

6-1-1997

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St. Tammany Growth and Development Survey

June 10, 1997

University of New Orleans
Survey Research Center



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Principal Sponsor: *Little Tchefuncte River Association*

Co-Sponsors: *Lake Pontchartrain Basin Foundation*
Save St. Tammany, Inc.

Summary

- Residents of St. Tammany are negative about recent trends in the quality of life in their parish.
- Anti-growth sentiment in St. Tammany has **doubled** in the past five years, and growth is considered by far to be the biggest problem facing the parish.
- Concern about growth-related problems is increasing.
- Today a majority of residents is opposed to both new residential and commercial development.
- Growth-related government services, such as drainage, traffic control, zoning, and preserving wetlands are rated "poor" or "very poor" by at least a third of the residents.
- Twenty-five percent say they sometimes smell sewage in their neighborhood.
- Residents are somewhat cynical about whether parish government listens to them on the issues of growth.
- In the southwest region of the parish, problems with growth are considered to be worse and opposition to new growth is higher.
- Three-quarters of the residents say they are willing to put up with restrictions on what they can do with property in order to control development.
- Most residents would not be willing to pay higher taxes at this time to control development.
- The educated residents are most willing to accept tradeoffs, such as taxes and restrictions, to control development.

The Survey

The University of New Orleans Survey Research Center conducted a survey of *five hundred registered voters in St. Tammany Parish* regarding their attitudes toward growth in the parish. They were interviewed by telephone between May 15 and May 24, 1997.

The survey included such areas as the overall quality of life, the quality of the natural environment, the quality of certain government services related to growth, attitudes toward new residential and commercial development, tradeoffs to controlling growth, and possible solutions to the overcrowding on the Causeway and its approach roads.

Results are presented for the parish as a whole, by geographic region, and by length of time residing in the parish. Certain items are also presented by educational level.

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

- 1) eastern St. Tammany: Slidell, Lacombe, Pearl River and Sun,
- 2) northwestern St Tammany: Covington, Abita Springs, Folsom, and Bush, and
- 3) southwestern St. Tammany: Mandeville and Madisonville.

Overall Quality of Life

Residents of St. Tammany are negative about recent trends in the quality of life in their parish. *Forty percent say that life in St. Tammany has "gotten worse" over the last few years; only 25% say life has "gotten better"* (Table 1).

There are regional differences in the response to this question and differences based on length of residence. Those living in the western half of the parish, north and south, are more negative about the direction of the parish; 44% and 45% say living in St. Tammany has gotten worse compared to 36% in the east. Those who have lived in St. Tammany the longest (more than fifteen years) are also more negative, which is understandable given that long-term residents have seen more change occur. Newcomers to St. Tammany are clearly the most positive, which is also predictable since many have moved there specifically for the quality of life.

When respondents were asked what they think is the biggest problem facing St. Tammany today, growth and development was mentioned far more often than any other problem (Table 2). Furthermore, the *concern about growth and development has doubled since 1992*, when only 17% spontaneously mentioned this as the biggest problem facing the parish. Today 39% mention the growth problem. Traffic and crime (including drugs), two other problems that often accompany growth, are the second and third most often mentioned problems. Mention of the traffic problem in particular has increased substantially since the 1992 survey.

Adding percentages of those mentioning growth, crime, drugs, and traffic problems there is a clear trend of increasing concern. *In 1992 mention of these four problems totaled 32%; in 1995*

they totaled 55%; today the total is 74%. It is remarkable that even in the past two years growth as a problem for residents has increased significantly.

On the western side of the parish, the problems of growth (47% in the northwest and 46% in the southwest) and traffic (20% in the northwest and 26% in the southwest) are the only two problems mentioned with any frequency. In eastern St. Tammany growth is also clearly the biggest problem in the minds of voters (34%), but traffic is considered less problematic (14%) than in the west. Furthermore, in the eastern portion of the parish, crime and drugs are seen as important problems by 23% of the voters, while these problems are considered less worrisome in western St. Tammany.

Because St. Tammany attracts residents and visitors partly due to the trees, waterways and countryside, we asked residents whether they thought the environment of the parish has gotten better or gotten worse over the past few years. Not surprisingly, over half responded that the environment has gotten worse (Table 3). This sentiment is more pronounced in southwestern St. Tammany and among those with college degrees.

Government Services

Respondents were asked to rate six government services which are related to growth and development. All but one of these services is rated "poor" or "very poor" by at least a third of the residents (Table 4). Most notable is the negative rating of *drainage*; 50% in Eastern St. Tammany, 44% in southwestern St. Tammany and 38% in northwestern St. Tammany have a negative evaluation of the quality of their drainage.

Growth-related government services are considered worse in the southwestern part of the parish. In the southwest, five of the six services are rated as poor or very poor by over a third of respondents, *drainage, managing growth, zoning, traffic control and preserving wetlands*, and in the northwest *traffic, drainage, managing growth and zoning* are rated poor by a third or more of respondents. In contrast, in the eastern region, *drainage* is clearly considered the worst service.

The growth-related government service with the most positive rating is sewage treatment, even though *twenty-five percent say they sometimes smell sewage in their neighborhood* (Table 5). This complaint is not a function of geography, but rather seems to be related to what type of sewage treatment the respondent uses. Thirty-five percent of the residents who have a septic tank or their own sewage treatment system report sometimes smelling sewage, compared to only 19% of those on community systems. While we have no basis for comparison, this seems high for a modern American community.

Attitudes Toward Growth

Anti-growth sentiment in St. Tammany has doubled in the past five years. In a 1992 survey conducted by the UNO Survey Research Center, 30% were opposed to new residential growth and 27% were opposed to new commercial growth. Today a majority (54%) is opposed to both kinds of new development, residential and commercial (Tables 6 and 7). Residents are also becoming more opinionated on this matter; the number saying "don't know" has dropped considerably over the past five years. This trend follows almost exactly the trend in mention of growth as the most important problem.

Opposition to new residential growth is higher by 17-18% in southwest St. Tammany compared to the other two regions. The difference is understandable since the growth-related problems are considered worse in the southwest. Even in eastern St. Tammany, however, the percent opposed to new residential growth has doubled since 1992, from 21% to 50%.

Opposition to new commercial growth is higher in both southwest and northwest St. Tammany than it is in the eastern region. But in all regions, opposition to new commercial growth has essentially doubled since 1992.

Length of residence in the parish has little bearing on opposition to new growth. Both old-timers and newcomers are about equally opposed when asked specifically about new development, even though, as mentioned previously, the old-timers are more negative about the general direction of the parish.

It would be a mistake to say that St. Tammany residents are completely opposed to any new development. Given the choice of continuing growth as it is, limiting growth, or stopping it completely, two-thirds choose "limit growth" (Table 8). They probably recognize the extreme nature of a complete moratorium on development, and in fact, only 10% are in favor of such a measure. ***However, if we add those who say "stop completely" to those who say "limit growth", the total amounts to three-quarters of St. Tammany, east, northwest and southwest, newcomers and old-timers, and residents at all levels of education.***

Government Responsiveness

Many residents in St. Tammany question the responsiveness of local government on the growth issue. Half of the respondents we interviewed responded that the government pays little or no attention to people like them when it comes to decisions about growth (Table 9). This result indicates more cynicism than exists nationally; on a similar question asked in a national survey about how much attention government pays to "people like me", without reference to a particular issue, 23% gave a cynical response.

The feeling of not being heard is most prominent among long-term residents of St. Tammany and residents of the eastern part of the parish. Long-term residents are most certainly reacting negatively to the amount and speed of change in their parish.

Tradeoffs to Limited Development

As with any desirable public policy goal, there are tradeoffs or costs associated with achieving that goal. Limiting or managing growth and development in St. Tammany is no exception, so we asked residents about four costs or tradeoffs in particular:

- restrictions on what people can do on their property
- fewer jobs in St. Tammany
- higher cost for new homes
- higher taxes

A majority of residents in St. Tammany say they are willing to accept all of these tradeoffs or costs to control development, but not all of the tradeoffs are equally acceptable. We should note at this point that acceptance of all of these costs is probably somewhat overstated in the survey due to respondents' desire to be socially correct.

The most acceptable cost is having restrictions on what people can do with their property (Table 10). *Seventy-five percent say they are willing to put up with restrictions in order to control development and growth.* Generally, acceptance of restrictions is more common among urban and suburban residents who are accustomed to such restrictions. In St. Tammany in particular, those living in the parish for less than fifteen years, residents in the southwestern region, and the most highly educated are the groups most likely to accept the fact of restrictions if growth is to be controlled.

Controlling development will also mean that new houses will cost more. This second tradeoff is acceptable to seventy-three percent of the voters, most of whom already own a home. Those of higher status, for whom the cost of housing is presumably not a problem, and residents of the southwestern region easily accept this tradeoff (Table 12).

Controlling development would likely mean slower job growth in St. Tammany, and sixty-eight percent of the voters say that this tradeoff is justified. Again, as is the case with the cost of homes, we can observe a clear status difference in the acceptability of fewer jobs. Those with college degrees, for whom job availability is less important, are more willing than the less educated to accept this cost of controlling development.

Controlling development also means that taxes will probably be higher, and this is the tradeoff least acceptable to voters (Table 13). Only 54% said that development should be controlled even if it means higher taxes and, given the upward bias in these answers, this result probably means that *most voters in St. Tammany would not be willing to pay higher taxes at this time to control development.* Like the other costs, paying taxes is more acceptable to higher status residents. Those with college degrees are significantly more likely to agree to higher taxes to control development (69%) than those with only high school diplomas (41%).

Three questions about development were asked without any mention of tradeoffs, and predictably the answers were biased in favor of controlling development (Tables 14, 15, and 16). Nearly everyone agrees that new houses should only be built when services are adequate, that apartments should be strictly limited, and that building in wetlands should be prohibited. These

responses are not as meaningful as the responses to the previous questions because no cost or tradeoff is presented in the question.

Solutions to the Causeway Problem

Various proposals are beginning to circulate regarding remedies to the Causeway traffic problems. We asked respondents for an initial reaction to the three options most often discussed, a light rail system, a second bridge at a new location, and a second span next to the current bridge.

Light rail and the new bridge are the two most favored options, especially among the newcomers to St. Tammany and the college educated. Residents of the southwest, the most affected by causeway congestion, are especially likely to choose the option of a new bridge in a new location. A parallel span next to the current bridge is the least favored option, probably because respondents are all too familiar with the problems on the current bridge and its approaches. It is clear that St. Tammany residents do not want to give up driving across the Lake yet; the light rail option does not receive more than a third of the respondents' support in any group or region.

There is no public consensus on a solution, largely because public information on these proposals is still very low. These opinions are certain to change as alternative proposals are more widely discussed.

TABLE 1							
QUALITY OF LIFE IN ST. TAMMANY PARISH COMPARED TO A FEW YEARS AGO							
		Region			Years in St. Tammany		
	All	East	North West	South West	0-5	6-15	15+
Gotten Better	25%	24%	24%	25%	27%	28%	22%
Stayed the Same	31	36	28	22	36	31	28
Gotten Worse	40	36	45	44	22	38	49
DK/Ref	4	4	3	9	15	3	1

N =	500	265	129	106	105	149	246
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TABLE 2									
BIGGEST PROBLEM FACING ST. TAMMANY PARISH									
	All			Region			Years in St. Tammany Parish		
	1992*	1995*	1997	East	North West	South West	0-5	6-15	15+
Growth and Development	17%	35%	39%	34%	47%	46%	39%	40%	39%
Crime	8	11	11	14	9	6	6	14	11
Drugs		6	6	9	2	2	2	4	9
Education	16	5	3	4	1	3	3	1	4
School Overcrowding		5	4	3	2	6	4	5	3
Streets	5	5	4	2	4	6	6	3	3
Flooding, Drainage, Sewage		3	4	6	1		2	4	4
Traffic	7	3	18	14	20	26	23	20	14
Politicians/Corruption	5	2	2	2	3	1	1	1	3
Economy/Lack of Jobs	8	2	1	1	1		2		
Environment		1							1

Other	19	8	4	5	4	1	5	4	4
No Problem	4		2	2	2	1	2	1	2
DK/Ref	11		3	4	4	2	5	3	3
N =	500	303	500	265	129	106	105	149	246

In the 1992 survey, Crime and Drugs, and, Education and School Overcrowding, were each single categories.

1992*: Source, St. Tammany Survey, University of New Orleans, Survey Research Center

1995*: Source, St. Tammany Sheriff's Election Survey, Multi-Quest International, Inc.

TABLE 3

QUALITY OF NATURAL ENVIRONMENT IN ST. TAMMANY PARISH OVER LAST FEW YEARS

	All	Region			Years in St. Tammany			Education		
		East	North West	South West	0-5	6-15	15+	High School	Some College	College Degree
Gotten Better	15%	17%	17%	9%	15%	18%	14%	21%	14%	12%
Stayed the Same	26	30	22	19	32	21	27	31	26	22
Gotten Worse	55	49	56	68	46	58	57	44	57	63
DK/Ref	4	4	2	4	6	3	3	3	4	4

N =	500	265	129	106	105	149	246	185	116	197
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TABLE 4							
PERCENT SAYING "POOR" "OR VERY POOR"							
REGARDING THE FOLLOWING GOVERNMENT SERVICES							
		Region			Years in St. Tammany		
	All	East	North West	South West	0-5	6-15	15+
Traffic Control	32%	26%	41%	35%	30%	33%	32%
Drainage	46%	50%	38%	44%	34%	47%	50%
Sewage Treatment	16%	12%	25%	14%	15%	15%	17%
Management of Commercial and Residential Growth	33%	29%	33%	42%	28%	34%	34%
Zoning and Planning the use of land	35%	30%	42%	38%	31%	34%	37%
Preserving marshes, woods and wetlands	33%	34%	28%	37%	29%	36%	33%

TABLE 5

DO YOU EVER SMELL SEWAGE IN YOUR NEIGHBORHOOD

	All	Region			Years in St. Tammany			Education		
		East	North West	South West	0-5	6-15	15+	High School	Some College	College Degree
Yes	25%	24%	23%	31%	25%	28%	24%	25%	25%	25%
No	74	76	77	69	75	72	76	75	75	74
DK/Ref										1
N =	500	265	129	106	105	149	246	185	116	197

TABLE 6

DO YOU FAVOR OR OPPOSE NEW RESIDENTIAL GROWTH
IN YOUR COMMUNITY AT THIS TIME?

	All		Region						Years in St. Tammany Parish		
	1992*	1997	East		North West		South West		0-5	6-15	15+
Favor	53%	40%	63%	47%	42%	39%	43%	25%	39%	40%	41%
Oppose	30	54	21	50	37	51	39	68	54	56	53

DK/Ref	17	6	16	3	21	10	18	7	6	5	6
N =	500	500	251	265	154	129	97	106	105	149	246

* Source: St. Tammany Survey, University of New Orleans, Survey Research Center

TABLE 7

DO YOU FAVOR OR OPPOSE NEW COMMERCIAL DEVELOPMENT AT THIS TIME?

	All		Region						Years in St. Tammany Parish		
			East		North West		South West				
	1992*	1997	1992*	1997	1992*	1997	1992*	1997	0-5	6-15	15+
Favor	60%	41%	64%	47%	60%	32%	51%	35%	45%	42%	38%
Oppose	27	54	23	47	28	62	37	62	51	51	57
DK/Ref	13	5	13	6	12	6	12	3	4	7	4
N =	500	500	251	265	154	129	97	106	105	149	246

* Source: St. Tammany Survey, University of New Orleans, Survey Research Center

TABLE 8

**DO YOU FEEL THAT COMMERCIAL AND RESIDENTIAL GROWTH IN YOUR
COMMUNITY SHOULD BE CONTINUED AS IT IS, LIMITED, OR STOPPED
COMPLETELY?**

	All	Region			Years in St. Tammany			Education		
		East	North West	South West	0-5	6-15	15+	High School	Some College	College Degree
Continued As Is	21%	23%	22%	17%	20%	20%	22%	20%	22%	21%
Limited	66	66	66	66	68	68	64	66	68	65
Stopped Completely	10	9	11	13	12	9	11	10	9	12
DK/Ref	2	2	1	4	1	3	2	3	2	2
N =	500	265	129	106	105	149	246	185	116	197

TABLE 9

**HOW MUCH ATTENTION DOES PARISH GOVERNMENT PAY TO WHAT PEOPLE
LIKE YOU THINK IN MAKING DECISIONS ABOUT GROWTH IN ST. TAMMANY
PARISH?**

	All	Region			Years in St. Tammany		
		East	North West	South West	0-5	6-15	15+
A Lot	12%	9%	13%	17%	13%	10%	12%

Some	36	35	35	38	41	38	33
A Little	35	37	36	30	28	37	37
None	14	16	11	11	12	10	16
DK/Ref	4	3	5	4	7	4	2
N =	500	265	129	106	104	149	246

TABLE 10

IT IS IMPORTANT TO CONTROL LAND DEVELOPMENT EVEN IF THAT PLACES RESTRICTIONS ON WHAT PEOPLE CAN BUILD ON THEIR PROPERTY?

	All	Region			Years in St. Tammany			Education		
		East	North West	South West	0-5	6-15	15+	High School	Some College	College Degree
Strongly Agree	40%	34%	42%	52%	54%	44%	31%	30%	35%	51%
Somewhat Agree	35	37	33	31	30	35	37	38	38	30
Somewhat Disagree	10	11	11	7	9	8	12	13	13	6
Strongly Disagree	11	14	10	4	6	8	15	12	12	8
DK/Ref	5	4	4	6	2	5	6	6	2	4
N =	500	265	129	106	105	149	246	185	116	197

TABLE 11**IT IS IMPORTANT TO CONTROL THE DEVELOPMENT OF LAND EVEN IF IT RESULTS IN FEWER JOBS IN YOUR COMMUNITY?**

		Region			Years in St. Tammany			Education		
	All	East	North West	South West	0-5	6-15	15+	High School	Some College	College Degree
Strongly Agree	36%	30%	37%	30%	48%	39%	29%	31%	33%	43%
Somewhat Agree	32	34	32	34	23	35	34	32	30	34
Somewhat Disagree	14	16	15	16	12	7	20	16	21	9
Strongly Disagree	8	10	7	10	10	9	7	9	5	9
DK/Ref	10	10	9	10	7	10	10	12	10	6
N =	500	265	129	106	105	149	246	185	116	197

TABLE 12**IT IS IMPORTANT TO CONTROL THE DEVELOPMENT OF LAND EVEN IF IT MEANS NEW HOUSES WILL COST MORE**

		Region			Years in St. Tammany			Education		
	All	East	North West	South West	0-5	6-15	15+	High School	Some College	College Degree

Strongly Agree	35%	28%	36%	52%	46%	36%	30%	30%	29%	44%
Somewhat Agree	38	39	40	32	28	42	40	35	46	36
Somewhat Disagree	12	13	13	7	10	8	14	15	13	8
Strongly Disagree	6	9	5	3	5	6	8	10	5	4
DK/Ref	9	11	6	6	10	9	8	11	6	8
N =	500	265	129	106	105	149	246	185	116	197

TABLE 13

IT IS IMPORTANT TO CONTROL THE DEVELOPMENT OF LAND EVEN IF YOU MUST PAY HIGHER TAXES OR FEES AS A RESULT OF THE REGULATIONS

	All	Region				Years in St. Tammany			Education		
		East	North West	South West		0-5	6-15	15+	High School	Some College	College Degree
Strongly Agree	24%	18%	31%	34%	33%	28%	17%	15%	24%	32%	
Somewhat Agree	30	32	28	30	28	29	32	26	27	37	
Somewhat Disagree	18	19	16	14	17	14	21	23	25	10	

Strongly Disagree	22	25	18	16	15	22	25	29	20	16
DK/Ref	6	6	6	6	6	6	5	8	5	4
N =	500	265	129	106	105	149	246	185	116	197

TABLE 14

NEW HOUSING SHOULD ONLY BE ALLOWED WHEN SERVICES, SUCH AS WATER, SEWERS, DRAINAGE AND ROADS ARE ADEQUATE T HANDLE THE ADDITIONAL NUMBER OF PEOPLE

	All	Region			Years in St. Tammany		
		East	North West	South West	0-5	6-15	15+
Strongly Agree	76%	73%	75%	85%	85%	78%	71%
Somewhat Agree	18	21	17	13	13	19	20
Somewhat Disagree	3	4	2	1	1	1	5
Strongly Disagree	1	1	2			2	2
DK/Ref	2	1	4	1	1	1	3
N =	500	265	129	106	105	149	246

TABLE 15							
THE LOCATION OF APARTMENTS AND CONDOMINIUMS SHOULD BE STRICTLY LIMITED							
		Region			Years in St. Tammany		
	All	East	North West	South West	0-5	6-15	15+
Strongly Agree	58%	54%	60%	67%	60%	62%	55%
Somewhat Agree	25	28	23	18	25	20	27
Somewhat Disagree	9	9	7	9	6	7	11
Strongly Disagree	4	4	5	3	5	6	3
DK/Ref	4	5	5	3	4	5	4
N =	500	265	129	106	105	149	245

TABLE 16							
BUILDING IN FRAGILE NATURAL AREAS, SUCH AS FLOOD PLAINS, MARSHES OR WETLANDS, SHOULD BE PROHIBITED							
		Region			Years in St. Tammany		
	All	East	North West	South West	0-5	6-15	15+

Strongly Agree	67%	66%	71%	65%	66%	72%	65%
Somewhat Agree	19	20	17	20	24	16	19
Somewhat Disagree	6	7	5	6	5	3	8
Strongly Disagree	3	3	4	4	3	5	2
DK/Ref	4	4	3	5	3	3	5
N =	500	265	129	106	105	149	245

TABLE 17

WHICH OF THE FOLLOWING DO YOU THINK IS THE BEST SOLUTION TO GROWING TRAFFIC CONGESTION ON AND APPROACHING THE LAKE PONCHARTRAIN CAUSEWAY?

	All	Region			Years in St. Tammany			Education		
		East	North West	South West	0-5	6-15	15+	High School	Some College	College Degree
Light rail train system across the Lake?	31%	32%	33%	24%	32%	27%	32%	27%	29%	35%
A new bridge crossing the Lake	30	28	26	40	36	32	26	28	25	34

between two new points?										
An additional bridge running next to the Causeway?	23	24	22	24	15	28	24	29	22	19
Other	5	3	6	7	6	4	4	3	6	4
DK/Ref	11	13	13	5	10	9	13	13	17	7
N =	500	265	129	106	105	149	245	184	116	197

TABLE 18	
POPULATION CHARACTERISTICS	
N = 500 Registered Voters in St. Tammany Parish	
Females	50%
Males	50
Median Age	46 Years of Age

Income	
Below \$10,000	4%
\$10,000 - \$25,000	8
\$25,001 - \$40,000	18
\$40,001 - \$60,000	25
\$60,001 - \$75,000	11
Over \$75,000	18
Don't Know/Refused	16
Highest Level of Education	
Grade School (thru 8th grade)	2%
Grades 9-11	5
High School	30
Some College	23
College	27

Degree	
Graduate Degree	12
Margin of Error	+/- 4.4%
<p>Definition of Region:</p> <p>East: Slidell, Lacombe, Pearl River, Sun</p> <p>Northwest: Covington, Abita Springs, Folsom, Bush</p> <p>Southwest: Mandeville, Madisonville</p>	
<p>Survey Conducted over the following dates: May 15th - May 24th, 1997.</p>	