

# Assessing Our Environment

One of the most important steps in any strategic planning process is to conduct an assessment of the environment to identify the existing conditions and future trends facing an organization. For St. Louis County, this means examining the external environment of St. Louis County, the place and its residents; and the internal environment, the government and its customers. Integral to assessing the environment, is providing mediums for input from all key stakeholders, including government officials and staff, residents, and customers of St. Louis County government. For the 2000-2004 Strategic Plan, there were four primary mediums to gather input from key stakeholders used to assess the environment:

- ! **Trends Analysis**
- ! **Telephone Survey**
- ! **SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats) Analysis**
- ! **Input by telephone, e-mail, and written letters**



## Trends Analysis: State of St. Louis County

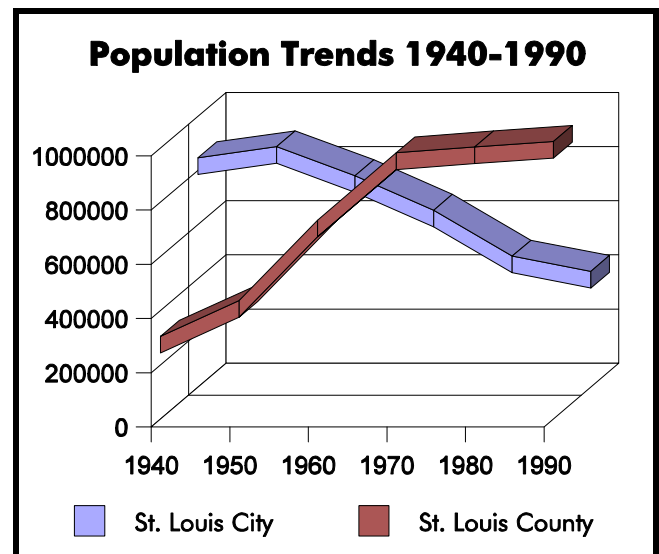
As St. Louis County reaches the 21<sup>st</sup> century, it is a mature, nearly fully developed urban county. St. Louis County has long enjoyed a reputation as an excellent place to live and work. St. Louis County is, in fact, the most affluent and populous county in Missouri, as well as the state's largest employment center. Yet St. Louis County, and the region of which it is an integral part, is changing. St. Louis County is undergoing significant demographic changes which are not necessarily unique to St. Louis County as they mirror the demographic trends of the entire nation.

However, the commonality of the changes should not downplay the impacts on St. Louis County. The changes will ultimately alter the quality of life, resource distribution, and the roles of both the private and public sectors in St. Louis County. St. Louis County government must be ready to deal with the changes, and an important step is identifying the potential outcomes. This section presents a trend analysis conducted by the St. Louis County Department of Planning that assesses the current demographic trends and their possible impacts on St. Louis County. With new challenges on the horizon, St. Louis County officials must be prepared to build on the County's many strengths and boldly tackle its future challenges.

## ! Population

Covering 524 square miles, St. Louis County is home to 1,000,000 residents, nearly 20% of the state's population. St. Louis County's population grew rapidly between 1940 and 1970, increasing from about 274,000 just before World War II to 951,000 by 1970. Most of the growth can be attributed to migration within the metropolitan area as residents of the City of St. Louis relocated to St. Louis County. Since 1970 though, St. Louis County has experienced a pattern of relatively slow population growth, with the County growing just 2% in the 1980s.

Between 1980 and 1990, population decline was greatest in inner ring suburbs bordering the City of St. Louis, and in North St. Louis County, including areas adjacent to Lambert Airport that were affected



Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census

by the airport expansion. Since 1980, the number of persons per household has declined, and the sharpest increase has been in the number of one and two person households. By 1990, population growth stabilized as the population of St. Louis County reached 993,508.

Today, with the extensive suburban development in adjoining counties, the population influx of people into St. Louis County which took place in the 1950s and 1960s has shifted to outward migration from the County. In other words, more people are moving out of the County than moving in. The population of the County continues to move toward outlying areas where extensive new housing construction is occurring.

The population shift from St. Louis County to outlying counties has come at the expense of the communities in St. Louis County. The impact is particularly evident in communities located in the inner ring adjacent to the City of St. Louis that flourished in the late 1960s and 1970s. The result of a shifting population has primarily come in the form of disinvestment, or lack of reinvestment, in these communities.

**! Age**

The major demographic trend in St. Louis County, like the nation as a whole, is the aging of the postwar “baby boom” generation. The extensive population growth after World War II now translates into a large population of “baby boomers between

**Baby-Boomers**

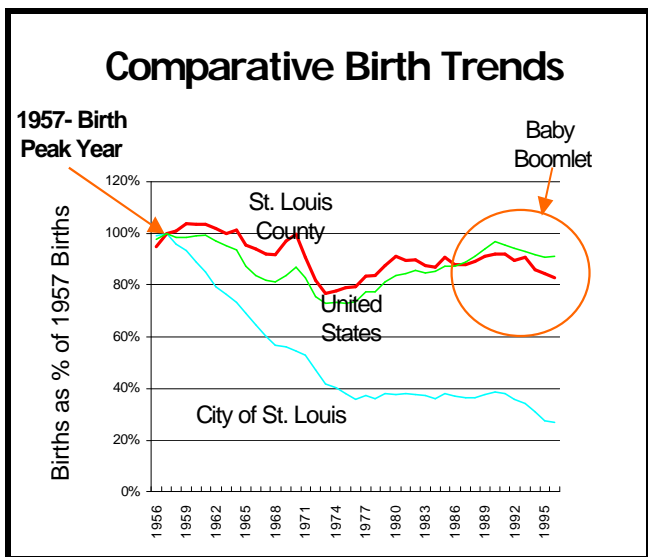
Baby boomers have had a significant impact on St. Louis County over the years because they are the largest age group. As this generation ages, they will continue to affect the services and public facilities throughout St. Louis County.

- ‘ In 1980, the largest age groups in the County were teenagers and people in their 20s;
- ‘ By 1990, people in their 30s were the largest group;
- ‘ In 2000, it will be people in their 40s.

the ages of 40 and 65. Additionally, the population 65 years and older is also growing, and will continue to increase more rapidly than any other age group as improvements in medicine and healthier lifestyles extend life span. Estimates indicate that the County elderly population will increase from 8% over 65 in 1970 to 20% in 2020. The consequence of a large, aging population translates into a higher level of needs and services, as well as alternative approaches to serving an active elderly population. For example, although nursing homes will still be needed, a continuum of housing options and levels of care will be required to support the more active elderly population. Transportation alternatives to link areas with high concentrations of elderly population, such as the inner-ring communities, to commercial, educational, and cultural activity centers will need to be developed. Consequently, more resources will be required than have previously been invested to serve the growing elderly population as the demand for special health care, housing, transportation, senior programming, and other support services escalates.

**! Racial and Ethnic Diversity**

Over the last several decades, St Louis County has become more racially and ethnically diverse. Since 1980, the African-American population has increased 27 %. Although a small share of the population, resident Asians and Pacific Islanders have grown 79%. The 2000 Census is expected to show these trends continuing.



Racial and ethnic diversity creates character and adds cultural opportunities to the fabric of our communities. St. Louis County must become increasingly sensitive and responsive to the increase in minority populations, for some of this population will require specialized needs and services, including language classes, job skills training, transportation, and other services.

**! Housing**

With more than 400,000 homes, St. Louis County affords residents a diversity of types, ages, styles, and neighborhoods to choose from. Nearly 75% of the housing, or 380,110 units, in St. Louis County are owner-occupied. By 1990, 66% of the County's housing units were at least twenty years old.

**, Housing Maintenance**

In some older parts of the County, neighborhoods have experienced decline and disinvestment. Older housing units require more maintenance than newer homes and often do not have the features desired by home buyers. Home maintenance is a major issue since a large percentage of aging homes correlate with the highest concentration of residents over 65 years of age. Fixed-income elderly households can be unable, financially and physically, to maintain their homes and will require assistance. Pro-active code enforcement is a vital part of maintaining aging homes and neighborhoods, but code enforcement alone is not the answer. More resources will be needed in the form of assistance to those who cannot afford, or are incapable of maintaining their homes, in order to improve the quality of mature housing in St. Louis County.

Older housing must be made as desirable as newer construction in order to compete in today's housing markets and into the future. If reinvestment and rehabilitation of the mature housing stock are ignored, deterioration of homes and neighborhoods will worsen, and newer, more functional housing typically located in outlying counties will continue to be preferred.

**, Housing Development**

Most of the County's housing was built during

the era of suburbanization that began in the mid-1940s with the end of World War II. The largest component of housing stock in the County was constructed in the 1960s. Housing development continued to thrive in the 1970s and 1980s, but with a greater proportion of multi-family units being built than in earlier decades. During the 1980s, there was a net increase of approximately 40,000 housing units. In the 1990s, housing development in St. Louis County proceeded at a relatively steady rate, though annual housing construction has been only about half of what it was in the late 1980s due to a decrease in the amount of easily developable land. Following a low of 144 permits issued in 1994, multi-family development has grown in the latter half of the 1990s. Without large tracts of vacant land, new housing development has been limited to small subdivisions and in-fill sites.

**, Housing Values**

In St. Louis County, homes with the highest value are primarily located in a corridor westward through the middle of the County from the City of Clayton to the City of Wildwood. Generally, less expensive, smaller homes are concentrated in older, inner-ring communities adjacent to

<b>Residential Permits Issued in St. Louis County, 1998</b>		
<b>Unincorporated</b>	Single Family	1653
	Multi-Family	408
	<b>Total</b>	<b>2061</b>
<b>Incorporated</b>	Single-Family	799
	Multi-Family	335
	<b>Total</b>	<b>1134</b>
<b>Total County</b>	Single-Family	2452
	Multi-Family	743
	<b>Total</b>	<b>3195</b>
Source: St. Louis County Department of Planning, Division of Research and Statistics 2/9/99		

the City of St. Louis and in North County. Census tracts with higher housing values located in the northern and southern areas of the County have experienced large increases in the number of units over the past ten years. According to the St. Louis County Assessor's Office, the 1997 average appraised value for homes in St. Louis County was \$117,296.

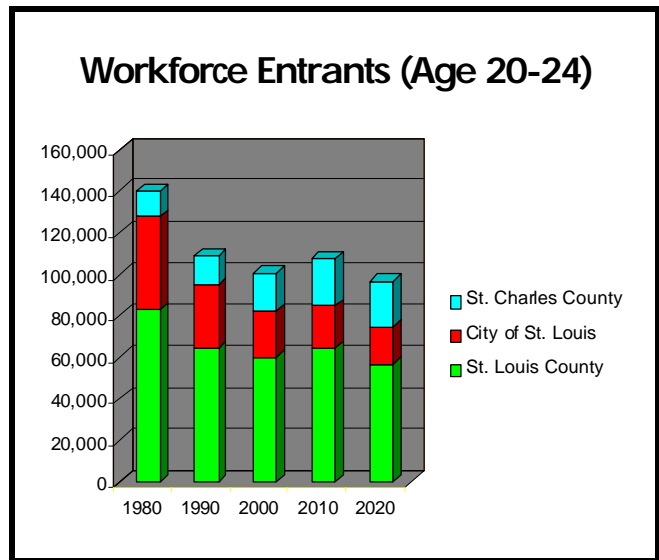
**! Income**

In 1989, St. Louis County ranked eighth in household income among all counties in the nation with populations over 800,000. St. Louis County is the most affluent county in the metropolitan area and in the State of Missouri with a 1989 per capita income of \$18,625. However, wide variations in income levels exist within the County. Municipal per capita income can range from \$4,831 in Wellston and \$5,569 in Kinloch to \$74,806 and \$86,978 in Westwood and Country Life Acres, respectively. The Missouri State Data Center estimates that only 5% of St. Louis County residents live in poverty.

**! Economy**

St. Louis County has been described as the "economic engine" of the region. In 1997, St. Louis County had about half of the metropolitan area's jobs and the largest residential labor force in the region. On the state level, the County contains about one-fourth of all jobs in Missouri. The County has also been an attractive location to a number of major employers. Since jobs typically follow people, St. Louis County's employment boom corresponded with the County's years of residential growth from the 1950s to the 1980s.

As residential growth stabilizes, so too could economic growth. As the County's vacant land diminishes, the redevelopment of existing commercial and industrial sites is expected to increase, as opposed to new construction. Employment opportunities are beginning to follow population and new development to outlying counties. Places of employment are now further away from the inner-ring communities and harder to access for low-income individuals, individuals who do not own automobiles, and elderly and teenagers who are unable to drive automobiles.



The difficulty in accessing jobs will impact groups that need jobs the most. St. Louis County will need to develop solutions to link jobs to the people who need to access them.

Among the most important economic issue for St. Louis County in the next decade will be the diminishing supply of new workers entering the job market. With a 19% decrease in the number of residents in their 20s expected between 1990 and 2000, employers may find it difficult to fill entry level jobs. Higher levels of education and technical training will be needed by the work force of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Efforts to reduce high minority unemployment will also be important to address.

With a shrinking number of entry level workers combined with a large constituent of "baby boomers" reaching retirement age, St. Louis County's labor market will be impacted by the need for workers. The lack of availability of workers could affect the growth of the local economy, as well as the ability of St. Louis County to compete in the global market. This means St. Louis County will need new and competitive approaches to attract and retain new workforce entrants. Attracting residents early in their economic careers can encourage them to remain for a lifetime. Undoubtedly, job training will be a critical component, as the twenty-first century labor force will need more than a high school diploma and greater technical abilities to meet the complex needs of employers.

## **! Transportation**

St. Louis County contains more than 4,800 miles of public roads including interstate and state highways, County arterials and local roads. The Missouri Department of Transportation (MoDOT), St. Louis County Department of Highways and Traffic, and municipalities are responsible for different portions of the road system.

Traditional commuting patterns which focused on the downtown central business district have changed in the St. Louis region and in the nation as a whole. Today, nearly 70% of the people who live in St. Louis County also work in the County. While the traditional commute to downtown has decreased, the number of "cross county" commuters has dramatically increased. Since the vast majority of County residents drive alone to work, it is not surprising that traffic congestion, road maintenance, and improved public transit are important to County residents. Despite an increase in tele-commuting, these issues are likely to remain important to County residents in the near future.

## **! Multiple-Jurisdictions**

St. Louis County is a community of "hometowns" - a big place, with a small town feel. St. Louis County contains ninety-one municipalities and a large unincorporated area containing 1/3 of the County's total population. Approximately 66% of the County's residents live in municipalities, ranging in size from 11 residents in the Village of Champ to 54,000 residents in the City of Florissant. Local government service delivery in St. Louis County is divided among more than 200 political jurisdictions including St. Louis County, ninety-one municipalities, twenty-three school districts, and forty-three municipal fire departments and protection districts.

St. Louis County government plays a dual role in terms of service delivery. It provides county-type services to the entire County, including road maintenance, revenue collection, public health services, and the jail. The County also provides municipal-type services to unincorporated areas, such as zoning, police protection, and public works. In addition, the County also makes several services available to municipalities on a contractual basis, since municipal governments vary in the services

provided to their residents. Some provide minimal services and may contract with other municipalities, the County, or private contractors to meet their needs. As a result, it is often unclear to County residents who is responsible for delivering which services.

While a large number of local governments may help ensure that governance is closer and more accountable to its citizens, a vast and overlapping array of public sector units and taxing authorities may also fragment decision-making processes and inhibit cooperative regional initiatives and resource-sharing in the public sector.

## **! Region At A Glance**

St. Louis County is not an island. Its past, present, and future are closely linked to that of the St. Louis metropolitan region. St. Louis County is one of the twelve counties that comprise the Bi-state metropolitan region - seven counties in Missouri and five counties in Illinois. With a 1997 population estimated at 2.56 million, the St. Louis metropolitan region is ranked the 18<sup>th</sup> largest in the nation. Positioned at the center of the region, St. Louis County's population comprised 40% of the bi-state population in 1990.

## **! Regional Planning and Growth Management**

The St. Louis region is one of the top-five most rapidly "sprawling" metropolitan areas in the country, according to The Pierce Report, a 1997 study of the St. Louis region by urban experts Neil Pierce and Curtis Johnson. The Pierce Report indicated that since 1950, the City of St. Louis has lost 58% of its population, while the region has subsidized a thinly spread pattern of suburban growth. While the entire 12-county St. Louis metropolitan region grew just 35% from 1950 to 1990, the amount of developed land soared 355%. The massive loss of population from the center city, the shifting growth from inner-ring St. Louis County suburbs to outlying areas, and the rapid growth and development further away from the metropolitan core will have severe consequences for St. Louis County if the pattern continues in the future.



## Citizen Telephone Survey

In February 1999, Attitude Research Company (ARC) completed work on a sample telephone survey of 617 randomly selected residents in St. Louis County on behalf of the Department of Planning. The telephone survey was administered to 303 people living in unincorporated St. Louis County and 314 people living in municipalities within the County. The margin of error for the sample size in unincorporated St. Louis County was +/- 5.6%, and the margin of error for the municipal sample was +/- 5.5%.

The purpose of the telephone survey was to gather data from County residents, focusing on service delivery. Specifically, the survey was developed to measure satisfaction with various services provided by the County, to understand awareness of the County's role in providing these services, and to determine demand for other possible services the County might provide. The following is a summary of the survey results.

### ! Direction of St. Louis County

Overall, the survey results indicated that St. Louis County was moving in the right direction. Over 70% of the survey respondents expressed high levels of optimism about the general direction of St. Louis County. When broken down by unincorporated area or municipality, even larger numbers, in excess of 76% of survey respondents, felt their area of the County or city was moving in the right direction.

Most County residents were not worried about a possible decline in their property values or about crime moving into their area. Approximately one-third of respondents answered that these were concerns.

Various problems facing the County were tested, and respondents ranked the seriousness of each problem. The most serious problem, according to 59% of respondents, is the lack of cooperation between St. Louis City and St. Louis County. A majority also answered that the highway system is inadequate for morning and evening commutes. Smaller percentages, near 40%, were concerned with urban sprawl, government fragmentation, and the excessive number of municipalities in the County. Limited airport capacity fell in the middle of the list, as did poor residential street maintenance and inadequate health care for the poor. Falling at the bottom of the list in terms of respondents' concerns were racial relations, inadequate stormwater control, and poor air quality. Only 30% answered that these were serious problems.

Possible methods for improving St. Louis County were tested. The number one priority according to 82% of the respondents was providing top-notch recreation centers for all areas of the County. Large majorities also named curbside recycling in unincorporated areas as a high priority. This is supported by only 52% of survey participants wanting trash service to be bid out for unincorporated areas so that collection would be provided by a single carrier within each neighborhood or subdivision.

## DIRECTION OF ST. LOUIS COUNTY

Survey Response	St. Louis County as a Whole		Specific Unincorporated Area or Municipality	
	Unincorporated	Incorporated	Unincorporated	Incorporated
<b>Right direction</b>	<b>74.9%</b>	<b>70.7%</b>	<b>78.2%</b>	<b>76.8%</b>
Mixed opinion	8.6%	12.7%	5.3%	9.9%
Wrong direction	13.5%	12.1%	15.5%	10.8%
Other / Don't know	3.0%	4.5%	1.0%	2.5%

When asked about countywide planning, responses differed based on the wording of the question. A significant majority, 73% of unincorporated residents and 62% of incorporated residents, felt that St. Louis County should have more authority over countywide planning. However, only slightly more than half of both unincorporated and incorporated residents agreed that “giving the County more authority over individual municipalities for comprehensive planning” was a good idea. In other words, planning is good, but not at the expense of the autonomy of individual municipalities.

Finally, there was not overwhelming support for incorporating all of St. Louis County. Only 36% of unincorporated respondents wanted all unincorporated portions of St. Louis County to become part of a municipality, and only 51% of incorporated residents indicated that full incorporation was preferred.

### **! Ballot Proposals and Initiatives**

In a series of questions designed to test reactions to possible ballot proposals, expanding MetroLink and Lambert Airport were seen as higher priorities than providing more open park land and green space or reducing the number of municipalities in St. Louis County. Expanding the MetroLink light rail system was very popular among both incorporated and unincorporated residents. More than eight in ten respondents favored such a proposal, and only about one in ten opposed it. A proposal to expand Lambert Airport to the northwest by adding a third runway and new terminal space was popular with 62% of the respondents. Park and recreational opportunities also received strong support with 61% of respondents indicating that they would support a ballot proposal to increase sales tax for parks and recreation. Only one-third of the respondents would oppose such an increase.

When questioned about possible initiatives, survey respondents indicated that they would be supportive of those that create more jobs and curb urban sprawl. Over 70% thought that government should make it a priority to provide more jobs through economic development. Approximately 62% felt that something should be done to halt the pace of urban sprawl. Initiatives getting less approval from survey respondents included providing more park

land and open space and reducing the number of municipalities in the County.

### **! Quality of Services**

Almost 65% of respondents felt that they receive an excellent value in service for the taxes they pay to St. Louis County. When evaluating specific public services, police protection topped the list with more than nine in ten answering that they thought police protection in the County was “excellent” or “good”. County parks and recreation programs followed at a close second, with more than eight in ten answering that services were “excellent” or “good.” Majorities were also satisfied with stormwater control; repair and maintenance of County roads, bridges, and subdivision streets; trash collection; and snow removal. The only two services with which majorities were dissatisfied were economic development to create jobs and curbside recycling.

Respondents were also asked about the difference in the quality of services between unincorporated and incorporated areas of St. Louis County. Slightly over half of the respondents from unincorporated St. Louis County answered that their services were as good as those in most municipalities. Only 40% of incorporated residents agreed that unincorporated services were as good. When asked the question in a slightly different way, less than half of unincorporated residents agreed that “people who live in municipalities in St. Louis County tend to receive better services than those who live in unincorporated areas,” while only a slight majority, or 55%, of people living in municipalities agreed with the statement. In other words, people living in municipalities are more likely to believe that they receive better services than those living in unincorporated areas.

### **! Communication**

Two-thirds of respondents, both in unincorporated and incorporated, answered that the County does an “excellent” or “good” job keeping them informed about County matters. Around 37% did not feel they were kept well-informed about County activities. Over 45% of the survey respondents indicated that their primary source for receiving information on St. Louis County was the newspaper. Television was a close second at 44%.

Support was high for publishing a newsletter to keep residents informed about the County. Only one-fourth of survey respondents were opposed to such a newsletter. Even when cost was explicitly introduced into the wording of the question, a majority still wanted the newsletter to be published quarterly, with significant numbers also preferring twice a year.

## ! Impressions of St. Louis County Government Facilities

Turning to County facilities, a majority had never been to the County Courts building or to the Administration building in downtown Clayton. However, near 80% of survey respondents had gone to County operated parks. Surprisingly, there is no statistically significant difference between park attendance for residents living in incorporated or unincorporated areas. Also, one-third of survey respondents indicated that they have been to Spirit of St. Louis Airport in Chesterfield.

The phrases that respondents thought were the most descriptive of County offices were “very friendly and helpful” and “modern and up-to-date facilities.” A majority also felt the County offices were “very efficient and business-like,” but “difficult because of parking problems.” Four in ten thought the phrase “long lines and long waits” was descriptive, and a similar amount felt the offices were “too impersonal and bureaucratic.”



## SWOT Analysis

In strategic planning, a tool commonly used to gather input is the identification of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats, or a

SWOT Analysis. The purpose of using SWOT Analysis for the 2000-2004 Strategic Plan was to aid in the development of the strategic issues to be addressed by St. Louis County government over the next five years. By identifying the strengths, weakness, opportunities, and threats facing both St. Louis County as a place, and St. Louis County government as an organization, the strategic issues that the County should direct and align resources

towards will emerge. In order to obtain diverse input, a SWOT Analysis was conducted by County officials and key staff at the retreat, as well as the general public at the community forums.

## ! County Government SWOT Analysis

The Strategic Plan consultants, Development Strategies, Inc. (DSI) and FOCUS St. Louis, conducted a SWOT analysis at the St. Louis County Government Retreat on February 26, 1999. Elected officials, department directors, and key staff were divided into four small groups of 10-12 persons and paired with a consultant to act as a neutral facilitator. Each small group performed a series of exercises in which group members listed the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats (SWOT) facing St. Louis County as a place (external) and St. Louis County government (internal). After all of the input was received, individuals voted on their top preferences in order to obtain group consensus on the most critical strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats (SWOT) facing St. Louis County. Finally, the four groups final results were compared, and a number of consistent themes and issues emerged.

### Strengths

Externally, the strengths of St. Louis County as a place named by County officials and staff were very similar to those named by citizens participating in the focus groups and telephone survey conducted by Attitude Research Company (ARC). Quality of life issues were mentioned by all of the small discussion groups as strengths, including affordable housing, safe neighborhoods, well regarded school districts, and cultural amenities. Additionally, the central location of St. Louis within the region and nation, and the favorable business climate of St. Louis County were also mentioned as strengths.

When groups were asked to list internal strengths of St. Louis County government, over 65 were mentioned. The three most common internal strengths were professional staff, fiscally sound, and well-managed government, with every group listing well-managed government as a strength. Other internal strengths included innovative approaches, established history of well-run government, and business-oriented government.

**Weaknesses**

The small discussion groups listed over 70 external weaknesses facing St. Louis County as a place. Although there was variance among the weaknesses listed by the groups, there were three common issues: poverty of inner ring areas, parochial and non-regional thinking, and multiplicity of local governments.

The internal weaknesses named by the small discussion groups tended to be very specific in nature rather than broad and general, which is most likely due to the fact that the participants had a very intimate knowledge of County government. The common issues mentioned were lack of funding, internal communications, and lack of mission.

**Opportunities**

When discussing the external opportunities for St. Louis County, many small group participants named ways to turn the weaknesses into opportunities. For example, while parochialism and non-regional thinking was mentioned as a weakness, participants thought that St. Louis County should take the opportunity to be a leader in supporting stronger regional planning. The top three opportunities mentioned by the groups were expanding mass transit, supporting change for stronger regional planning, and providing technical assistance to other areas and governments in the region.

For internal opportunities, group participants listed ways in which St. Louis County could be more efficient and effective. Many participants agreed that the County needs to better utilize technology to improve communications and services to its citizens. Participants also strongly felt that St. Louis County should assist in the consolidation of governments to eliminate duplication of resources and services. The third most named opportunity was to provide employee incentives. Group participants recognized the importance of attracting and retaining quality employees for St. Louis County government.

**Threats**

Many of the issues listed as external weaknesses

**SWOT RESULTS FROM COUNTY GOVERNMENT**

**Strengths**

- External - St. Louis County as a Place
  - T Good quality of life
  - T Safe neighborhoods
  - T Educational opportunities, good school districts

Internal - St. Louis County as a Government

- T Employee strength, tenure, and skills
- T Fiscally sound, AAA bond rating
- T Professionally managed organization

**Weaknesses**

- External - St. Louis County as a Place
  - T Parochialism, NIMBYism, non-regional attitude
  - T Extreme poverty in inner ring
  - T Multiplicity of local governments and organizations

Internal - St. Louis County as a Government

- T Decreasing funds
- T Internal communications
- T Lack of direction, mission, and priorities

**Opportunities**

- External - St. Louis County as a Place
  - T Increase mass transit
  - T Support change for stronger regional planning
  - T Provide technical assistance to other areas and governments

Internal - St. Louis County as a Government

- T Utilize technology better to increase efficiency
- T Consolidate governments to reduce duplication
- T Provide better employee incentives

**Threats**

- External - St. Louis County as a Place
  - T Economic downturns
  - T Closures and relocations of major industries and businesses
  - T Decay and fiscal drain of the City of St. Louis

Internal - St. Louis County as a Government

- T Resistance to change
- T Partisan politics
- T Loss of revenue

were brought up again as threats. Small group participants agreed that economic downturns were the greatest external threat facing St. Louis County. More specifically, groups mentioned major business and industrial closures and relocations. Group participants also identified the decline and fiscal drain that the City of St. Louis places on St. Louis County as an external threat.

Internally, group participants felt the greatest threat to St. Louis County government was resistance to change. Partisan politics were also mentioned as a threat because they can prevent action from occurring. Reducing economic resources was also mentioned several times as an internal threat, but in different variations, such as recessions and annexations.

## **! Citizen SWOT Analysis**

Over 150 St. Louis County residents participated in nine community forums held throughout the County in April 1999. After viewing an informational video about the County, participants were divided into small groups and paired with a neutral facilitator from FOCUS St. Louis to complete a SWOT Analysis. Each small group listed the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats (SWOT) facing St. Louis County. The results of the SWOT Analysis from the nine community forums follows.

### **, Strengths**

Community forum participants listed many strengths that St. Louis County can build upon. The most frequent strength named by the small groups was the economy. Participants frequently mentioned the diversity of the economy, number of employment opportunities, low unemployment rate, strong economic base, and the high tax base as strengths of St. Louis County. Another strength frequently mentioned was the cultural and social amenities of St. Louis County, including libraries, parks, museums, shopping centers, restaurants, and the zoo.

The quality of life in St. Louis County was also a top strength. Participants commented on the strong school systems, healthy neighborhoods, ethnic diversity, low crime, abundance of churches, community pride, and other factors

that contribute to St. Louis County as a good place to live, work, and raise a family.

Transportation was also often named as a strength of St. Louis County in terms of MetroLink and accessibility to major highways. Transportation, however, is an unusual topic, for it was by far the most frequently mentioned overall issue at all of the community forums, and was named as a strength, weakness, opportunity, and threat depending on how the individual felt about the issue. For example, those residents satisfied with the current MetroLink system named it as a strength, while those who feel it is inadequate considered MetroLink a weakness. Additionally, residents who would like to see MetroLink expanded, named it as an opportunity. Conversely, the residents who oppose MetroLink listed it as a threat.

### **, Weaknesses**

Community forum participants were very vocal about the weaknesses of St. Louis County. Transportation issues were named as the top weakness of St. Louis County, with discussion groups expressing concern over inadequate funding for public transit, lack of public transit, need for sidewalks, poor street maintenance, traffic congestion, and aging infrastructure.

The discussion groups also felt strongly about the lack of leadership and the failure to think regionally as weaknesses of St. Louis County. Several participants also stated that governmental fragmentation and the parochialism between governments were weaknesses of St. Louis County. While some participants felt that the entire County should be come incorporated, and others felt that the municipalities should be consolidated, the general feeling was that lack of leadership in addressing the abundance of governments was a major weakness of St. Louis County.

Additionally, the environment, urban sprawl, and redevelopment issues were also frequently mentioned as weaknesses at the community forums. With respect to the environment, residents named air quality and loss of open

space as weaknesses. Issues related to urban sprawl, such as uncontrolled development; strains on land, infrastructure, and services; “leap frog” growth; and population shifting west and south were considered weaknesses of St. Louis County. Redevelopment was frequently mentioned as a weakness in terms of not capitalizing on the potential of reinvesting in older communities.

**, Opportunities**

The opportunities for St. Louis County most frequently mentioned by community forum participants were redevelopment, coordination between governments, communication, transportation, and financing. Redevelopment was considered an opportunity by the largest number of community forum participants. Participants commented that St. Louis County is a good location for economic development, and that the County should redevelop that land it has and rebuild in older areas. Specifically, enhancing the existing buildings and infrastructure of inner-ring suburbs was mentioned as an opportunity.

Another key opportunity identified by community forum participants was coordination between governments. Discussion groups mentioned consolidation of small municipalities, integration of municipal and regional services, and cooperative land use planning. Overall, a key opportunity was to form a partnership between municipalities and St. Louis County to address localized issues. Specifically, several participants thought closer cooperation with the City of St. Louis would be an opportunity to better coordinate government resources.

Improving communication from St. Louis County government to residents was an opportunity recognized by community forum participants. Participants thought that producing a newsletter for unincorporated areas and increasing the number and frequency of forums for public education would provide better public relations between the county and its residents.

As explained previously, transportation was the issue discussed by the most participants at the

community forums. Transportation was named as an opportunity for St. Louis County to provide adequate public transportation, construct more sidewalks, improve road conditions, and further the development of transportation alternatives to the automobile. However, the most frequently mentioned transportation opportunity was MetroLink expansion.

Community forum participants named financing as an opportunity for St. Louis County. Specifically, bond issues, joint public financing, low-cost home improvement loans from local banks, private investment, and aggressive grant seeking from federal and state sources were identified as financing opportunities for St. Louis County.

**SWOT RESULTS FROM COMMUNITY FORUMS**

**Strengths**

- T Economy
- T Cultural and social amenities
- T Quality of life
- T Transportation

**Weaknesses**

- T Transportation
- T Lack of leadership
- T Poor environmental conditions
- T Urban Sprawl
- T Lack of redevelopment

**Opportunities**

- T Redevelopment
- T Coordination between governments
- T Communication
- T Transportation
- T Financing

**Threats**

- T Transportation
- T Lack of cooperation between governments
- T Urban sprawl
- T Lack of redevelopment and reinvestment strategies

### **, Threats**

Again, the widely discussed transportation issue was the most frequently named threat facing St. Louis County at the community forums. Discussion groups named congestion, lack of transportation planning, deteriorating infrastructure, deferred road maintenance, and not taking initiative to build first-rate transit system as threats.

Another top threat to the County was the lack of cooperation and coordination between governments. The lack of political partnerships causes stagnation and partisan bickering, and ultimately inefficient government. Specifically, community forum participants felt that the multiplicity of governments, competition among municipalities, overall lack of leadership, and poorly governed municipalities were threats to St. Louis County.

Urban sprawl was also identified by community forum participants as a threat to St. Louis County. Discussion groups listed haphazard growth without a regional plan, loss of open space, decreasing population as people relocate to neighboring counties, and subsidizing St. Charles County development as threats.

Going hand-in-hand with urban sprawl, is the lack of redevelopment and reinvestment in St. Louis County. Community forum participants indicated that deteriorating neighborhoods, declining property values, poor allocation of development resources, and failure to recognize and act on the needs of mature communities, are threats to St. Louis County. Participants also felt that the lack of a pro-active approach to dealing with redevelopment and reinvestment was a major threat, particularly in relation to code enforcement and abandoned/vacant properties.

### **, Community Forum Critical Issues**

After participants listed the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats, they were asked to individually select what they felt were the most critical issues facing St. Louis County. The top three issues selected by community forum participants were

redevelopment/reinvestment, transportation, and regional leadership. Issues that were not determined to be critical for St. Louis County to address included parks, the environment, and health services.



### **Citizen Input**

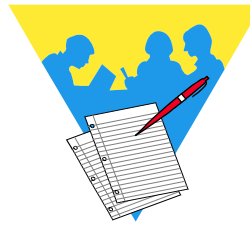
In addition to the community forums, St. Louis County residents were afforded the opportunity to provide input into the 2000-2004 Strategic Plan via e-mail, telephone hotline, and conventional mail. Approximately 250 residents used these methods to contribute their thoughts. Citizen input covered a gamut of issues, including personal property taxes, Y2K, flooding, Section 8 housing, recycling, urban sprawl, trash service, and school funding.

Overwhelmingly, citizen input focused on transportation issues. Similar to the input from the community forums, MetroLink expansion was desired by many residents. Over 25% of the transportation input was comments from citizens in favor of expanding MetroLink to all areas of St. Louis County. The need to construct more sidewalks and bike trails was also frequently mentioned by citizens. Other transportation input included the need to extend Interstate 170, install sound walls, address congestion, and improve aging roadways. Lambert Airport expansion was also a concern for several citizens.

After transportation, the next issue receiving the most citizen feedback was taxes. Tax issues did not come out strongly in the telephone survey or SWOT Analysis, but did so through citizen comments via e-mail, telephone hotline, and conventional mail primarily because a 2000-2004 Strategic Plan informational flyer was included in the personal property tax bills mailed to over 400,000 households. The majority of the comments from citizens expressed a desire to eliminate personal property taxes. Many also commented that personal property taxes for people aged 65 and older should be eliminated or reduced since many elderly individuals are constrained by fixed incomes.

Other top issues identified by citizen comments were the environment and government consolidation. With respect to the environment, several citizens indicated that preserving open space and creating more park and recreational facilities should be a priority of St. Louis County. On consolidation, half of the citizen comments focused on the need to consolidate municipalities to reduce the number of governments in St. Louis County. Other citizens indicated that they would like the municipalities, the City of St. Louis, and the County to work cooperatively to solve shared issues.

Citizen comments also focused on education and urban sprawl. Citizens expressed an interest in restructuring funding for education to make it more equitable. With regard to urban sprawl, there were many comments about stopping the spread of population to outlying counties, as well as the need for a comprehensive land use plan to address sprawl related issues, such as the loss of open space and traffic congestion.



## Summary of Input

Over 1,000 individuals, including County government employees, elected officials, citizens, businesses, and other key stakeholders, provided input into the 2000-2004 Strategic Plan. The feedback gained from the trend analysis, telephone survey, community forums, and citizen input via e-mail, telephone hotline, and conventional mail was assessed to determine the

most critical issues to be addressed by the 2000-2004 St. Louis County Strategic Plan. Unlike past plans, the 2000-2004 Strategic Plan narrowed the list of critical issues facing St. Louis County to four strategic issues to concentrate resources and efforts over the next five years. The four strategic issues are:

- ! **County's Role in the Region**
- ! **Reinvestment in Older Communities**
- ! **Transportation**
- ! **Unincorporated Services**

## DETERMINING THE STRATEGIC ISSUES

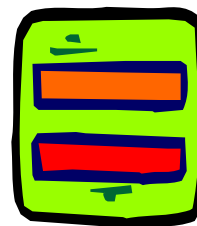
### Input from:

- ' County government employees
- ' Elected officials
- ' Citizens
- ' Businesses
- ' Organizations and Agencies
- ' Other key stakeholders



### Methods used:

- ' Trend analysis
- ' Telephone survey
- ' SWOT Analysis
- ' Community forums
- ' E-mail and conventional mail
- ' Telephone hotline



### Strategic Issues:

- County's Role in the Region
- Reinvestment in Older Communities
- Transportation
- Unincorporated Services