jr., decided that RCGA had to be redesigned and revitalized to improve St. Louis’s competitive edge. Harbison was serving as Chair of RCGA’s Board of Directors and, in that role, he took the lead. To signal that regional economic development was being taken to a higher level, the Greater St. Louis Economic Development Council was formed in 1994. Its eleven-person board includes, ex officio, the City of St. Louis Mayor and St. Louis County Executive as well as top officials from St. Charles County, Southwestern Illinois, labor, Civic Progress, and small business.

By bringing all these interests into one group, the goal was to have the area’s twenty-plus economic development units stop stealing jobs from one another and instead harness their efforts to compete better with other metropolitan regions. Pursuing jobs should have two stages, according to this thinking. First work together to sell an interested firm on the St. Louis area and then, after that deal is consummated, declare open competition to offer the most attractive package within the region.

The Council was grafted onto the RCGA and, to seal the arrangement, Richard C. D. Fleming, an established national figure in metropolitan economic development, was hired to head both groups. This was a departure from standard St. Louis civic recruitment practices which typically follow the why-look-elsewhere-when-there-is-so-much-talent-here maxim. Fleming had just spent seven years as President of the Greater Denver Chamber of Commerce and, prior to that, had tours with the Central Atlanta Project, the Rouse Company, and the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development.

RCGA served as the initial incubator for the St. Louis Sports Commission. Begun in 1989 as a RCGA committee, since 1994 it has been a separate non-profit organization. Sports, especially the St. Louis Cardinals, have been a unifying force for the region as well as a means for attracting visitors and enhancing the community. Chaired by Olympic medalist Jackie Joyner-Kersee and directed by Frank Viverito, the Commission’s achievements range from headliners like securing both the NCAA Women’s and Men’s Basketball Final Four Championships to community builders such as raising thousands of dollars for youth sports programs.

Soon after his arrival, Fleming set a goal of 100,000 new jobs by the end of the century, eased out almost all the existing staffers, replaced them with economic development specialists, most from elsewhere, and organized an intraregional economic development network with the Greater St. Louis Economic Development Council and RCGA at the hub. With this backing, and a little luck at being ambitious during an historic national economic expansion, the job campaign appears to have met its target.

RCGA has also elevated its presence in other regional ventures. Starting in 1996, it has organized annual leadership visits to metropolitan areas such as Baltimore, Cleveland, and Seattle. These high-profile field trips give local public, business, and non-profit officials a chance to strengthen bonds while they are learning lessons, positive
and negative, from the other sites. On selected infrastructure projects, such as Lambert Airport expansion and the Page Avenue Bridge, RCGA has been an outspoken advocate, lobbying national and state representatives, generating favorable publicity, and coordinating initiative campaigns. RCGA has been especially vocal in stimulating technology-based enterprises. It began with a series of awards to highlight emerging scientific firms and has expanded to include attracting venture capital and, in 1998, spinning off a subsidiary, the Technology Gateway Alliance.

**Leadership Council Southwestern Illinois**

Oscar Wilde once wrote that "if there is one thing worse than being talked about, it's not being talked about." Those from the Illinois portion of the St. Louis region often feel that way, that the Missouri component hardly even knows they exist and, when Missourians do think about Southwestern Illinois, it is a distorted picture. Although Madison and St. Clair Counties alone have over a half million residents and upwards of two hundred and fifty thousand jobs, each representing about one-fifth the area's total, they all too often are an afterthought in regional decision-making. Rather than viewing Illinois as the land of opportunity or, more pessimistically a set of challenges, the rest of the region does not see it at all. There are no Illinois-based corporations within Civic Progress, scant coverage of Illinois issues by the region's print and electronic media, and, with the exception of the Bi-State Development Agency and the East-West Gateway Coordinating Council, minimal or no Illinois representation on other bodies.

In the early 1980s, a few Illinois leaders--Ralph Korte, owner of a major construction firm, Earl Lazerson, Chancellor of Southern Illinois University at Edwardsville, and Ralph Mathias, a top executive at Illinois Power--decided to move unilaterally. With the knowledge and support of Jim O'Flynn, the RCGA President, in 1983 they formed the Leadership Council of Southwestern Illinois. They saw its mission as including economic development but also broader goals such as to "create a sense of identity," "promote the general welfare," and "improve the quality of life."

Had the 1970s debate about how best to meet the region's airport needs gone a different way, Illinois might have both the sun and several hundred commercial airliners rising daily on its side of the Mississippi River. The two options were to build a brand new facility, modeled after Midcontinent in Kansas City or the DFW Complex in Dallas-Fort Worth, near Columbia and Waterloo, just south of the Jefferson Barracks Bridge in Illinois, or to expand Lambert Airport. Many City officials, especially Mayor A.J. Cervantes, supported the Columbia-Waterloo alternative, thinking it would keep Downtown St. Louis at the region's center and be a countervailing force for western expansion into St. Charles County. In a decision that ultimately became part of the 1976 presidential campaign, the Lambert choice won and the area has been embroiled in a whose-ox-gets-gored battle over runway patterns ever since.

Unlike the RCGA, which included all sectors but was and is essentially controlled by its larger business members, the Leadership Council has designed and maintained much more power sharing. As a public-private-nonprofit partnership, it has a healthy balance among all three. It has inten-
tionally kept its staff quite lean, longtime Executive Director Jim Pennekamp and a small support group, and sustains it's all-for-one, one-for-all approach with well-attended monthly sessions and active committees.

Cooperation has produced achievements. Its initial accomplishment was accelerating the construction of Interstate 255, completing the loop around the St. Louis region and opening up prime territory for development. It has also played a vital role in other infrastructure improvements: the Metrolink extension from East St. Louis to Belleville Area College, MidAmerica Airport, the joint-use facility with Scott Air Force Base, and the Clark Bridge connecting St. Charles County and the Alton area. With its existing extensive rail and port facilities, it is leveraging these public investments and transportation assets to attract both large and small private development ranging from the Gateway International Raceway to the Dial Corporation Distribution Center to numerous office and retail projects. Still Illinois's visibility within the region lags behind its attainments. Despite occasional publicity spurts by the Leadership Council, the most memorable being an attempt to mimic West (St. Louis) County by renaming itself "East County," it remains all too hidden. Off the beaten path for most Missourians, separated by a river that is psychologically wider than its physical breadth, rarely on the front page or at the top of the television news unless something bad has happened, it continues to struggle to be an equal partner in the regional arena, despite having gone a long way toward getting its own act together both across counties and among sectors.

Focus St. Louis

In his 1993 book, *Cistatates*, Neal Peirce, the nation's preeminent urban affairs journalist, noted that "in place after place we have been struck by the logic of creating some form of regionwide citizen organization working for the shared and common good over pressure from special interests and parochial positions of fragmented local governments." Specific interests in the St. Louis region, be they individual governments or private concerns, have no shortage of constituencies and advocates. If the regional good was to compete, at times, with this array, would not it also require organized support, peopled by individuals whose eyes were more on the whole than on its constituent parts?

The first response to this need was the Leadership St. Louis (LSL) Program, a nine-month training series for fifty-plus individuals already occupying prominent positions in the community, begun in 1976. Copied from a similar Atlanta venture and initially funded and managed by the Danforth Foundation, it set out to build regional citizens. By the early 1980s, there were upwards of three hundred LSL graduates eager to regionalize but having insufficient places to do so. Through their alumni association, Metro St. Louis Forum, they began a series of discussions which ultimately created Confluence St. Louis, a citizens league modeled after a Minneapolis-St. Paul organization which had been a catalyst for regional policy reform in the Twin Cities.

The two organizations existed in parallel for the next thirteen years. Under the visionary direction of Carolyn Losos, the Leadership St. Louis Program separated itself, first organizationally and ultimately financially, from the Danforth Foundation and became the Leadership Center of
Greater St. Louis. It added seminars and workshops for youth, teachers, mid-level managers, and recently arrived corporate executives while retaining its core LSL Program. Confluence St. Louis's membership ranks rapidly grew to over six hundred, with about one-third being past LSL participants. Those who joined resembled the original founders, largely upper middle or upper class, highly educated, and coming disproportionately from the central corridor in the City of St. Louis and St. Louis County. The Confluence Board of Directors was initially chosen through competitive elections but, after a few years, it was concluded that such an approach discouraged too many people from serving since many did not wish to risk the embarrassment of a public defeat. Subsequently, the Board became essentially self-perpetuating, selecting replacements as members completed the maximum two three-year terms.

Some still familiar names from the first Leadership St. Louis class: Joe Cavato (Senior Vice President with Bank of America Midwest and chair of many civic task forces and commissions), Jo Curran (first Confluence St. Louis Executive Director, now with Tenet Health Care), Dee Joyner (Senior Vice President for Commerce Bank and, like Cavato, head of numerous boards and commissions), and Stanford Scott (long-time East St. Louis youth mentor).

Supplementing the Board were ongoing committees charged with proposing issues and coordinating implementation of past recommendations as well as task forces studying a particular problem and, over a six to eighteen month span, preparing a report with findings and recommenda-

tions. These efforts drew another 100 to 200 people into the organization's active life with the remaining members being supportive spectators. Confluence made little effort to broaden participation, preferring to focus on thoughtful policy analysis rather than extended public mobilization. Following Plato's advice, they were philosopher-citizens, not political activists.

Confluence cast its policy net widely. In addition to the two task forces discussed in earlier chapters, the 1987 report on "Too Many Governments?" that led to the Board of Freeholders in the late 1980s and the mid-1990s effort recommending changes in the Metropolitan Sewer District's governance and financing, other topics on its agenda have included solid waste disposal, health care, economic development, crime, education, housing, and race relations. Its 1989 report, "A New Spirit for St. Louis: Valuing Diversity, was a milestone in confronting the region's racial polarization and getting civic leaders to acknowledge its social and economic harm. Confluence also played a pivotal role in promoting collaborative partnerships such as Aid for Victims of Crime, the Regional Housing Alliance, and the St. Louis Minority Business Council.

As it pursued these issues, Confluence chose compatibility and rationality as its public style. No threats, such as negative publicity for resisting change or ignoring recommendations, were made. Reports were expected to stand or fall on the quality of their reasoning, not the extent of subsequent arm-twisting. One of the consequences for avoiding confrontation was low media coverage. Typically Confluence received a polite hearing on the day a report was issued, followed by an op-ed piece or two, and then, from the media's perspective, the issue vanished: no victors
or villains, no good gals or bad guys, no back-and-forth narrative, no resolution.

In 1996 Confluence St. Louis and the Leadership Center of Greater St. Louis merged into a single entity: FOCUS St. Louis. The two-plus-two-equals-five logic was that the leadership programs would benefit from having more interaction with the various policy initiatives while the task forces and committees would benefit from having a more direct flow of trained volunteers. Carolyn Losos postponed her retirement to serve as interim head and then Christine Chadwick, who had links with both entities (she had chaired the Leadership Center's Board and served as Interim Executive Director for Confluence), became the permanent director.

In its first few years, FOCUS has retained the training programs but modified its policy approach to give process a greater role. Whereas Confluence had an output orientation ("study and action on issues of importance to the region"), FOCUS has opted more for an input approach. Its 1999 mission statement ("to create a cooperative, thriving region by engaging citizens in active leadership roles to influence positive community change") has a softer tone and its series of value statements have added process elements ("strive for common ground") to policy outcomes ("developing practical solutions that produce visible change").

This tension between engaging citizens and proposing reforms is endemic for citizens organizations. If they do not broadly involve people, then they do not deserve to wear the "citizens" label and risk being called elitist. But if they do not produce change, then they hazard becoming idle debating forums soon to be abandoned by all but those most desperate for human interaction.

There are other dilemmas as well. To the extent that Focus advocates controversial changes in policy, it lessens it credibility as a neutral trainer in its leadership programs and a facilitative force for building consensus. If its proposals offend too many people too often, its fundraising prospects dim but if it has no edge and is all bland, it will become irrelevant in regional decisionmaking.

The St. Louis Post-Dispatch jumped into the civic engagement business in 1999. The paper jettisoned most of its Sunday News Analysis section for "Imagine St. Louis," an effort to inform and stimulate "deliberative conversations" among the area's residents. Abandoning the third person to speak more directly to the citizen-reader, the paper described it as "a portal to you, a way to initiate and to join in conversations about public life, a way to ask questions, to study problems and to strike off on roads that might lead to solutions to problems that all of us encounter in contemporary living." St. Louis's reaction, as it so often is to change, was both muted and mixed.

St. Louis 2004

It was a speech writer's fantasy come true. Andrew Craig had been named St. Louis' 1995 Man of the Year and he wanted to say something more than aw-shucks-I-don't-really-deserve-this when he accepted the award. Al Kerth, who as a Fleishman-Hillard public relations executive had staffed Civic Progress for many years, had just the idea for a boffo speech.

The outwardly calm but inwardly passionate Kerth was
frustrated by the region's glacial progress. It needed a goal, a concrete target, and Kerth thought he had identified it: "04" as in 1804 (Louisiana Purchase brings Missouri portion of St. Louis into the Union) and 1904 (the World's Fair and the Olympics). There, eight years away, was another "04": 2004. Enough time to get some changes underway, but not so distant that people might be complaisant. It was time to ready-aim-fire, not discuss-deliberate-drift.

Alfred H. Kerth III comes by his penchant for governance reform naturally. His father, Alfred H. Kerth, Jr., was a member of the commission that wrote the 1968 St. Louis County Charter and his grandfather, the original Alfred H. Kerth, chaired the commission that produced the 1950 County Charter.

So Kerth's words, uttered through Craig's mouth, sparked St. Louis 2004. Fueled by major contributions from several Civic Progress corporations and the Danforth Foundation, it quickly hired a talented staff and leased spiffy offices in the Metropolitan Square Building. Senator John Danforth, vintage statesman material after a distinguished eighteen-year career in the U.S. Senate, agreed to chair the effort and Joanne LaSala, a Fleishman-Hillard executive and former City of St. Louis budget director, came on as the day-to-day head.

The task was to develop a vision for the St. Louis region, all or most of which could be achieved by but of course-2004. Working with and through Focus St. Louis, it spread out over the region, holding tens of community forums in the Fall of 1996. These formed the grist for a series of task forces and action teams, with more than a thousand citizens, largely from leadership positions, participating. They met through the first half of 1997, producing a series of tentative ideas which, again in cooperation with the area's citizens league, were tested and refined through another round of community meetings.

Craig's Man-of-the-Year trophy was tarnished before the year was out but his pockets overflowed with gold. In August 1996, he auctioned off Boatmen's Bank to NationsBank, headquartered in Charlotte, North Carolina. The St. Louis region's largest bank became a branch but Boatmen's shareholders received a forty percent premium for their stock. Doing best of all was Craig himself: he bagged $10 million in NationsBank stock, a $1.5 million annual retirement pension and, if he pre-deceases his spouse, she will continue to get $1 million a year.

By early 1998, the agenda was announced in the form of eleven action plans, each expressed in visionary terms: facing racism and discrimination, combating youth gang violence, providing safe places for kids, downtown revitalization, access to health, cleaner air, zero tolerance for hate crimes, 21st century technologies and high-paying jobs, sustainable neighborhoods, minority and women-owned business growth, and a regional park and trail system. Notably absent were an educational initiative and governmental reform. The former was one of the recurring themes in the community sessions but 2004's Learning Task Force was unable to develop a workable approach. Sensitive to past failures to restructure government, the 2004 leaders kept that topic off the table from day one.
In fulfilling this vision, St. Louis 2004 describes itself as a catalytic agent, not a program operator. It keeps its eye on the target, identifying resources, recruiting implementors, monitoring progress, applauding success, overcoming inertia. It regularly reminds everyone that its fiscal year, 2004, is also its last year. Since it will not be around past then, others must assume the direct responsibility to make things happen.

To date, this approach has been reasonably effective. Through a spin-off entity, Gateway Parks and Trails 2004, it coordinated the effort to design and pass the authorizing legislation for the twelve-county regional park and recreation district. Taking something from concept to law in not just one but two state legislatures in a single session is no trivial feat, even if the topic—parks and trails—is not high on the controversy list.

St. Louis 2004 has also used its corporate ties to tap private funds. Eighteen of the area’s banks have pledged $750 million in loans and equity for the nine neighborhoods selected in the initial round for the sustainability project. Nor has 2004 picked an especially promising set of communities. The nine—five in the City of St. Louis, three in St. Louis County, and one in East St. Louis—are among the most devastated in the region. With a combined population of about ninety thousand, the median household income is $14,000 with about one-quarter of the residents on public assistance.

The organization’s eye for action, its deadline orientation, and its promise to vanish into the ether shortly after December 31, 2004 have made it the darling of corporate donors and private givers. They have provided St. Louis 2004 with more than $2 million a year for its budget and that, in turn, amplifies its chances for future triumphs. It is regionalism, establishment-style.

**Danforth Foundation**

Founded in 1927 by members of the Danforth family, the Ralston Purina heirs, the Foundation spent its first seventy years primarily on educational policy and programs, supporting a wide range of projects throughout the United States. Mindful of its St. Louis home, it always reserved a modest portion of its grant-making for local initiatives including Confluence St. Louis, where it provided much of the seed capital, and the Leadership St. Louis Program. It also occasionally dipped into its reserves to find substantial nine-figure donations for Washington University and lesser amounts for St. Louis University.

All that changed in 1997. Its Board of Directors decided to act locally, not nationally. It determined, in its own words, "the time was right for focusing the Foundation's resources on the St. Louis metropolitan area" and "with enthusiasm the Foundation has joined with others to help make St. Louis a leading region in the new millennium."

Since the Foundation brought prestige, the three well-established Danforth brothers (Danforth Agri-Resources President Donald, Senator Jack, and Washington University Chancellor Emeritus William) who occupied three of the nine Board positions, and more than $400 million in assets to the arena, this made them an instant full-fledged member of the new regionalism movement. Although they had been one of the doors civic groups knocked on in previous years seeking support, everyone knew the local pot was small. Now it would all go for St. Louis.

Instead of sitting back passively, picking and choosing
among requests submitted to it, the Foundation made it clear that, for the most part, its staff and trustees were going to call the shots. In addition to Washington University, which received a whopping $90 million on top of its previous donations, others securing $100,000-or-more support in the first round of St. Louis investments included the American Youth Foundation, the City Museum, Metropolis Saint Louis, the Municipal Theatre, Soulard Market, the St. Louis Public Schools, and St. Louis 2004.

In 1999, it announced the St. Louis Regional Report Card, an effort to use an annual yardstick to track the area's quality of life. Assuming that a well-publicized assessment will stimulate discussion and, where called for, reshape the agenda, the endeavor will both assemble existing data, such as infant mortality rates, and generate new information, some from a series of annual public opinion polls. All of this will be disseminated both through traditional channels, like the mass media, and grassroots outlets, such as neighborhood meetings. By designating the United Way of Greater St. Louis as the home agency for the Report Card and giving it $3.5 million over five years to implement it, the Foundation has also broadened the United Way's role in regional debates, adding policy analysis to its existing social services role.

**Lessons and Patterns**

As these organizations and others move onto the regional stage, not all read from the same script. Each, understandably, has a tendency to place its organization in the lead role, starring in the stirring tale of a region, once stagnant, that came to its collective senses and, with the imaginative vision provided by (MY ORGANIZATION) and the skilled but selfless leadership of (ME) and, oh yes, with some help from the supporting cast (ALL THE OTHER ORGANIZATIONS), caused St. Louis to emerge early in the 21st century as a world-class metropolitan area.

This competition for who-is-the-most-regional-of-us-all is not a bad thing. Entrepreneurialism invigorates the economy and it can serve regionalism as well. But without a single pyramid, an option St. Louisans reject yesterday, today, and tomorrow, the area is destined to have regional action through many, not by one. As St. Louis passes through the millennium, there is greater acceptance that the times call for more regional action and enhanced realization that neither the public nor private sector can unilaterally assume regional leadership.

If you ask St. Louisans what they like most about living in the region, the most frequent answer—from newcomers and oldtimers alike—is that the area combines cosmopolitan amenities with a small town lifestyle. St. Louisans value the ability to choose from among a large number of neighborhoods and subdivisions, municipalities and school districts, internally homogeneous but, as an assembled set, quite diverse. This trait, present in other metropolitan areas but acutely developed in St. Louis, has during the last century-plus become institutionalized. The area's many governments, its fragmented polity, are not an historical accident but instead a natural outgrowth of what St. Louisans value. So, St. Louisans cannot, indeed will not, look solely to government to steer it through intensified regional competition.

Nor are St. Louisans willing to let the private sector have the reins. There is grudging appreciation for what major corporations, the type that belong to Civic Progress,
have contributed to the region's betterment. But St. Louisans are reluctant to have their influence go too far beyond the workplace. Concentrated power, too little choice, is just as suspect in business as it is in government, perhaps even more so. For their part, business executives are not especially keen on spending so much time on community governance. It distracts them from improving the bottom line.

Having rejected solo regional acts by either government or business, St. Louis and many other metropolitan areas have created a third sector, perhaps best called the civic sector. Occupying this turf are the new regionalism institutions. Some might have stronger links to the public (East-West Gateway) or the private (Civic Progress) and others (Focus St. Louis) try to avoid either classification. But they are where the metropolitan-wide action is and will occur and where, for better or worse, the responsibility for much of the region's future lies.

About The Author

E. Terrence Jones is a Professor of Political Science and Public Policy Administration at the University of Missouri - St. Louis where he has taught since 1969. He holds a Ph.D. in Political Science (1967) from Georgetown University, a B.S. in Economics (1963) from St. Louis University, and has additional postgraduate training in Survey Research at the University of Michigan. He is the author of Conducting Political Research and more than sixty professional and popular articles on metropolitan politics, public opinion, and public policy. He has served as a consultant to more than fifty local governments in the St. Louis region, is a past president of Confluence St. Louis, and has been a consultant to The Leadership St. Louis Program since 1986.
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SOURCES

In addition to the publications listed below, the author used organizational records, archival materials, statutory and constitutional documents, and newspaper accounts. In a few instances, it also relies on my personal recollections, either from being at some meetings myself or from conversations with those who were there.

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Chapter 5


Chapter 6


