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## St. Tammany Local Government Survey (September 1, 1999)

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# St. Tammany Local Government Survey

**September 1, 1999**

**Sponsor: St. Tammany League of Women Voters**

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## Summary

This survey was commissioned by the League of Women Voters of St. Tammany to measure registered voters' attitudes towards their local government and their expectations of the new parish government.

As has been in the case in all previous St. Tammany surveys, the problem most pressing to voters is managing growth and its accompanying problems. There is considerable concern that the north shore will become like the south shore if present trends continue.

Very few voters feel that the current parish government has been responsive to their needs and wishes on the subject of growth.

Yet a majority reject the notion of centralized regulations and compatible zoning, a situation that presents a serious problem for the new parish government, which must deal with independent municipalities.

Our interpretation of this seeming inconsistency is that voters in St. Tammany have always had a greater sense of identification with their city, town or area than with the parish as a whole. Thus, they are reluctant to vest control, even for managing growth, in a central authority.

Voters with college degrees are most likely to see the need for centralized regulations and compatible zoning, but even this group is evenly divided on the

issue of greater centralization.

On the other hand, voters in St. Tammany are relatively trustful of the way parish government manages money. In fact, they are more trustful than voters in New Orleans or adults in the U.S. as a whole.

Furthermore, they do not believe that competition between the various municipalities and parish government is an important problem.

The new parish government faces a serious dilemma as it attempts to deal with the "growth issue". On the one hand, voters want them to control growth, but at the same time they are reluctant to give them authority to do so.

## **The Survey**

The University of New Orleans Survey Research Center conducted a survey of four hundred registered voters in St. Tammany Parish regarding their attitudes toward local government. They were interviewed by telephone between July 26 and August 5, 1999.

As the Parish approaches the change to home rule, The League of Women Voters desired citizen input concerning their expectations of the new parish government. The survey included such areas as the quality of certain government services related to growth, perceptions of the responsiveness of the parish government to its citizens, perceptions of the current level of cooperation between local governments, expectations of the new parish government, and the overall quality of life.

Results are presented for the parish as a whole, by geographic region, and certain items are presented by educational level.

The regions are defined, based on the respondent's address, as:

- **Eastern St. Tammany:** Slidell, Lacombe, Pearl River and Sun
- **Northwestern St. Tammany:** Covington, Abita Springs, Folsom, and Bush
- **Southwestern St. Tammany:** Mandeville and Madisonville

*Sampling error equals  $\pm 5\%$ .*

## **Overall Quality of Life, 1997-1999 (Tables 1 and 2)**

In the past two years there has been no significant improvement in citizen perceptions of the direction of the quality of life in St. Tammany. In all three regions of the Parish more citizens think things are getting worse than think things are getting better. As was the case two years ago, perceptions are more negative in the western end of the parish than in the eastern end.

However, in the southwest area (Mandeville/Madisonville) perceptions are more positive than they were two years ago.

When citizens were asked what they expected St. Tammany to look like ten years from now, if present trends continue, the majority focused on overcrowding, and many in the western region of the parish

predicted that St. Tammany would be like the south shore. Here are some actual comments:

"St. Tammany is going to be one giant parking lot."

"We're going to be packed in like sardines."

"There will be a continuing contest to build the ugliest building on 190."

"We're going to be like New Orleans with all its problems."

"It's starting to look like Veterans Highway."

"We're going to be Queens or the Bronx."

The western region of St. Tammany was more concerned about "turning into the south shore" than the eastern region, possibly because a higher percentage of its population migrated from the south shore, and the greatest growth has occurred in the west.

<b>TABLE 1</b>								
<b>QUALITY OF LIFE IN ST. TAMMANY COMPARED TO A FEW YEARS AGO</b>								
Region								
	All		East		Northwest		Southwest	
	1997	1999	1997	1999	1997	1999	1997	1999
Gotten Better	25%	27%	24%	27%	24%	24%	25%	33%
Stayed the Same	31	28	36	33	28	28	22	18
Gotten Worse	40	38	36	33	45	41	44	43
DK/Ref	4	7	4	7	3	7	9	6

  

<b>TABLE 2</b>				
<b>CITIZEN PREDICTIONS ABOUT ST. TAMMANY PARISH IN 10 YEARS</b>				
Region				
	All	East	Northwest	Southwest
Overcrowded	38%	48%	30%	28%
Turning into S. Shore	30	17	41	42

General Positive	5	4	6	6
General Negative	3	-- <sup>1</sup>	5	4
Bad Traffic	--	6	8	10
Other <sup>2</sup>	20	17	7	8
DK/Ref.	4	6	3	2

<sup>1</sup>--indicates that for the particular cell the response was less than 3%.

<sup>2</sup>The *Other* category is a cumulative cell for categories that did not total 3%.

### Government Services, 1997-1999 (Tables 3 and 4)

Over one-third of the citizens rated traffic control, drainage, management of growth and zoning as "poor" or "very poor". Traffic control and growth management is perceived to be worse in the two western regions than in the eastern part of the parish.

In particular, management of growth has deteriorated in the southwestern region in the past two years.

It is the college educated voters of St. Tammany who are most negative about how the parish government has handled zoning and planning. This is to be expected since they are more likely to understand the connection between zoning and growth problems.

On the other hand, citizens perceive that drainage has improved in all three regions in the past two years, and zoning and planning have improved in the Northwest.

A majority of voters in all regions of the parish are willing to pay higher **fees** for better public services. This does not, however, mean that they would be willing to pay higher **taxes**. The word, fee, means something smaller and is usually associated with a particular service such as garbage pickup or sewage.

TABLE 3								
PERCENT SAYING "POOR" OR "VERY POOR" REGARDING THE FOLLOWING GOVERNMENT SERVICES								
Region								
	All		East		Northwest		Southwest	
	1997	1999	1997	1999	1997	1999	1997	1999
Traffic Control	32%	<b>36%</b>	26%	28%	41%	41%	35%	38%
Drainage	46%	<b>34%</b>	50%	36%	38%	30%	44%	36%

Management of Commercial and Residential Growth	33%	<b>36%</b>	29%	29%	33%	38%	28%	48%
Zoning and Planning	35%	<b>35%</b>	30%	29%	42%	37%	31%	32%
Condition of Local Streets and Roads	--	<b>24%</b>	--	27%	--	22%	--	21%

**TABLE 3A**

**PERCENT SAYING "POOR" OR "VERY POOR" REGARDING ZONING AND PLANNING**

Education

	High School or Less	Some College	College Degree (includes graduate)
Zoning and Planning	28%	32%	42%

**TABLE 4**

**PERCENT WILLING TO PAY HIGHER FEES FOR BETTER QUALITY PUBLIC SERVICES**

Region

	All	East	Northwest	Southwest
Yes	57%	61%	52%	56%
No	34	31	39	34
DK/Ref.	9	8	9	10

### Evaluations and Responsiveness of Parish Government (Table 5-7)

When it comes to the subject of **growth**, half of the voters think their parish government pays little or no attention to what the citizens think. This should not be surprising given the concern about uncontrolled growth in St. Tammany. Only about 10% think citizens have a lot of influence over parish decisions regarding growth.

St. Tammany citizens are more trusting of the ability of their parish government to manage tax money (Table 6) than they are of the parish government's responsiveness to citizen opinions on growth. The best way to view these responses is to compare St. Tammany to New Orleans and to the nation as a

whole. St. Tammany voters trust their local government to manage tax money more than voters in New Orleans and more than voters in the U.S. Thus, given the overall cynicism about government in this country, these responses are relatively positive.

In addition, those citizens with higher educational attainment in St. Tammany trust government officials to manage their tax more than citizens with lower levels of educational attainment.

Voters were asked about how well they thought the various local governments in St. Tammany cooperate (Table 7). A seventy- percent majority believe that their public officials cooperate and work together. Thus, in the eyes of voters, competition between the various municipalities and parish government is not an important problem. It should be noted, however, that voters only become aware of inter-governmental conflicts when there is a highly publicized event or issue that pits one government vs. the other.

Educational level makes no difference in opinions about the level of cooperation between local governments in St. Tammany.

<b>TABLE 5</b>				
<b>DEGREE OF ATTENTION PARISH OFFICIALS PAY TO CITIZENS IN MAKING DECISIONS ABOUT GROWTH</b>				
Region				
	All	East	Northwest	Southwest
A lot	9%	6%	12%	9%
Some	37	35	36	41
A little	37	38	37	35
None	13	15	11	11
DK/Ref.	4	6	4	4

  

<b>TABLE 6</b>						
<b>AMOUNT OF TAX MONEY WASTED BY ST. TAMMANY PARISH GOVERNMENT</b>						
Region						
	St. Tammany	Orleans Parish (1997)	United States (1996)	East	Northwest	Southwest
A lot	16%	46%	60%	20%	16%	8%
Some	48	37	39	47	51	44

Don't waste very much	24	12	1	22	22	32
DK/Ref.	12	5	<1	11	11	16

**TABLE 6A**

**AMOUNT OF TAX MONEY WASTED  
BY ST. TAMMANY PARISH GOVERNMENT**

Education			
	High School or Less	Some College	College Degree (includes graduate)
Waste A Lot	27%	12%	10%
Waste Some	41	54	49
Don't Waste Very Much	19	22	29
DK	3	12	12

**TABLE 7**

**PERCEIVED LEVEL OF COOPERATION AMONG  
CITY, TOWN, AND PARISH OFFICIALS**

Region				
	All	East	Northwest	Southwest
Very Well	14%	12%	16%	15%
Somewhat Well	56	60	55	49
Not Very Well	13	12	17	9
Not Well at All	6	7	3	8
DK/Ref.	11	4	9	19

**TABLE 7A**

**PERCEIVED LEVEL OF COOPERATION AMONG  
CITY, TOWN, AND PARISH OFFICIALS**

Education				
-----------	--	--	--	--



	High School or Less	Some College	College Degree (includes graduate)
Very Well	19%	10%	14%
Somewhat Well	53	58	59
Not Very Well	11	17	12
Not Well at All	7	5	5
DK	10	10	10

### Centralized Regulations and Compatible Zoning? (Table 8-10)

Some supporters of the new home rule form of government for St. Tammany believe that a centralized government with an executive branch will be better able to cope with the parish wide problem of unmanaged growth. However, when citizens are asked whether they favor centralized or compatible regulations, services, and zoning, a majority reject that option. They prefer a continuation of the current policy of each city and town setting its own regulations. This obviously presents a serious problem for the new parish government, which must deal with independent municipalities, whose voters have greater identification with the local municipality than with the parish government.

Voters with college degrees are most likely to see the need for centralized services and regulations, but even this group is evenly divided on the subject of greater centralization.

Voters, place a high priority on controlling and restricting growth, even at the expense of individual property rights (Table 10). However, most are not ready or willing to vest control for this regulation in a centralized parish government, which must be involved with any effective growth plan.

Those with higher levels of education are overwhelmingly (82%) in favor of controlling growth at the expense of individual property rights. However, as noted above, this group is split on the issue of centralized regulations and compatible zoning.

<b>TABLE 8</b>				
<b>FEELINGS REGARDING CENTRALIZED REGULATIONS AND SERVICES FOR THE WHOLE PARISH</b>				
	Region			
	All	East	Northwest	Southwest
One Set of Regulations and Services for Whole Parish	34%	37%	26%	36%
Depends (volunteered)	5	4	6	7
Each City, Town, Rural Area Sets	56	53	64	52

Its Own Regs. And Services				
DK/Ref.	5	6	4	5

**TABLE 8A**

**FEELINGS REGARDING CENTRALIZED REGULATIONS AND SERVICES FOR THE WHOLE PARISH**

Education			
	High School or Less	Some College	College Degree (includes graduate)
One Set of Regulations and Services for Whole Parish	28%	31%	41%
Depends (volunteered)	4	7	4
Each City, Town, Rural Area Sets Its Own Regs. And Services	62	58	51
DK/Ref.	6	3	4

**TABLE 9**

**FEELINGS REGARDING COMPATIBLE ZONING REGULATIONS FOR THE WHOLE PARISH**

Region				
	All	East	Northwest	Southwest
Compatible Zoning Regs. For the Whole Parish	34%	38%	32%	29%
Depends (volunteered)	4	2	5	7
Independent Regulations for Each City, Town, or Rural Area	59	57	59	61
DK/Ref.	3	3	4	3

**TABLE 9A**

**FEELINGS REGARDING COMPATIBLE ZONING REGULATIONS  
FOR THE WHOLE PARISH**

Education			
	High School or Less	Some College	College Degree (includes graduate)
Compatible Zoning Regs. For the Whole Parish	25%	33%	43%
Depends (volunteered)	1	5	5
Independent Regulations for Each City, Town, or Rural Area	69	59	50
DK/Ref.	5	3	2

**TABLE 10**

**CONTROLLING AND RESTRICTING GROWTH  
VS. INDIVIDUAL PROPERTY RIGHTS**

Region				
	All	East	Northwest	Southwest
Control and Restrict development	71%	74%	61%	81%
Depends (volunteered)	7	3	14	7
Let People Do What They Want With Their Property	18	21	21	10
DK/Ref.	4	2	4	2

**TABLE 10A**

**CONTROLLING AND RESTRICTING GROWTH  
VS. INDIVIDUAL PROPERTY RIGHTS**

Education			
	High School or	Some College	College Degree

	Less		(includes graduate)
Control and Restrict development	59%	71%	82%
Depends (volunteered)	7	7	8
Let People Do What They Want With Their Property	32	18	8
DK/Ref.	2	4	2

**Awareness of Upcoming Elections (Tables 11 thru 13)**

Slightly less than half of the St. Tammany electorate has heard "a lot" or "a little" about the upcoming elections for parish president and council. This is not surprising since the election is not until October, and voters typically do not focus on local elections until the last month or less. Naturally, the college educated are more aware of the upcoming election.

Very few voters have heard of the "New Directions 2025 Comprehensive Plan", which is not surprising since it is a relatively new citizen-based organization, and has only recently begun to generate publicity. Among the most educated St. Tammany voters, only 21% express some familiarity with this organization.

The most important problem that St. Tammany voters want their new parish government to deal with is **controlling and restricting growth**. The growth problem was also the most often mentioned problem in previous 1992 and 1997 UNOSRC surveys where voters were asked about the "biggest problem facing the parish". If we add "traffic control" and "regulate zoning and planning" to the "restrict growth" category, over one-third spontaneously mention some aspect of growth as their desired priority for the new parish government.

Growth problems are less pressing in the eastern region than the western regions, because drainage is also an important priority in the east.

<b>TABLE 11</b>				
<b>AWARENESS OF "NEW DIRECTIONS 2025 COMPREHENSIVE PLAN"</b>				
Education				
	All	Less Than High School	Some College	College Degree (includes graduate)
A Lot	3%	1%	3%	4%
A Little	13	10	10	17

Not Much	42	51	32	32
Heard Nothing (volunteered)	42	51	32	32
DK/Ref.	<1	2	3	0

**TABLE 12**  
**AWARENESS OF UPCOMING ELECTIONS FOR**  
**PARISH PRESIDENT AND COUNCIL**

Education				
	All	Less Than High School	Some College	College Degree (includes graduate)
A Lot	9%	4%	8%	15%
A Little	34	34	31	36
Not Much	41	41	47	36
Heard Nothing (volunteered)	15	20	13	12
DK/Ref.	1	1	1	1

**TABLE 13**  
**THE SINGLE MOST IMPORTANT THING THE NEW PARISH PRESIDENT**  
**AND COUNCIL SHOULD DO OVER THE NEXT FOUR YEARS**

Region				
	All	East	Northwest	Southwest
Restrict Growth and Building	22%	16%	27%	31%
Improve Drainage	8	13	5	4
Traffic Control	7	6	9	8
Improve/Build More Schools	7	5	7	11
Manage Money, Better Govt., Improve Efficiency	7	8	8	3
Fix The Roads	7	9	4	6

Regulate Zoning and Planning	6	5	8	4
Focus on Environmental Problems/Issues	4	--	4	8
Public Safety	3	5	--	--
Consolidate Services	--	--	4	--
Promote Industry/ Increase Tax Base	--	--	--	3
Other <sup>1</sup>	14	15	10	12
DK/Ref.	15	18	14	11

<sup>1</sup>--indicates that for the particular cell the response was less than 3%.

<sup>2</sup>The *Other* category is a cumulative cell for categories that did not total 3%.

## APPENDIX A

PERCEPTION OF GOVERNMENT SERVICES					
	Traffic Control	Drainage	Management of Commercial and Residential Growth	Zoning and Planning	Conditions of Local Streets and Roads
Excellent	2%	1%	1%	1%	2%
Good	24	29	27	22	33
Fair	36	34	31	33	40
Poor	24	29	25	25	19
Very Poor	12	5	11	10	5
DK	2	2	5	9	1

## Appendix B: The Questionnaire

ID# \_\_\_\_\_ (1-3)

280-7379

Hello, this is \_\_\_\_\_ calling from the League of Women Voters. This month the League is conducting a study of public opinion on issues facing St. Tammany today, and we'd really appreciate your help and cooperation. The interview will only take a few minutes and your answers will be confidential.

Here is the first question.

How many registered voters are currently at home in your household?

IF NONE: ARRANGE FOR A CALLBACK

IF ONE: CONDUCT INTERVIEW WITH THAT VOTER

IF TWO OR MORE: In order to determine who to interview, could you tell me, of the registered voters currently at home – who celebrated their birthday most recently?

(ENTER DESCRIPTION OF TARGET RESPONDENT)

IF RESPONDENT IS NOT PERSON CURRENTLY ON THE PHONE, REPEAT THE INTRODUCTION AND PROCEED TO THE FIRST QUESTION.

How would you say living in St. Tammany now compares with a few years ago – do you feel it has gotten better, gotten worse, or stayed about the same as it was a few years ago? (4)

1 GOTTEN BETTER

3 STAYED THE SAME

5 GOTTEN WORSE

9 DK/Ref

Next I'd like you to rate various parish government services in St. Tammany.

Would you say that traffic control is excellent, good, fair, poor, or very poor?

	EXCEL -LENT	GOOD	FAIR	POOR	VERY POOR	DK/ Ref
	1	2	3	4	5	9
TRAFFIC CONTROL(5)	1	2	3	4	5	9
What about the condition of local streets and roads(6)	1	2	3	4	5	9
What about Drainage?(7)	1	2	3	4	5	9
What about the management of commercial and residential growth? (8)	1	2	3	4	5	9
What about zoning and Planning? (9)	1	2	3	4	5	9

Next, I'd like you to describe St. Tammany Parish 10 yrs. from now – what do you think it will be like if

things keep going like they are now? (10-11)

(RECORD VERBATIM)

In making decisions about growth in St. Tammany, how much attention does parish government pay to what people like you think – a lot, some, a little, or none?(12)

1 A LOT

2 SOME

3 A LITTLE

4 NONE

5 DK/Ref

Do you think that people in St. Tammany parish government waste a lot of the money we pay in taxes, waste some of it, or don't waste very much of it? (13)

1 WASTE A LOT

3 WASTE SOME

5 DON'T WASTE VERY MUCH

9 DK

Some people say that no matter who people vote for, it won't make any difference in what happens in St. Tammany. Others say that who people vote for can make a difference in what happens. Which comes closest to your opinion? (14)

1 VOTING WON'T MAKE A DIFFERENCE TO WHAT HAPPENS

3 DEPENDS (VOLUNTEERED)

5 VOTING CAN MAKE DIFFERENCE

9 DK

How well would you say the various city, town and parish officials in St. Tammany work together and cooperate with each other – very well, somewhat well, not very well, not well at all? (15)

1 VERY WELL

2 SOMEWHAT WELL

3 NOT VERY WELL



4 NOT WELL AT ALL

9 DK

Some people say St. Tammany should have centralized regulations and services for things like drainage, sewerage, garbage and the like for the whole parish. Other people say each city, town or rural area should independently set its own regulations and services, as it is today. Which comes closest to your opinion? (16)

1 ONE SET OF REGULATIONS AND SERVICES FOR THE WHOLE

PARISH

2 DEPENDS (VOLUNTEERED)

3 EACH CITY, TOWN OR RURAL AREA SETS ITS OWN REGULATIONS

AND SERVICES

9 DK

In your opinion, is it more important to control and restrict development in St. Tammany or to let people do what they want with their property? (17)

1 CONTROL AND RESTRICT DEVELOPMENT

2 DEPENDS (VOLUNTEERED)

3 LET PEOPLE DO WHAT THEY WANT

9 DK

Would you be willing to pay higher fees to get better quality public services parishwide? (18)

1 YES

2 NO

9 DK

Some people say St. Tammany should have compatible zoning regulations for the whole parish. Other people say each city, town or rural area should independently set its own zoning regulations, as it is today. Which comes closest to your opinion? (19)

1 COMPATIBLE ZONING REGULATIONS FOR THE WHOLE PARISH

2 DEPENDS (VOLUNTEERED)

3 INDEPENDENT REGULATIONS FOR EACH CITY, TOWN OR RURAL

AREA

9 DK

If you could tell the new parish president and council the single most important thing they should do in the next four years – what would that be? (20-21)

(RECORD VERBATIM)

How much have you heard about the New Directions 2025 Comprehensive Plan for St. Tammany – not much, a little, or a lot? (22)

1 NOT MUCH

2 A LITTLE

3 A LOT

7 HEARD NOTHING (VOLUNTEERED)

9 DK

How much have you heard about the elections coming up on October 23<sup>rd</sup> for a Parish President and council – not much, a little, or a lot? (23)

1 NOT MUCH

2 A LITTLE

3 A LOT

7 HEARD NOTHING (VOLUNTEERED)

9 DK

**Finally, I have a few questions about you for statistical purposes.**

How many years of school have you completed? \_\_\_\_\_ (24)

1 GRADE SCHOOL (THRU 8<sup>TH</sup>)

2 GRADES 9-11

3 HIGH SCHOOL

4 SOME COLLEGE OR TWO-YEAR DEGREE

5 COLLEGE DEGREE – FOUR YEAR

6 GRADUATE DEGREE

9 DK/Ref

How old are you? (CODE YEARS) \_\_\_\_\_ (25)

1 18-25

2 26-35

3 36-45

4 46-55

5 56-65

6 66 AND UP

9 DK/Ref

As I read some categories of income, please tell me when I get to your TOTAL family income. (READ CATEGORIES) (26)

1 BELOW \$10,000

2 \$10,000 TO \$25,000

3 \$26,000 TO \$40,000

4 \$41,000 TO \$60,000

5 \$61,000 TO \$75,000

6 \$76,000 TO \$100,000

7 OVER \$100,000

9 DK/Ref

This is the end of our interview. Thank you for participating.

INTERVIEWER: CODE GENDER \_\_\_\_\_ (27)

1 MALE

2 FEMALE

INTERVIEWER CODE TOWN FROM SAMPLE SHEET: \_\_\_\_\_ (28)

1 SLIDELL

2 MANDEVILLE

3 COVINGTON

4 LACOMBE

5 ABITA SPRINGS

6 FOLSOM

7 MADISONVILLE

8 PEARL RIVER

9 OTHER \_\_\_\_\_

INTERVIEWER CODE POLICE JURY DISTRICT (1-14) FROM \_\_\_\_\_ SAMPLE SHEET (29-30)