

# Better Together

Sponsored by The Missouri Council  
for a Better Economy




## PRESS PACKET

### JANUARY 13, 2014

**PRESS CONTACT:** ANNE MARIE MOY  
EMAIL: ANNEMARIEMOY@GMAIL.COM  
PHONE: (314) 686-8958

[www.BetterTogetherSTL.com](http://www.BetterTogetherSTL.com)

 @BTSTL

 [facebook.com/BetterTogetherSTL](https://facebook.com/BetterTogetherSTL)

PUBLIC  
FINANCE

ECONOMIC  
DEVELOPMENT

PUBLIC  
HEALTH

PUBLIC  
SAFETY

PARKS AND  
RECREATION

GENERAL  
ADMINISTRATION

## Backgrounder

Sponsored by The Missouri Council for a Better Economy, Better Together is a grassroots project formed to:

- Support efforts to bolster economic growth in the St. Louis Region;
- Act as a catalyst for community discussion; and
- Identify opportunities for St. Louis City-County cooperation and consolidation.

Better Together was born in response to growing public interest in addressing the fragmented nature of local government throughout St. Louis City and County. Roots of the fractured system date back nearly 140 years.

In 1876, residents of St. Louis City voted to break away from St. Louis County. The move toward the split was prompted by cost-cutting and by fears of urban meddling in Jefferson City. At the time, the County was very rural and the City did not want to be burdened with paying for the development of the County's infrastructure.

The absence of a cohesive governmental structure left a void and many smaller governments formed to fill it. This is why the 1.3 million people who call St. Louis home are served by 115 local governments, which include St. Louis City and County, as well as 90 municipalities and 23 fire districts. The costs associated with funding all 116 governments (excluding airport and water service fees), has reached a staggering \$2 billion per year, underscoring the need to revisit the discussion to reunite the region.

To-date, there has been no comprehensive single study that has looked across the City and County to determine whether the region could improve both service and cost by streamlining and eliminating redundancies and better serve the people of St. Louis.

Better Together is not putting forth, nor advocating for a specific plan to such end, but rather seeks to act as a facilitator, a resource for information and tools and a catalyst to spark discussion. Throughout the next 16 months, Better Together will conduct studies, compile information and make it understandable and publicly available. This work will show how \$2 billion of taxpayer funds are being spent each year and provide a basis for informed discussion about how best to move forward.

As the organization's name reflects, this work will be done Better Together – the future of the St. Louis Region will naturally be determined Better Together, with widespread and inclusive participation from people throughout both the City and the County.

# # #

## **Better Together**

### **FAQ**

**1. What is the goal/purpose behind the formation of Better Together?**

Better Together is a grassroots organization formed to bring together people from throughout the region and drive community-based discussion about how best to bolster economic growth, as well as chart and take command of the region's future – together. Better Together was formed to examine how municipal services are delivered to the people who live within the boundaries of St. Louis City and County; compare the status quo to best practices and identify opportunities for improved effectiveness and improved cost.

**2. How is Better Together going to work?**

Better Together will conduct community-based studies that will examine how St. Louis City, County and its municipalities and fire protection districts are currently delivering municipal services in an effort to identify ways we can all be served better and more efficiently.

**3. What does Better Together mean by community-based study?**

The staff and volunteers at Better Together plan to organize members of the community to work together to develop information about the performance of our local governments. These community members will work with subject-matter experts to develop readily-understood reports for St. Louis residents about our government. Rather than rely solely on consultants to drive the data collection St. Louis residents will be invited to participate in dozens of sponsored discussions and forums about the performance of our local governments. All of the data—in its raw form as well as distilled---will then be available to anyone who wants to view it.

**4. What prompted the formation of Better Together?**

Better Together was formed in response to a growing public interest in addressing the fragmented nature of local government throughout St. Louis City and County.

**5. What need does Better Together fill?**

The 1.3 million people who call St. Louis home are served by 115 local governments, which include St. Louis City and County, as well as 90 municipalities and 23 fire districts. The costs associated with funding all 116 governments has reached a staggering \$2 billion per year. These facts, along with the fact that we are not growing, present a need to examine current practices to determine if we can do better.

**6. What is your timetable?**

We plan to complete our work early in 2015 but we will issue reports along the way.

**7. Are you advocating that the City should re-enter the County or vice versa?**

No. Better Together is not putting forth, nor advocating for any specific plan. Rather, we want to gather information about the performance of our local governments and share that information with the public.

**8. Who is funding Better Together?**

Better Together is being funded through private donations – including individual and corporate. Contributions, both large and small, have started coming in. In the interest of transparency, data about our donations will be disclosed from time to time.

## History

Sponsored by The Missouri Council for a Better Economy, Better Together is a grassroots project formed to:

- Support efforts to bolster economic growth in the St. Louis Region;
- Act as a catalyst for community discussion; and
- Identify opportunities for St. Louis City-County cooperation and consolidation.

Better Together was born in response to growing public interest in addressing the fragmented nature of local government throughout St. Louis City and County. Roots of the fractured system date back nearly 140 years.

In 1876, residents of St. Louis City voted to break away from St. Louis County. The move toward the split was prompted by cost-cutting and by fears of urban meddling in Jefferson City. At the time, the County was very rural and the City did not want to be burdened with paying for the development of the County's infrastructure.

The absence of a cohesive governmental structure left a void and many smaller governments formed to fill it. This is why the 1.3 million people who call St. Louis home are served by 115 local governments, which include St. Louis City and County, as well as 90 municipalities and 23 fire districts. The costs associated with funding all 116 governments (excluding airport and water service fees), has reached a staggering \$2 billion per year, underscoring the need to revisit the discussion to reunite the region.

To-date, there has been no comprehensive single study that has looked across the City and County to determine whether the region could improve both service and cost by streamlining and eliminating redundancies and better serve the people of St. Louis.

Better Together is not putting forth, nor advocating for a specific plan to such end, but rather seeks to act as a facilitator, a resource for information and tools and a catalyst to spark discussion. Throughout the next 16 months, Better Together will conduct studies, compile information and make it understandable and publicly available. This work will show how \$2 billion of taxpayer funds are being spent each year and provide a basis for informed discussion about how best to move forward.

As the organization's name reflects, this work will be done Better Together – the future of the St. Louis Region will naturally be determined Better Together, with widespread and inclusive participation from people throughout both the City and the County.

# # #

*Better Together* will develop, compile and publicize the data that St. Louis needs to evaluate whether political reconciliation between the City and County should occur and offer insights into what residents could expect. Asking and answering these tough questions at a time when regional leadership is motivated to consider change will provide the intelligence that is needed to explore and evaluate proposals for a consolidated government.

Because this process will be fully transparent with all discussions conducted in public and shared through social and traditional media, St. Louis residents will learn about their local government—the good, the bad and the ugly. This information will help leaders and citizens as they consider changes that consolidate all or part of St. Louis City and County governments. *Better Together* will not advocate for any particular proposal or initiative.

Visit our Better Together website ([www.BetterTogetherSTL.com](http://www.BetterTogetherSTL.com)) and register to receive regular updates on our activities. Or, better yet, volunteer with us as we step through what we hope will be the most inclusive and transparent process our community has ever gone through.

You can follow us on Twitter @BTSTL or find us on Facebook.

*Better Together* is a project sponsored by the Missouri Council for a Better Economy (MCBE). MCBE supports efforts to bolster economic growth in Missouri, especially the Saint Louis region, through issue education to the public, improvements in public education, and reforms in local and state tax policy and related issues. MCBE aspires to be a catalyst for community discussion on core issues of governance, taxation and governmental policy related to economic development with particular emphasis on the discussions around the relationship between St. Louis City and St. Louis County. The Missouri Council for a Better Economy is a 501(c)(3) organization.



**In 1876**, St. Louis City residents voted to separate from St. Louis County in a move that has come to be known as the Great Divorce. This decision was driven primarily by concerns among City leaders about the cost of building infrastructure west of Skinker all the way out to the Missouri River.

Over the past 137 years some efforts have been made to reunite the region though most didn't make it past the discussion stage. Voters have defeated proposed reunification initiatives in 1926 and 1962 but have not had an opportunity to weigh in on the question for more than 50 years.

In recent years interest in political reconciliation has grown. Many St. Louis leaders see some type of reunification as necessary to economic growth. Others are concerned about the spiraling cost of government.

**It's time to ask the question:  
would we be *Better Together*?**

[www.BetterTogetherSTL.com](http://www.BetterTogetherSTL.com)





Slightly more than 1.3 million people live in St. Louis City and St. Louis County. These people receive their basic municipal services from 115 different governments. Those 115 governments include 90 municipalities and 23 Fire Protection Districts in St. Louis County, St. Louis County government and the City of St. Louis. **The cost of funding these 115 governments has now reached a staggering \$2 billion per year!**

Many people believe that the cost of all this government is enough reason to ask ourselves if we're doing the best we can but cost isn't the only factor we should be concerned with. Our local economy has not enjoyed robust growth and many leaders believe that our fragmented government prevents us from competing effectively in a global economy.

Over the course of the next year, *Better Together* will examine municipal service delivery by function. Our studies will be sequential, and they will include:

- Public Finance
- Economic Development
- Public Health
- Public Safety
- Parks, Recreation, & Infrastructure
- Administration

Volunteers from the community will work with subject-matter expert consultants in an effort to answer four key questions in each study:

1. How is the service delivered today?  
What are our current practices?
2. What are considered to be best-practices in this area?
3. How does St. Louis' performance compare to best-practices?
4. What are scenarios for going forward that could improve effectiveness and/or cost? What would this service look like if political reconciliation between the City and County were enacted?

PUBLIC  
FINANCE

ECONOMIC  
DEVELOPMENT

PUBLIC  
HEALTH

PUBLIC  
SAFETY

PARKS AND  
RECREATION

GENERAL  
ADMINISTRATION