



REPORT

SEPTEMBER 2026

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A FREE-MARKET GUIDE FOR MISSOURI MUNICIPALITIES

PART FIVE: SANITATION, HEALTH-RELATED SERVICES, HOMELESSNESS, AND ANIMAL CONTROL

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ADVANCING LIBERTY WITH RESPONSIBILITY
BY PROMOTING MARKET SOLUTIONS
FOR MISSOURI PUBLIC POLICY



KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Health services are generally county responsibilities. However, municipalities may have health code regulations or help enforce state and county health regulations.
- Local regulations can overreach, and in particular can be used to restrict consumer choice and impose unnecessary costs on taxpayers.
- Alternative service delivery is an option that municipalities can effectively use to increase efficiency and provide better services in tasks such as trash collection and the provision of animal shelters.

INTRODUCTION

This is part five in a series titled “A Free-Market Guide for Missouri Municipalities.” The focus of this part of the series is on how municipalities deal with issues related to sanitation, health-related services, homelessness, and animal control.

Part one covered the structure and organization of municipal government itself, including the reasons for incorporation, how cities compete with each other through a menu of taxes and services, and the question of whether to hire a city manager.

Part two focused on municipal taxation. Missouri municipalities have an unsound reliance on sales and (in two cities) income taxes for revenue. Property taxes and, where appropriate, user fees should be a larger part of the municipal revenue mix. This part of the guide analyzed the various municipal revenue options and their proper use.

Part three examined planning and zoning policies in municipalities. This is the one major policy area where simply not acting is a valid option. Municipalities can function just fine, thank you, without zoning and comprehensive planning. (Some level of infrastructure planning, however, is generally necessary.)

Part four analyzed park and recreation facilities. It considered which aspects municipalities should manage by themselves and which aspects could be outsourced, as

well as the strategy involved in deciding which park and recreation assets should be funded with taxes and which assets should be funded with user fees.

Subsequent parts will be released on public safety, transportation, public works, and pensions. The overall project is organized by content area and is intended to serve as a resource for municipal officials, community activists, and interested citizens. Each part of this guide combines current examples, historical knowledge, political realities, and academic studies on the operation and management of municipalities in our state.

As noted throughout this series of guides, the adoption of free market–oriented public policies by governments has the potential to dramatically improve lives around the world. If Missouri’s cities, towns, and villages adopt many of the policies discussed in this series, the quality of life of the people of Missouri should be improved.

The policies discussed in these reports are difficult to characterize politically. Some could be considered progressive (liberalizing zoning and limiting tax subsidies), some conservative (eliminating local income taxes and reducing union influence on licensing), and some libertarian (privatizing public services). However, all the policies discussed have been implemented somewhere in the United States—and usually somewhere in Missouri—with beneficial results.

As a reminder, I use the term *free market–oriented policies* throughout this project in a broad sense. It encompasses policies that create a more optimal system of taxes and land regulations, save taxpayers money by sharing or outsourcing services, deliver higher-quality public services through competition or privatization, and expand opportunity by reducing barriers to homeownership, employment, and entrepreneurship. Inertia is an extremely powerful force in local government. Arguments such as “We’ve always done it that way” or “Most cities do it like that” carry considerable weight in local policy and politics. This guide presents examples of cities, towns, and villages that enact policies to provide a wide variety of public services in a more market-oriented, limited-government manner. If we can succeed in bringing attention to such examples—even when small or rare—to those involved in the daily operation of local governments throughout Missouri, this project will be a success.

In these guides, the term *municipality* will refer to all three recognized types of incorporated communities: cities, towns, and villages. When *city*, *town*, or *village* is used, it generally refers to individual examples of each, or to laws and policies specific to that type of incorporated community. *Town* is less clearly defined in Missouri law than the other two, so that term will not be used in a specific sense. Habit, simplicity, and a desire to vary the terminology will result in my occasionally using *city* as shorthand for all types of municipalities. Finally, in instances where a municipality shares its name with another form of government, such as the City of Ozark and Ozark County, the author is referring to the municipality unless it is clearly stated otherwise.

SANITATION SERVICES

Trash pickup is one of the most common services for which municipalities use alternative service delivery (ASD). Many of the municipal options discussed in this series fall under the broad heading of ASD. ASD is a general term that encompasses a wide variety of service options; basically any option other than municipal employees providing services within their own municipalities funded by tax dollars. ASD includes privatization, shared services with other governments, contracting (outsourcing), and public-private partnerships.

ASD options are neither rare nor unusual in Missouri. In fact, one of the purposes of this project is to highlight just how common and often beneficial they are. The International City/County Management Association (ICMA) does a quinquennial survey of city managers and administrators (the survey also includes counties) around the United States regarding the use of ASD options.

In the 2017 ICMA survey (the most recent available that included sanitation services), 75 percent of responding cities used ASD options for commercial solid waste collection and over 70 percent used ASD options for residential collection (see appendix). Private service by for-profit trash collection companies was the most common option for both.¹ There are many options for private provision of trash collection. These options include:

- Full privatization, where the property owner contracts with the trash hauler and the local government is not involved beyond ensuring that the trash is actually collected. This practice is more common in commercial trash collection than in residential collection, though it is by no means rare for cities. Springfield and Independence, respectively the third- and fifth-largest cities in the state, use this system.²
- Sole source, where one private trash hauler provides residential trash pickup for the city. For example, in 2023 Clayton just renewed its contract with Republic Services for trash collection through September 2026.³ That is just one example out of many in Missouri.
- Multiple providers, where the city divides the community into zones and puts multiple options out for bid to private trash haulers. Multiple bids and multiple providers can help the city get the best deal for citizens. Chicago uses such a system for its residential recycling program. St. Louis County uses this system for trash collection in the unincorporated areas of the county (which have approximately 300,000 residents), but the author is unaware of other Missouri municipalities that currently do this. Kansas City previously used a system similar to this, and Springfield considered adopting this system several years ago but decided against it.
- Both private companies and the city sanitation department provide trash services in different parts of the city. Kansas City did this for many years until it brought all trash pickup in-house in 2020.
- Another government (presumably a neighboring city) is contracted to provide trash collection. For example, in St. Charles County, Cottleville contracts with neighboring St. Peters for sanitation services.⁴ Seven percent of cities in the ICMA survey reported using this option.

Kansas City ended its use of private trash services in 2020. At the time, several reasons were given for the decision, including rising rates from private providers due to consolidation in the private waste-hauling industry and complaints about private trash service in the Northland.⁵ The experience demonstrates the importance of continuous oversight when outsourcing municipal functions. Analysis of the differences in costs between trash collection by public and private providers in

Kansas City in 2010 and 2011 had found that the private providers were significantly more efficient than the public providers.⁶

For trash services, the ASD model is very important. Municipal monopolies have an advantage because they can require that every customer in an area use their service. Competitive, private trash services that do not have that monopoly power are at a disadvantage. It should surprise no one that a system in which multiple trash haulers serve the same area may be less efficient than a mandated public monopoly. One trash truck coming once a week to serve every house is going to be more efficient than multiple trash trucks coming on various days to serve their assigned homes. The latter option will also do more damage to the roads.

However, a model in which cities put trash service out for competitive bidding by private companies who then have a monopoly for the period of the contract has worked well for trash privatization. Bel and Warner recognized this when they wrote:

In most countries, there is a strong association between private production and competition for the market through competitive tendering, and public production without competition for the market. Typically, public production is outside a competitive framework. The benefits of competitive contracting (increased efficiency) would come primarily with competition for the market as monopoly production would continue to be necessary due to economies of scale.⁷

Bel and Warner further noted that the benefits from competition and privatization often erode over time. One way to address that is to make certain the trash contract is opened for competitive bidding with some degree of frequency. Ballwin, in St. Louis County, lost sight of this important point in 2012 when it renewed its trash contract with its trash provider for ten more years without going out to bid. It turned out the city had not gone out to bid for trash collection since 1995. In 2022, when the contract was again up for renewal, Ballwin had improved its process. It put the waste collection out to bid for a shorter contract term of just six years. It received several bids, and again chose Republic Services, which offered the lowest bid.⁸

How do communities like Springfield, Independence, and many unincorporated areas that have entirely private trash service address the lack of efficiency and increased road damage from multiple trash companies coming on different days of the week? Homeowner associations and subdivision groups often step into the picture and manage trash contracting for their entire neighborhood. In many cases this is a perfect scenario that gives residents full control of their own trash service while maintaining the efficiencies of a monopoly and limiting road damage from frequent truck traffic.

However municipalities decide to operate sanitation services—including municipal ownership and operation—user fees, not general taxes, should fund such operations. Paying for trash services through direct billing instead of general taxes allows for greater assurances that the money spent on sanitation goes to sanitation and is not diverted to pay for other services. This is the same argument for reliance on user fees in other local government services, including recreation facilities. If municipalities choose to pay for sanitation out of general taxes—which could be preferable from a tax-deduction-of-property-taxes standpoint (city sanitation charges are deductible from federal income taxes if they are a part of general property taxes, but not if they are a specific bill to a property for a specific service) then care should be taken by the municipality to segregate sanitation revenues and expenditures from other tax funds.

As David Duff wrote in his study on government general taxes versus user fees in Canada (emphasis added throughout this report):

Subject to these important caveats, however, [...] user fees can be a useful way to raise revenues to finance publicly provided goods and services, one that can improve the allocation of scarce economic resources as well as promoting accountability and fairness. In order to achieve these advantages, however, these levies should generally be imposed at economically efficient rates, with revenues earmarked for the goods and services for the use of which the specific tax or fee is imposed.

Moving from theory to practice, this article has identified various areas of government expenditure

(social services [...] and general administration) for which [...] user fees would be inappropriate; others (health care and education) where these levies might be imposed provided that access is guaranteed on the basis of right, need, or merit, as the case may be; and yet others (transportation, water and sewage, **and the collection and disposal of solid waste**) for which [...] user fees are specifically recommended.⁹

In 2023, Columbia, Missouri, started phasing out its strange experiment with an overly complicated system of trash collection, which included a ban on trash carts and an absurd requirement that customers could only use official Columbia city trash bags.¹⁰ This was a unique example of a city making a simple thing complicated for reasons nobody could quite comprehend, and Columbia is better off for the unpopular program's demise.

Whatever we call it—waste, trash, or garbage—its collection and proper disposal are vital for healthy communities. That collection is a perfect opportunity for private providers to save taxpayer dollars. Municipalities that still provide government-operated sanitation services should follow the lead of hundreds of other Missouri communities and outsource that service in whatever manner is best for their city. However, careful oversight of the services and regular competitive tendering of the work by municipalities are also vital requirements to make sure communities get the trash service they need at the best possible price for residents.

HEALTH-RELATED SERVICES

Most local health departments in Missouri are operated by counties. The only cities that operate their own comprehensive health departments—meaning they provide a wide variety of public health services up to and including routine medical services like immunizations and tuberculosis testing—are Kansas City, St. Louis (which isn't in a county), Joplin, and Independence. Springfield, St. Joseph, and Columbia operate local health departments in combination with their relevant counties. Everywhere else in Missouri, counties operate the local health departments.

Some municipalities, including St. Peters, operate smaller, more limited health departments that focus on issues such

as animal control, restaurant inspections, health-code enforcement, and property-nuisance violations, but they are not comprehensive public health agencies.

The author wishes to be clear that the recommendations here relate to the organization and management of certain common public health responsibilities. The author is not providing medical advice.

Health Code Regulations

While municipalities typically don't have comprehensive health departments, they may have health code regulations or help enforce state and county health regulations. Clearly, health codes have played a role in making our communities and food supply safer, but they suffer from the same problems and limitations that all regulatory codes have. For example, the useful home laundry chute is now illegal in parts of Missouri, including St. Louis County. The much-loved school or church bake sales of the recent past have been regulated nearly out of existence, a victim of health-code intrusion.¹¹ Overly intrusive regulation in the name of safety, no matter how rare the supposed danger may be, was mocked by the satirical *Onion* newspaper with the article, "Falling Down Laundry Chute and Breaking Neck Remains America's No. 548,221 Killer."¹²

Then there are regulations that seem inconsistent. For example, Missouri law currently allows farmers to sell or deliver raw milk and cream directly to consumers on the farm or through delivery—but retail sales in grocery stores and similar outlets remain illegal.

Consider also Missouri's cottage food laws. Missouri statute permits home cooks to sell a narrow set of products: baked goods, traditional fruit jams and jellies, and dried herbs or herb mixes. That's it; no pickles, no fermented foods, no dairy, no sauces.

The Institute for Justice has filed numerous lawsuits defending the right of people to sell homemade and homegrown food.¹³ As long as customers are informed of the food's origin, including the lack of regulatory oversight, why shouldn't they be able to purchase raw milk, homemade pickles, or other types of food?

Food Trucks

A good example of municipal over-regulation due to health concerns is related to food trucks. As food trucks have grown in popularity over the past 20 or so years, municipalities around the state have had to adjust their local ordinances in response to the new industry. Not surprisingly, the restaurant industry has hardly been supportive of adjusting traffic, public health, and other regulations to accommodate the new competition. Too often, cities have been hesitant to allow food trucks to operate in their communities without onerous regulations, often supported by existing restaurant owners.¹⁴

Numerous municipalities have debated food truck rules, including St. Louis, Kansas City, Clayton, Ladue, Lake Ozark, Jefferson City, Columbia, and many more. Some cities, such as Ladue, have decided to allow them only as part of permitted special events. Some cities have decided to allow food trucks to operate only in designated areas, while others have allowed them to operate more generally, but *not* in certain places (e.g., Lake Ozark allowing them to operate in most of the city *except* along its popular “Strip” area).

The reality is that food trucks are popular with consumers, they pay taxes, and they must meet the same health requirements as brick-and-mortar restaurants. Importantly, there is no evidence that food trucks have more health code concerns than restaurants. One study measured health code violations among restaurants and food trucks in several major cities and determined “the results suggest that food from mobile vendors is as safe as food from restaurants.”¹⁵

Traffic regulations making sure food trucks don’t operate in a manner that impedes traffic or creates a dangerous situation are understandable. In that regard, aspects of the Lake Ozark prohibition on operating food trucks along its busy and crowded “Strip” are justified. However, other regulations are often just an excuse to limit competition for existing restaurants.

In the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, it is more important than ever to revitalize cities, support entrepreneurs, and create opportunity for all by removing harmful local regulations such as those preventing food

trucks from operating. Yet, as recently as April 2026, a legislative effort to expand the areas where food trucks could operate within the City of Saint Louis was stopped by opponents of their expansion.¹⁶ The St. Louis Cardinals voiced concern about the proposal, saying that it would reduce their control over street vending around the downtown ballpark. Why the Cardinals were apparently given “control” over street vending on the public street around the ballpark in the first place was not explained. Restaurant interests in other parts of the city also opposed the changes, as happens routinely.

Opposition to food trucks by municipalities in Missouri remains a consistent example of using the power of zoning and food and health codes to protect certain interest groups, be they restaurants or professional sports franchises, at the expense of consumer choice and small-business opportunity.

Municipal Hospitals

There are 27 hospitals in Missouri owned and operated by local governments. However, almost all of them are owned by counties or by independent hospital taxing districts.¹⁷ My research indicates that there are only two municipalities that own and operate hospitals: North Kansas City and Excelsior Springs. These cities are both in Clay County, and the two hospitals have an ongoing operational partnership.¹⁸

North Kansas City Hospital (NKCH) is the larger of the two, with 451 licensed beds, making it a fairly large hospital for Missouri. In 2012, the city considered selling its hospital to a private hospital company, but public outcry and local political opposition halted that effort.¹⁹ Due to its very close proximity to Kansas City, NKCH may be uniquely positioned to remain in operation as a city-owned hospital. Its partnership with Excelsior Springs Hospital (ESH) may allow the latter to maintain its municipal status in the long run, too. However, in general, the financial realities of small, government-owned hospitals are daunting. As of the publication of this report at least two other local government-owned hospitals are going through a privatization process: the Perry County and Liberty hospitals.

Most of Missouri's local government-owned hospitals are rural, and their struggles mirror those of rural hospitals throughout America.²⁰ Public hospitals of all types are also facing financial difficulties. According to one study, after the Great Recession ended:

[S]afety-net hospitals now face a new market reality. The economic downturn, slow recovery, and politics of deficit reduction have eroded the ability of local governments to support the safety net. Many safety-net hospitals have not focused on effective management, cost control, quality improvement, or services that attract insured patients. As a result . . . **many are likely to face increasing financial and competitive pressures that may threaten their survival.**²¹

Because there are only two remaining municipal-owned hospitals in Missouri, the author is going to delve further into this topic in the next series of guides, which will focus on free-market policies for Missouri counties. North Kansas City and Excelsior Springs should consider privatizing their hospitals now, while they are in a position of relative fiscal strength, instead of possibly having to do so in the future from a position of weakness, which is what happened in Perry County (among other problematic issues associated with that particular hospital privatization effort). NKCH may be the unicorn that can successfully continue as it is, but that is a risk the city may not wish to take.

HOMELESSNESS

The problem of homelessness is getting worse in America. Missouri's cities are no different. A 2022 count of the homeless in Jackson County (including Kansas City) found a 193 percent increase in the homeless population over the prior three years.²²

According to the Cicero Institute, there are approximately 600,000 homeless in America.²³ About 60 percent of homeless people are undergoing temporary homelessness and make substantial use of government and nonprofit shelters as they seek work and permanent housing. The other 40 percent who resist using shelters and often suffer from addiction, mental illness, or both, are the more acute problem.²⁴ Those are the people putting themselves and others at risk every day in cities across Missouri.

Cities frequently contract with nonprofit agencies to serve the homeless in their areas. Kansas City, St. Louis, Springfield, and likely many other municipalities use their homeless funds to contract with charitable groups in this field. In 2023, Springfield announced it was seeking applications from private organizations to expand homeless services in Springfield, to be paid in part by the federal stimulus acts of that time period.²⁵ This is a good example of local governments working alongside private, nonprofit groups to provide public services.

In 2022, Missouri passed a law requiring that cities enforce bans on “camping” along municipal sidewalks and in parks or risk losing state social service funds. Local bans on “camping” are common, but some cities had declined to enforce them. The Missouri Supreme Court struck down the state’s “camping enforcement” law in 2023. (The ruling was over a technicality in the bill; it did not directly address whether “camping enforcement” rules by the state are allowed or not.)

The problems homelessness causes for the homeless themselves are obvious. Homeless people are significantly more likely to both commit crimes and be the victims of crimes. But in addition, their massed presence in downtown areas makes people less likely to want to go downtown, and that makes it more difficult for downtown areas to be the economic engines for Missouri that they can and should be. For example, in a poll of Los Angeles residents, 40 percent said that the homeless make them feel unsafe.²⁶ The author's experiences in St. Louis are anecdotal, but it is highly likely that a significant number of people from the metropolitan area limit their visits to St. Louis due to fear of crime. The homeless population puts that fear of crime right in people's faces; whether those perceptions are accurate or not is immaterial. For the tech company Square, which temporarily closed its downtown St. Louis office in 2021 due to incidents of crime at a nearby homeless encampment, the crime was certainly real enough.

Cities should enforce their existing “camping” bans in order to help bring workers, visitors, tourists, and investment back to Missouri's downtown areas. These are the regions that could be driving our economy and creating the employment, growth, and tax revenues to help fund our state and local social services as well as the salaries and profits that help fund donations to our nonprofits and

their wonderful work to support the homeless. Of course, solving this problem is not easy, as illustrated by the following three examples.

In March 2023, the Springfield police department cleared out the region's largest homeless encampment, as its local ordinances and the new state law required (this predated it being overturned by the courts). Police officers visited the camp beforehand and informed the people there that they had 72 hours to clear out. Representatives of area nonprofits accompanied the police to share information on resources available with the people being forced to move, including coupons for low-cost motels nearby.²⁷ But that doesn't mean there are always enough beds in shelters available to serve everyone who has been cleared out of the homeless encampment.

For years, the City of St. Louis had dealt with the issue of the New Life Evangelistic Shelter near downtown St. Louis. The nonprofit shelter served the homeless for decades, but it was forced to close in 2017 after it was found to be a persistent nuisance for the area. The shelter's residents were impeding the growth of the area's "loft district." This was the difficult situation of a homeless shelter impacting the economic expansion of an area and limiting the growth and investment that every region needs to create jobs, homes (in this case, primarily expensive urban lofts), and new businesses. The shelter closed, and the homeless then had fewer options for places to go.

Similarly, Peter and Paul Community Services have operated a homeless shelter in the St. Louis neighborhood of Soulard for decades, generally without any problems with the nearby residents. As homelessness increased, the organization sought to move in order to increase the number of beds it could offer. However, its attempts to move have run up against a local zoning rule requiring that a homeless shelter get permission from nearby residents before it opens a new facility. Not surprisingly, residents in other neighborhoods have blocked any new locations for Peter and Paul. While the opposing residents are understandably concerned about their property values (and safety), what about the property rights of the landowners who wanted to sell to Peter and Paul, or the property rights of Peter and Paul, who wanted to buy new land to carry out their mission?

Along with the many zoning reforms discussed previously, cities with overly restrictive impediments to social service organizations operating in their communities need to revisit their zoning laws to allow more freedom for such organizations. I don't claim this is simple, but this seems to be a policy Catch-22: Cities are cleaning out encampments (as they should) but limiting the shelter options for the homeless who are removed from the encampments. The remaining options, like squatting in abandoned buildings, are poor alternatives. At a minimum, St. Louis, Springfield, and other cities dealing with a homelessness problem should increase the number of places where nonprofit organizations are allowed to serve the homeless.

There are many changes needed in how we address the homeless problem in our country, including moving away from the failed "housing first" strategy and allowing easier confinement or enhanced judicial oversight of addicts and the mentally ill for purposes of treatment. But those are primarily federal, state, and county-level changes.²⁸ Missouri municipalities need to focus on enforcing municipal camping bans (in as humane a way as possible) and enforcing other laws, such as those concerning public drunkenness, urination, and disorderly conduct, to prevent the homeless from diminishing the quality of life and harming the economy of our cities and their downtown areas. In 2023, St. Louis considered an ill-advised "Homeless Bill of Rights" that would have moved the city in exactly the wrong direction. It would have legalized public urination, loitering, and panhandling. While it may have been well-intentioned, it would have harmed the exact areas, such as its downtown, that need to thrive. (Thankfully, the bill did not pass.)

Cities should continue to contract with the nonprofit sector where they can, and where cities own and operate their own municipal shelters (such as Biddle House in St. Louis), they should do so as effectively as they can.²⁹ Recent investigations into social service spending in Minneapolis and elsewhere have demonstrated that these contracts with private providers need careful oversight by independent parties to guarantee that the providers aren't misappropriating tax dollars or benefiting from political connections.³⁰ Finally, cities should reform zoning rules, if necessary, to allow the nonprofit sector to better serve the homeless population alongside existing municipal shelters. Cities should not allow behaviors by the homeless that drive people away from those same cities and make the problems worse.

ANIMAL CONTROL

Many municipalities have contracted with local, nonprofit animal-welfare agencies to operate their local rescue and shelter efforts, particularly the latter. Through the use of private fundraising and dedicated volunteers, these groups have been able to provide quality services while saving taxpayer dollars. Some cities have also contracted with private veterinarians. Both are excellent options, and the nonprofit model seems to be expanding in popularity in Missouri, particularly for animal shelter operations.

According to the 2017 ICMA survey on ASD practices (see appendix),³¹ 82 percent of cities do animal control—the sometimes dangerous business of collecting stray animals—using government employees, although 32 percent of those cities contract with other governments for the service. Only 15 percent of municipalities contract with the private sector for animal control. A much higher number of cities, 32 percent (again), contracts with the private sector for animal shelter management, which generally includes adoption and veterinary services. Forty percent of cities contract with other governments for shelter usage.

Both Kansas City and St. Louis have privatized their animal shelter operations, and Kansas City had also previously privatized its animal control services to animal welfare groups. Kansas City first turned over its animal shelter to KC Pet Project in 2012, and that privatization effort led to tax savings of \$40,000 and a significant reduction in euthanasia for the animals.³² Later, in 2019, when Kansas City proposed contracting with the same nonprofit for animal control operations, city employees opposed it based on familiar grounds:

City workers and the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees Local 500 worry about the loss of jobs and pensions if the city of Kansas City, Missouri, follows through with its plan to privatize the Animal Control Division.³³

Chillicothe has long contracted with the local Humane Society group to operate its animal shelter and control operations. The arrangement with the Livingston County Humane Society calls for an agreement whereby “the humane society receives a base service fee, a portion of dog and cat license fees, all kennel and adoption fees and all animal control fines.”³⁴

Independence operates its own municipal animal control and shelter department, but it provides those services as well for the unincorporated parts of Jackson County. Other cities that contract with nonprofit animal welfare groups include Blue Springs, which has contracted with Pawportunities to run its animal control operation.

The history of contracting with private veterinarians is more checkered. Kansas City first outsourced its animal shelter to a private vet in 2009. The private operator saved taxpayers \$175,000 and improved adoption rates at the same time. However, complaints regarding alleged animal abuse caused the city to terminate the contract in 2011, and the services went back to city operation.

Complaints about animal abuse in animal shelters are common. The St. Louis County animal shelter was subjected to a series of complaints and lawsuits from its own volunteers in 2018 and 2019.³⁵ Eventually, in late 2022, the animal shelter operations were privatized to the nonprofit Animal Protective Agency (APA).³⁶ Stray Rescue, a nonprofit animal welfare agency that previously managed the City of St. Louis’s shelter, was the subject of multiple lawsuits around the same time from volunteers over a variety of issues, including the allegation that it was violating its “no-kill” pledge.³⁷ Stray Rescue soon after (in 2019) lost its contract to operate the city’s animal shelter to another nonprofit, Care STL, which continues to manage it now.

In 2020, after having run the Kansas City animal shelter for almost a decade, the same nonprofit, KC Pet Project, was given a contract to operate animal control operations. The activists and volunteers for the nonprofit proved, not surprisingly, to be a better fit for managing a shelter than for removing dangerous animals from the streets. Volunteers may hesitate when assigned to capture a rabid pit bull. In 2025, animal control was moved back to municipal operation in Kansas City.³⁸ The nonprofit continues to operate the city’s shelter. The point here is that the various ASD options are a good fit for many animal shelters and related services, but cities should maintain the in-house capabilities for the more dangerous, police-like animal control work. The fact that many more municipalities contract with the private sector for shelter operations than for animal control work shows that many cities have reached the same conclusion.

Jails are hard places to operate, whether they are for people or animals. The author suspects there is a core group of animal rights “volunteers” who are going to file complaints about any shelter that isn’t a no-kill shelter. With that in mind, accepting volunteers at a shelter, particularly one that still euthanizes animals, should not be a haphazard process where just anyone can come help. Dedicated volunteers, however, are still a core aspect of successful animal welfare agencies that contract with municipal governments for animal shelter or, less frequently, animal control operations. Groups such as KC Pet Project, Pawportunities, Care STL, the APA, and the Livingston County Humane Society can provide the animal-welfare operations that cities need throughout Missouri.

CONCLUSION

Local governments have a number of available options for providing the services their communities desire. As shown by the ICMA survey, animal control and sanitation can be provided by local government in a wide variety of ways. Missouri municipalities that continue to offer city-owned and operated trash and animal shelters should strongly consider the myriad of options to improve those services. For sanitation, this includes full privatization and outsourcing to private companies. For animal shelter operations, contracting with nonprofit groups is a great option for cities, but cities should keep the more difficult and dangerous aspects of animal control work in-house.

Acknowledgments: The author wishes to thank Show-Me Institute interns William Redington, Natalie Robinson, Grace Hearn, Amanda Unverferth, Braxton Steele, Patrick Johann, Nick Schwarzen, and Maria Rivero for their assistance with this project. The author also wishes to thank Mike Schoedel for his review and suggestions for the overall project.

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Glossary of Relevant Terms

Cottage Foods: Foods that fall under the category of “cottage foods” often include baked goods, jams, jellies, dry mixes, and candies. Generally, cottage foods are understood to be foods that are prepared at a home residence and sold to a consumer directly. These sales typically take place at farmers markets or on a producer’s property. However, the most important distinction of cottage foods is that those producing them are afforded certain exceptions from licensing or inspection requirements. Generally, foods that are classified as “cottage foods” are those not time- or temperature-controlled for safety. (Source: The National Agricultural Law Center)

Outsourcing/Contracting: Outsourcing and contracting are two terms for the same thing, generally. For example, Zhang and Sun use the terms interchangeably in their study of the topic.³⁹ They refer primarily to municipal government’s hiring out the provision of public services to private or nonprofit organizations. As used in this guide, local government usually maintains a managerial role under contracting and outsourcing arrangements more so than with full privatization.

APPENDIX

Data from the International City/County Management Association (ICMA) 2017 Alternative Service Delivery Survey. Published June 2019.

The ICMA mailed surveys to 13,777 chief administrative officers of all municipalities with a population over 2,500 and all counties across the United States. Responses were received from 2,343 local governments, yielding a response rate of 17% with a 2% margin of error.

Percentage breakdown of respondents' answers to the question of who provides each listed service in their jurisdiction

	Number of cities reporting	Your employees entirely	Your employees in part	Another government or authority	Private sector/ For profit	Non-profit	Franchise/ concessions	Subsidies	Volunteers
Residential solid waste collection	1127	27.2	5.1	6.4	56.7	0.5	10.6	0.3	0.1
Commercial solid waste collection	856	19.3	6.3	7.5	61.9	0.5	11.9	0.1	0.1
Recycling	1209	22.0	11.8	12.2	51.9	3.0	9.3	0.7	1.7
Sanitary inspection	764	30.2	7.5	59.6	5.8	0.8	0.1	0.0	0.0
Inspection of food preparation facilities	645	23.4	4.7	65.7	7.4	3.3	0.3	0.0	0.0
Animal control	1190	49.7	11.8	31.9	7.5	7.1	0.3	0.4	0.8
Operation of animal shelters	840	26.8	6.2	40.4	8.7	23.5	0.5	1.1	5.2
Operation/ management of hospitals	410	3.7	2.2	34.6	47.1	30.2	1.2	0.0	0.7

Note: Due to multiple answers and rounding, totals do not equal 100%.

NOTES

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