

# St. Louis City and St. Louis County Unification Survey

## Fact Sheet

In September 2012, opinion-research firm Fairbank, Maslin, Maullin, Metz & Associates conducted a telephone survey of Missouri voters on the concept of unifying St. Louis City and St. Louis County. The survey was conducted on behalf of Missouri Council for a Better Economy.

A total of eight hundred voters were interviewed. Two hundred randomly selected voters each (for a total of 400) were interviewed in St. Louis City and St. Louis County and three hundred randomly selected voters were interviewed in the balance of the state.

In the poll, respondents were presented with two potential unification scenarios:

- **Full Unification:** This approach would extend the boundaries of St. Louis County to include the City of St. Louis; consolidate all government functions within St. Louis County departments that are now exercised by St. Louis City; eliminate municipal governments within St. Louis County, including the former City of St. Louis government, create a representative County legislative body; and create an elected County Mayor. The unification process would be completed within four years, phasing out overlapping County and City departments.
- **New Municipality (“Re-entry”):** This approach would extend the boundaries of St. Louis County to include the City of St. Louis; make the City of St. Louis the 91st municipality in St. Louis County (like Kirkwood or Florissant, for example); phase out duplicate City of St. Louis departments (the so-called County offices); and maintain municipal control of the police and fire departments and local land-use zoning.

The topline findings and takeaways are as follows:

According to the pollster, Richard Maullin, **“The idea of unifying St. Louis City and St. Louis County is not dead on arrival.”** Although this issue is certainly not top-of-mind for the majority of voters, many were open to the idea of full reunification or of St. Louis City entering St. Louis County as the 92<sup>nd</sup> municipality.

**Voters in the City of St. Louis were the most interested in reunification.** In the survey, 77 percent of St. Louis City voters interviewed said that they would consider supporting a Missouri “constitutional amendment that would unify St. Louis City and St. Louis County.” In St. Louis County, 43 percent of voters said they would support re-entry, while 39 percent would support a full merger. Across the rest of the state of Missouri, 42 percent of voters said they would support re-entry, while 43 percent voiced their support for a full merger.

Respondents were read a battery of arguments, both in favor and against reunification. Tellingly, **the more information the respondents received throughout the duration of the survey, the more likely they were to support unification**, either in the “Full Unification” or the “New Municipality” model.

As the battery of questions in the survey progressed, statewide voters and St. Louis City voters expressed greater preference for the more far-reaching “Full Unification” option. A plurality of voters in St. Louis County prefers the “New Municipality” option.

Among St. Louis City voters, at least three of five favor both approaches to unification. Support is particularly strong among younger (18-49) voters and those with children at home. In St. Louis County, support for unification is far stronger among Democrats than among Republicans. Women in St. Louis County are more supportive of either unification approach than men. Statewide, there are few demographic variations of note.

Again: Voters expressed stronger opinions and became more decisive as they received more information. This suggests that **an intensive education and awareness campaign would be key** to the passage of a constitutional amendment, either by a statewide ballot initiative or by a vote of St. Louis City and St. Louis County (as outlined in the state constitution). Because of the amount of work and consensus building required, this would be an issue for the November 2016 ballot.

Most voters supporting reunification gave two reasons for their support:

- Unification of St. Louis City and St. Louis County will help end non-productive competition between St. Louis region municipalities and focus the region’s energies on opportunities

to bring jobs to the St. Louis region.

- Unification could save taxpayers substantial sums of money (an estimated \$20 million annually under the “New Municipality” option and an estimated \$200 million every year under the “Full Unification” approach) each year by eliminating City and County duplication of services and departments.

In other words, **the most persuasive arguments relate directly to job growth and cost savings.**

The passage of Proposition A and Proposition R in November 2012 showed that we have the capacity to reform ourselves – and that education, cooperation, and transparency are critical to any major reform.

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