



St. Louis, MO-IL MSA

Regulatory Order/Family: Traditional/Middle America

Summary

The St. Louis metropolitan area is very fragmented, with 239 incorporated units and 12 counties. Most municipal and county governments are quite accommodating to growth, with the exception of a minority of municipalities that practice exclusionary zoning. Growth management and urban containment are practically unknown in the region and affordable housing programs are not a priority—probably because the region's housing has historically been quite affordable.

Governance Framework and Growth Trends

About 2.6 million people live in the St. Louis MSA, with 2 million in 7 counties and 156 cities and villages on the Missouri side of the Mississippi River and 600,000 in 83 cities and villages and 5 counties on the Illinois side. The Illinois counties are divided into 67 townships, but for the most part the counties regulate land use, not the townships. On average, the Missouri cities and villages have just under 15,000 residents and 7 square miles, whereas those in Illinois average only 4,200 residents and 3 square miles. Several of the counties in Missouri are quite urbanized, with a total of 680,000 residents in unincorporated areas (one-third of all residents on the Missouri side) as compared with just under 150,000 outside the villages and cities on the Illinois side (one-quarter of the residents on the Illinois side).

The developed land base of metropolitan St. Louis increased 22 percent between 1982 and 1997 while the metropolitan population grew less than 6 percent. Consequently, density in the metro area dropped from 3.8 to 3.3 persons per urbanized acre. Another illustration of decentralization was rapid population decline in the cities of St. Louis, which lost 50,000 residents in the 1990s, and East St. Louis which lost about 10,000. About 6 percent of the land in the St. Louis metro area is publicly owned, mostly by the federal and state governments, creating no barriers to urban expansion.

Regulatory Environment

Many of the jurisdictions in the center of the region (including the city of St. Louis) either did not respond to our survey or were not surveyed because of their small populations, forcing us to rely on some inferences.

Almost all the cities and villages in metropolitan St. Louis have zoning, and it tends to be exclusionary with 44 percent of the Missouri cities and 62 percent of the Illinois cities limiting density to fewer than 8 dwellings per acre. These cities and villages tend to be smaller than average but they still contain 16 percent of the incorporated population in Missouri and a third of that in Illinois. About 40 percent of the Missouri cities and 30 percent of the Illinois cities would not allow our hypothetical apartment development. Only 28 percent of the Missouri cities accommodate density higher than 15 dwellings per acre, but these account for just over 60 percent of the city population



(about 830,000 residents). Densities are typically lower on the Illinois side, with 30 percent of the residents (130,000 or so) living in the handful of cities zoned for over 15 dwellings per acre.

All five of the counties we surveyed in Missouri have zoning. At least two of the five in Illinois have zoning; two counties did not respond to our survey and one definitely does not zone.¹ St. Louis County, with an unincorporated population of over 330,000 is the second most populous area local government in the region (after St. Louis city). For all intents and purposes, it manages land like a large suburb, allowing densities over 30 dwellings per acre. Only one county in each state—at the extreme west and east of the region—has very low density zoning and would bar our hypothetical apartment development. An estimated 60 and 90 percent of the cities in Missouri and Illinois, respectively, have comprehensive plans, as do 4 of 5 counties in Missouri and 2 of 3 in Illinois.

Other land use mechanisms are uncommon in metropolitan St. Louis and—like Kansas City—those that do exist are confined mainly to infrastructure measures. About a quarter of the Missouri cities and 60 percent of the Illinois cities have impact fees. APFOs are less common overall—between 15 and 20 percent of the Missouri cities, and fewer than 10 Illinois cities, have them—but these are the largest cities. Only St. Louis County reported having impact fees and based on county size alone, we expect another one or two non-responding counties to have fees or APFOs. No counties and only a few cities reported having a containment program of any kind, and only a handful of cities (and no counties) reported an incentive based affordable housing program.

¹ We decided not to survey two additional mostly rural counties, Lincoln and Crawford, which sit at the far edges of metropolitan St. Louis, after we obtained information that neither had residential land use regulations of the sort that pertained to this research.