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City, Meet County: St. Louis Weighs Historic Merger

A measure to consolidate St. Louis City and County could go before Missouri voters as soon as 2020. But St. Louisans are mixed on what that means.

On Monday, the St. Louis think tank [Better Together](#) unveiled a formal proposal to combine the City of St. Louis and St. Louis County in a new type of local government for Missouri: a metropolitan city. Governed by an elected “Metro Mayor” and a 33-member council, the new Metro City of St. Louis would have sweeping powers to enact new laws, tax residents, and oversee law enforcement, justice, planning, zoning, and economic development. This proposal, which would be decided by voters across Missouri, would essentially do away with the present government of the City of St. Louis, including the city’s 29-member Board of Aldermen and the office of Mayor Lyda Krewson.

Such a consolidation would overnight transform St. Louis into the 10th largest city in the U.S., with 1.3 million people—larger than San Jose and right behind Dallas.

The idea is rekindling a longstanding debate in several cities that are pondering the virtues and potential pitfalls of joining up with their surrounding counties. There have been about [40 city-county mergers in the U.S.](#); in recent decades, major examples include Nashville (1962), Indianapolis (1970), and Louisville (2003). They’re rare because they’re difficult to pull off: Voters may be skeptical of the money-saving arguments for consolidation and susceptible to fears over changing borders between segregated communities. Louisville only got their union done on the fourth try.

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