

CitiesStrong Fact Sheet

Municipal Cooperation in the St. Louis Region

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In the St. Louis Region, and within St. Louis County, dozens of municipalities interact with each other, higher levels of governments and a variety of public and private entities in order to improve the effectiveness and restrain the costs of services. The region is noteworthy for its relatively low costs and high quality of service delivery.

Cooperative efforts began in earnest after WWI when many metro areas were moving from an agrarian society to more urban in nature, spurred by the demand for emerging amenities such as paved streets, improved water and sewers, telephone, gas and electric services, and land use controls. Municipalities understood they needed certain state authority to proceed and they began to work together for state laws and constitutional amendments under which to operate. They also recognized that utilities, roads, and other infrastructure elements do not begin and end at their borders so cooperation meant connections. Municipal leaders also learned that cities were laboratories of good practices when experiences were shared. Much was to be gained for future generations with a cooperative foundation in the early days of the development of the various areas within St. Louis County. These early decades were followed by evolution of police, fire, and ambulance services, and recreational services.

While certain cooperative services such as the St. Louis Major Case Squad, the Zoo Museum District date back many decades, the last 25 years have seen a dramatic increase in intergovernmental cooperation. With ideas frequently nurtured by professional city administrators/managers, police/fire chiefs, recreation directors, and others, municipalities have implemented coops that have saved tens of millions of dollars while enhancing service delivery.

Cooperative examples are:

Numerous cities have formed joint insurance pools for both liability and health insurance. Millions of dollars are saved as a result.

Cities also have found that predicting winter salt needs can be challenging. Rather than risk a shortage of salt or each city buying too much salt, cities cooperatively purchase a large amount, arrange for its storage and then deliver it where needed. The bulk price is lower than numerous small purchases and salt is available when needed.

Public safety is an extremely high priority of every level of government. With municipalities on the front lines, cities offer mutual aid so that any city can call on another whenever a significant safety issue arises. This allows cities to pool their manpower and equipment without having to overspend in anticipation of surges.

Many cities also contract for police services or jointly operate a department with neighbors.

Recently, all the municipal, county and fire agencies cooperated to jointly build a world class radio system that makes it much easier for every first responder to connect to others and increases the reliability of the communication system. The joint system is much less expensive than dozens of individual systems and insures state of the art equipment. Our first responders and our citizens are safer as a result.

Municipalities use large, efficient, information systems to check police records rather than try to maintain such records themselves.

Municipalities also contract with each other for dispatching services or have formed cooperatives to jointly run dispatching facilities. This has led to additional cooperative services such as housing and transporting prisoners.

For major events such as devastating storms or significant crime events, St. Louis County leads training exercises for first responders, utility companies, hospitals and others. The County Emergency Operations staff may activate the new operations center as needed to bring all

partner agencies together in one spot physically or via computer connections so that all those providing aid can benefit from up to the minute situational guidance.

In the arena of recreation and culture, most are aware of major regional entities supported by taxpayers such as the Zoo, Art and History Museums, Science Center, and more recently, regional trails and the improvements to the Arch grounds. These outstanding facilities are known around the world.

Citizens are also fortunate to be able to enjoy a huge array of local recreation centers, trails, pools, balls fields, courts, ice rinks, and specialized facilities. In the recreation industry, St. Louis is so well known for facilities and citizen support that professionals from other cities routinely visit St. Louis to learn from us. In order to use these facilities wisely, many cities have joint funding agreements with other cities, school districts or other agencies to share facilities. This means that citizens have great access without great costs. And facilities can represent the interests of local citizens. Golf may be a priority in one community, tennis in another, aquatic facilities or trails in yet others. Large facilities can be provided by the State, County, or districts, while more localized facilities can be supported by municipalities. The spectrum is viewed as highly desirable both within the area as well as beyond.

For less visible services, municipalities and others cooperate extensively in order to take advantage of highly trained specialists at reasonable costs. For example, most cities contract with St. Louis County inspection agencies for the most difficult inspections involving items like elevators, large commercial buildings, and explosives. They may also contract with the county for more routine inspections regarding plumbing, electrical, decks and less technical items. Cities thereby can balance the quality, cost and responsiveness so that citizens are well served.

Storm water management is another technical area where cities rely on an outside agency for detailed advice. The Metropolitan Sewer District has teams formed with municipal leaders to create and implement plans that reduce pollution to meet federal requirements. It would be very expensive for each municipality to tackle this alone but with teamwork through MSD, the environment benefits for generations to come.

Local officials have long understood the benefit of cooperation among cities, and as a result, citizens are well served by efficient and effective services that are constantly evolving and scaled to meet the demands of each locale. These are complimented by world class regional or district services that add a cosmopolitan flair to the small town feel enjoyed by so many.