

Seniors Count Initiative of St. Louis

The Seniors Count Initiative is a new community effort to help improve the health, nutrition, and quality of life of people who are 60 years of age or older in our region. Our region, like other communities across the nation, will want to prepare for the challenges and opportunities that lay ahead with this much-anticipated shift in demographics.

The older population of the U.S. has increased from 25.7 million in 1980 to 40 million today, and is expected to increase to 72 million by the year 2030. According to the 2012 American Community Survey, the number of older citizens in the St. Louis region is also growing.

County	Number of Residents 60 years and older	Number of Residents 85 years and older
St. Louis City	53,829	5,405
St. Louis County	218,277	25,638
St. Charles County	66,345	5,454

Senior Citizens Services Fund Tax

As our region's population ages, one of the greatest concerns is the growing economic insecurity felt by seniors living on a fixed income. Further, the effects of a life of long-term poverty on this age group appear to accelerate the challenges of aging. Lack of affordable access to transportation, health care and housing are great concerns for many independent-living seniors in the St. Louis region. As the Baby-Boom generation reaches age 65, available resources to support living independently will grow even more important as large numbers of people and their caregivers seek ways to "age in place" and with dignity. **The cost of independent or community-based care is estimated to be one quarter of the cost of institutional care.** In other words, to support someone living at home costs 25 cents for every \$1 dollar spent to pay the cost of a nursing home.

In 1990, Missouri legislation approved enabling language to allow property tax levies to fund senior services. These levies are enacted on a county-by-county basis. The purpose of the "Senior Citizens Services Fund Tax" is to enhance services for our senior citizens by providing funds for programs which will improve the health, nutrition, and quality of life of persons who are 60 years of age or older. The revenue generated would supplement public and private funding for senior services already in place. The combined estimated revenue for St. Charles County, St. Louis County and the City of St. Louis would be approximately \$20 million.

The law allows counties to collect five cents for every \$100 of property assessed. The average home with an appraised value of \$100,000 will pay \$9.50 a year.

$$\begin{array}{rcl}
 \$100,000 \text{ (Appraised Value)} \times .19\% \text{ (% of Market Value)} & = & \$19,000 \text{ (Assessed Value)} \\
 \text{Senior Services Fund Tax} & & \begin{array}{r} \times .05 \\ \hline = \$9.50 \end{array}
 \end{array}$$

Revenue raised in each jurisdiction, remains in that county.

In Missouri, 60% of the counties that have passed tax levies occurred in the last 13 years and most voters approved the levy the first time it appeared on the ballot (91%). Out of 115 counties in Missouri, 48 counties have passed a senior tax levy, but not St. Louis City, St. Louis County and St. Charles County. The property tax levy

funds are managed by board members who are elected county officials. All funds collected for this purpose shall be deposited in a special fund for the provision of services for persons 60 years of age or older, and shall be used for no other purpose except those purposes authorized in sections 67.990 to 67.995.

The normal practice is that counties use a formal grant application process to determine which agencies will be funded through their senior service tax levies. Funding decisions are determined by board members and grant recipients must provide final reports annually.

The Research

In June of 2013, the Daughters of Charity Foundation of St. Louis (DCFSL) engaged Dr. E. Terrance Jones to conduct local research into community perceptions and concerns regarding the needs of seniors who are trying to remain independent. His research included a survey in the City of St. Louis, St. Louis County, and St. Charles County to measure community understanding of and attitudes toward the problems facing low-income senior citizens needing assistance to live independently as well as public reaction to various policies to improve the situation and to conduct one-on-one leader/stakeholder interviews on the same topic.

The overall purpose for the research in St. Louis County, City of St. Louis, and St. Charles County:

- Understand community perceptions, concerns, and priorities in relation to low-income senior services and funding to support those services.
- Assess community understanding and tolerance of local policy solutions to increase and/or stabilize funding for low-income senior services, including a local tax levy.
- Identify other background issues which might influence efforts to pursue local policy solutions to stabilize funding for low-income senior services.
- Develop messages which engage the community in learning more about these issues.

The research sample consisted of 600 registered voters for St. Louis County and 400 voters each for St. Charles County and the City of St. Louis with a margin of error (at the 95% confidence level) of plus-or-minus 3.9% for St. Louis County and plus-or-minus 4.8% for the City of St. Louis and St. Charles County. These sample sizes generated a sufficiently large number of responses for demographic segments (e.g., those 65 and older) within each of the three jurisdictions. The sample would be drawn according to standard probability techniques from an up-to-date data base. The Survey methodology included topics such as Ballot Proposition: Pre- and Post-Information, Messages: For and Against, Potential Fund Uses: Impact on Support, and Demographics

The Results suggested the need for a region-wide public education for 18 – 24 months prior a senior tax fund campaign can be successful. It was recommended that a Resource Committee of leaders from area senior service provider organizations be formed to guide a grassroots-level initiative forward.

Economic Advantages to having a Senior Services Fund

- Seniors staying in their home continue to contribute property and sales taxes to the county
- Less time and expense will be required to care for senior parents
- Expensive cost of dependent living is avoided or delayed – thus avoiding depletion of life savings
- Decrease burden on taxpayers for the cost of long-term care

Tax Levy: Why Now?

After much research and many conversations with area leaders in senior care, the time to consider a senior services fund is now:

- Market demand is growing as more people turn age 65
- Money raised in each county is controlled by that county
- Greater risk for marginalization populations of low-income seniors
- Growing economic insecurity felt by seniors living on a fixed income.
- 2012 Census: 1.2 million US seniors 65+ as extremely poor
- Economic benefits of in home - 25 cents for every \$1 spent for nursing home
- Local precedent for nonprofit, government and public to work on a campaign that would generate funding for seniors.
- 48 Counties in Missouri have already passed this levy to benefit their senior citizens
- 77% of Missouri seniors vote!

Role of the Resource Committee

The role of the Seniors Count Resource Committee is to lead the coalition's existing networks of organized nonprofits actively involved in the democratic process of leveraging their relationships and reputations to create public awareness and mobilize voter engagement on behalf of those they serve. Local County Steering Committees representing each jurisdiction will essentially lead their own educational and political campaigns. The Resource committee can provide big picture, resources and help define qualitative goals to support overall regional success.

The Committee's primary responsibilities:

- Develop political allies and key community connections
- Develop a Steering Committee in each jurisdiction
- Identify the top key services for funding focusing on the broad needs of seniors
- Conduct a needs assessment in each jurisdiction
- Define qualitative goals to support overall regional success
- Set education campaign standards to ensure quality of messaging
- Provide consultation to the Steering committees
- Share resources
- Conduct second polling
- Identify campaign standards with each jurisdiction

Committee Members:

John Turongian, VP Senior Ministries of Alexian Brothers Senior Ministries
Sr. Suzanne Wesley CSJ, President of Cardinal Ritter Senior Services
Mary Hutchinson, President of Community Council of St. Charles County
Louis Albert, President of Jewish Family and Children's Services
John Kotovsky, President of Lutheran Senior Services
Mary Alice Ryan, President of St. Andrew's Senior Solutions

December 2013