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St. Louisans Pay Too Much to Fund Municipalities, Research Group Says.

The municipal governments in St. Louis and St. Louis County are expensive for taxpayers, according to reports issued this week by a nonprofit group advocating for consolidating some of those governments.

In 2014, St. Louis, St. Louis County, and the 90 municipal governments in St. Louis County spent \$281 million on general administration — the planning, organizing, directing, coordinating, and controlling of government operations — [according to the research group Better Together](#).

Per capita, a resident of the St. Louis region paid \$213 solely for general administration costs in 2014, the group said. Better Together found that Louisville, Ky. — another region with dozens of municipalities — spent just \$127 per person.

Reducing the amount spent on municipal governments would save the city and county more than \$113 million a year, money which “could be put toward other issues that matter to our region’s residents, such as providing additional training and resources to police officers and increasing neighborhood safety.”

Normandy Mayor Patrick Green said the group’s findings were “probably an accurate picture but maybe not a detailed picture.”

Maybe St. Louisans get better services than people in Louisville, he noted. And maybe that’s what they want.

Better Together also compiled the municipal ordinances that govern the region and found they total more than 52,000 pages. If lined up end to end, they would stretch from Busch Stadium to the Galleria.

“When you have laws governing whether people can barbecue in their own front yard, the manner in which they walk down the street, and whether their curtains match — and when these ordinances vary from municipality to municipality — you create an environment in which minor citations can alter the lives of individuals and families,” said Dave Leipholtz, the group’s director of community-based studies.

The group also pointed to a heavy reliance on municipal sales taxes in the St. Louis region. Before 1969, municipalities relied upon property and utility taxes as their two major funding streams. Today, sales tax revenue is the No. 1 funding source of 69 municipalities in St. Louis County, the group said. As a region, St. Louis brings in 36.7 percent of its revenue from sales taxes.

Better Together is a St. Louis-based nonprofit group studying a city-county merger through a series of reports that point to inefficiencies in public safety, public finance, public health and economic development. The city operates as its own separate county.

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