The political and fiscal organization of local governments in American metropolitan areas has long been a topic of scrutiny, academic and otherwise. The focus of this chapter is the St. Louis area, which has a long tradition of regional governance reform efforts dating back to the separation of St. Louis City from St. Louis County in 1876.

Reform Using the State Constitution

Provisions in the Missouri Constitution have provided a significant option for regional reform. There have been seven reform attempts, beginning with the separation of the city and county in 1876 and ending with the 1990 Board of Electors. The other significant attempts at reform have used a constitutional amendment route. Two other cases discussed below, the 1930 Metropolitan Federation and the 1962 Borough Plan, involved constitutional amendments to attempt reform in St. Louis.

Regional governance planning in St. Louis has proceeded along two distinct but intertwined paths. The first utilized provisions in the Missouri Constitution that provide the opportunity for more formal and comprehensive reform. This story starts in 1876 and has episodes in the 1920s, 1950s, and 1960s; its latest chapters are in the late 1980s and early 1990s. The second incremental path has had many templates, covered multiple policy areas, and assumed many forms (see Chapter 3). Its tale begins in the 1950s and continues to the present day.

Separation of the City from the County: The “Great Divorce”

By 1876 St. Louis City was a large city in a rural county that had very sparse population and limited commercial business activity and tax base. This produced
pressure for the city to separate itself from the county and avoid the financial burden of supporting the county. The relationship between these governments had been characterized by “uninterrupted controversy” since the early 1860s (Cassella, 1959, p. 87). Separation was increasingly advanced as a better solution than consolidation or reorganization (ibid., p. 91).

With the constitutional convention in 1875 the city-county relationship was at the forefront. The convention adopted a provision that authorized separation. The new constitution was approved in late 1875. Using the new constitution, a Board of Freeholders was elected in early 1876 with a specific mandate to prepare a plan for the separation for voter approval. It was passed, after considerable controversy, on October 22, 1876. The city was “emancipated,” and its size was increased from about eighteen to sixty-one square miles, an area deemed to be more than adequate for future growth.

One of the problems with the new constitution was that it contained no provision for any subsequent adjustment of city-county borders; they were fixed. By the early 1900s it was obvious that the city and county were becoming a unified urban area, with interrelated problems, but there was no way to deal with the regional issues due to the formal separation.

It is from this historical setting that the following Board of Freeholders proposals emerged to deal with the shortsightedness of the “great divorce.” Ironically, this later planning for regional governance emerged out of the 1876 plan that was its antithesis.
Map 5.1  St. Louis County Municipalities

Municipalities
St. Louis County, Missouri

MUNICIPALITIES

1. BALLWIN
2. BELLA VISTA
3. BELL-JOHNSTON NEIGHBORS
4. BELLEVIEW
5. BEL-NOR
6. BEL-RIDGE
7. BERKELEY
8. BERNOW HILLS
9. BLACK HILL
10. BRICKWOOD HILLS
11. BRIDGTON
12. CALVERTON PARK
13. CAMPBELL
14. CARTHAGE
15. CEDARFIELD
16. CLEARWATER VALLEY
17. CLAYTON
18. COLE VALLEY
19. COUNTRY CLUB HILLS
20. COUNTRY LIFE SUBDIV
21. CRESTWOOD
22. DESI ROY
23. DESI ROY PARK
24. DELLWOOD
25. DESI ROY
26. DISHUS
27. EDGEMONT
28. ELLISVILLE
29. EUREKA
30. ENTRANCE
31. EUGENIO

32. FREDERICKSDALE
33. FLANDERS
34. FORTNIGHT
35. GLENDALE
36. GLENWOOD
37. GRANTWOOD VILLAGE
38. GREEN PARK
39. GREENS
40. GREENWOOD
41. GUBLISH
42. HELLHOLE
43. HILLSIDE
44. HINCKLEY
45. HOLLAND
46. HOLLAND PARK
47. HOLLAND
48. IRELAND
49. IRELAND PARK
50. JENNINGS
51. JENNINGS PARK
52. JETHRO
53. JETHRO
54. JOHNSON
55. JOHNSON
56. JOHNSON
57. KIRKWOOD
58. KIRKWOOD
59. KIRKWOOD
60. KIRKWOOD
61. LAKEWOOD
62. LADS
63. LAKESIDE
64. LAKESIDE
65. LAKESIDE
66. LAKESIDE
67. LAKESIDE
68. LAKESIDE
69. LAKESIDE
70. LAKESIDE
71. LAKESIDE
72. LAKESIDE
73. LAKESIDE
74. LAKESIDE
75. LAKESIDE
76. LAKESIDE
77. LAKESIDE
78. LAKESIDE
79. LAKESIDE
80. LAKESIDE
81. LAKESIDE
82. LAKESIDE
83. LAKESIDE
84. LAKESIDE
85. LAKESIDE
86. LAKESIDE
87. LAKESIDE
88. LAKESIDE
89. LAKESIDE
90. LAKESIDE
91. LAKESIDE
92. LAKESIDE
93. LAKESIDE
94. LAKESIDE
95. LAKESIDE
96. LAKESIDE
97. LAKESIDE
98. LAKESIDE
99. LAKESIDE
100. LAKESIDE

Source: Prepared by St. Louis County, Department of Planning, March 2009.
What Scope for Metropolitan Government?

Release of an Advisory Commission on Intergovernmental Relations report (ACIR, 1988) brought again into focus the question of government organization in metropolitan areas. This report documented in great detail the innovative arrangements undertaken in St. Louis to respond to service needs.

Working within a public choice framework, the ACIR reports praised the creativity of public entrepreneurs and part-time officials in small cities. A myriad of service contracts, cooperative arrangements, informal agreements, shared systems, local associations, and volunteer officials provided the glue that binds together this complexity of local jurisdictions (see Chapter 3 for other examples).

In a planning context, one completes a reading of the ACIR report with the overpowering sense that:

- this is the way local government should operate;
- smaller, and implicitly more, is better; and
- the free market in governmental organization should be allowed to operate absent concern for the overall area-wide implications.

Release of the ACIR report on St. Louis coincided to the month (September) with the formal submission of a plan for a comprehensive governmental and fiscal reorganization within the county. There is stark contrast between the findings of this ACIR report (1988) and the provisions in the *Plan for Governmental Reorganization in St. Louis & St. Louis County* (Board of Freeholders, 1988a). The ACIR report praised the existing governmental arrangement, noting in conclusion: “The experience of the St. Louis area in metropolitan organization has much to teach the rest of metropolitan America” (ACIR, 1988, p. 168; emphasis added). In stark contrast, the Board of Freeholders (1988a), proposed a plan for a major restructuring for all county, municipal, and fire and emergency medical services (EMS) in St. Louis County. For reasons why metropolitan government probably will not emerge, see Chapter 2 in this volume.

Major Countywide Reform: 1987

Section 30(a) of the state constitution designates five types of reform that could be considered. The first three relate to reentry or merger between St. Louis City and St. Louis County. The fourth addresses the formation of an area-wide district(s) and was put in place in 1945. The fifth option was added to the constitution by a statewide referendum in 1966. It is very broad in scope and allows the board “to formulate and adopt any other plan for the partial or complete government of all or any part of the city and the county” (emphasis added).

Under the purview of the fifth option, a new Board of Freeholders was set up to delve into the myriad issues pertaining to local government organization within

The full chapter was published in *Governing Metropolitan Regions in the 21st Century (Cities and Contemporary Society)*, edited by Donald Phares (M.E. Sharpe, 2009).