



# WILDWOOD

June 24, 2019

The Honorable City Council  
City of Wildwood, Missouri  
16860 Main Street  
Wildwood, Missouri 63040

**Re: Update on 'Better Together' Merger Plan (Wards – All)**

Council Members:

Given the interest in the merger plan that was being proposed by a not-for-profit entity called Better Together, the Economic Development Manager, the City Attorney, and the Co-Interim City Administrators thought it would be appropriate to provide a semi-monthly reporting of pertinent information or other items collected in the two (2) week timeframe separating City Council meetings. This update is intended to be brief, provide bullet points of information, links to other information being offered throughout the merger areas, and attached important documents, if appropriate. Some of the updates reflect a busy time in the discussion of this topic, while others may not. However, to ensure, as the Mayor has stated on numerous occasions, the City is being proactive in this regard, the update will allow for the general and, in some instances, the more detailed information to be readily available or the locations where it can be found identified.

In the timeframe between May 28, 2019 and tonight's meeting, items of interest are as follows:

1. The Better Together effort has certainly gone through a major change in direction, since the organizers and its leaders paused the proposed merger discussion. With this pause, many communities have also slowed their efforts to address the proposal's obvious efforts to eliminate the current government structure in the region. Other agencies continue forward with their efforts, such as the Metro St. Louis Municipal League and its Board of Freeholders proposals, while the City's Wildwood Preservation Commission continues to meet under its current charge. This charge is to define the assets that make Wildwood special and develop ways to ensure they could outlast the City, if the merger was approved and put into place. This Commission has a special role in protecting the investments of the residents of Wildwood.
- a) The Wildwood Preservation Commission (WPC) held its fifth meeting on June 10, 2019 and heard from two (2) representatives from the Missouri Department of Conservation (MDC) about watersheds and stream management techniques, which were both areas that had been identified as priorities at the start of this assessment process for the community. The meeting went forward thereafter with a discussion on the survey that is being prepared that will be sent to residents explaining why they are receiving it and then seeks their identification of priority assets of this City and other information. Thereafter, the Commission decided to meet once a month, versus twice a month. The next meeting of the Wildwood Preservation Commission (WPC) is set for July 11, 2019, at City Hall. The meeting will begin at 6:30 p.m.

2. The extent of coverage has slowed in the local newspapers as well and, more so than in the past, now focuses on what might be next in this regard.
3. The Municipal League of Metro St. Louis has issued a number of items relative to the Board of Freeholders Plan on its website, which can be viewed at the following link - <http://www.stlmuni.org/board-of-freeholder/>. Additionally, an e-mail was received this week regarding this effort, which is attached to this update report.

If any of the City Council Members should have comments or questions in this regard, please feel free to contact any of the aforementioned parties at (636) 458-0440. Thank you for your review of this information and input on the same.

Respectfully submitted,  
**CITY OF WILDWOOD**

Steve Cross, Co-Interim City Administrator  
Julian Jacquin, Economic Development Manager  
Joe Vujnich, Co-Interim City Administrator

Cc: The Honorable James R. Bowlin, Mayor  
John A. Young, City Attorney  
Kathy Arnett, Assistant Director of Planning and Parks

# Now that Better Together's plan is dead, let's create something that's truly better

 [stltoday.com/business/columns/david-nicklaus/now-that-better-together-s-plan-is-dead-lets/article\\_0f578247-0d2a-5f55-9fde-b54ce14ed807.html](https://stltoday.com/business/columns/david-nicklaus/now-that-better-together-s-plan-is-dead-lets/article_0f578247-0d2a-5f55-9fde-b54ce14ed807.html)

June 15, 2019



David Rusk spent as much time as anybody picking apart the now-abandoned Better Together plan.

He's written 11 white papers, published by Construction Forum STL, in which he criticizes everything from the plan's financial assumptions to its penchant for centralizing things that don't need to be centralized.

When Rusk came to town Wednesday, though, he also wanted to talk about three things Better Together got right. One is that many municipalities in St. Louis County are too small to fund their infrastructure needs. Another is that fragmented government is closely connected to racial and economic segregation. The third is that fragmentation can hold back economic growth.

Rusk, who was part of a Construction Forum speaker series, is worth listening to on these issues. He's been mayor of Albuquerque, N.M., and a scholar at various think tanks, and his book "Cities Without Suburbs" has influenced a generation of urban planners.

Though he wasn't a fan of the Better Together plan, Rusk doesn't believe doing nothing is an option for St. Louis. He also thinks any future reforms should be sold on the basis of making government better, not cheaper.

"It's tempting, but you must not sell any kind of a merger on the basis of saving money," he said. "What you can sell is a better, more professional standard of service. You need to find a way to establish structures ... that can facilitate cooperation, and then let people reap the benefits."

Rusk endorses having the city re-enter St. Louis County, which could be accomplished through a board of freeholders. The St. Louis County Municipal League is already gathering signatures to start such a process.

That change alone, however, would do little to address the inequities that are one of the region's most pressing problems. Rusk would like to see the Missouri Legislature expand St. Louis County's sales-tax pool, ending the system where some cities keep revenue from sales inside their borders. He'd also like to see some property-tax sharing, as is done in the Minneapolis-St. Paul area.

He suggests that St. Louis County, which has a triple-A credit rating, could guarantee municipalities' bonds. This would allow the cities, most of which can't access credit markets on their own, to borrow money for capital improvements.

In addition, Rusk would create what he calls "communities of common interest," a way for neighboring cities to cooperate on things like business licensing or policing.

In his most sweeping and perhaps most controversial recommendation, Rusk says the Bi-State Development Agency and East-West Gateway Council of Governments could be merged into a single entity, with an elected board and authority over area-wide land-use planning. The model would be the Metro agency in Portland, Ore., the nation's only directly elected regional government.

All of his ideas face serious political hurdles. A metro-wide agency would require approval by the Missouri and Illinois legislatures, for example, and voters have rejected past efforts to end the city-county divorce.

Some of the ideas also need a little more thought. If many of St. Louis County's 88 municipalities are too small to be viable, wouldn't a bond guarantee and a richer sales-tax pool just perpetuate inefficiency?

That could perhaps be solved by setting minimum standards for cities that want to participate. With appropriate public input — something that was missing from the Better Together process — Rusk's recommendations could be tweaked into a structure that makes local governments more effective, while giving all area residents a voice on issues that affect the whole region.