

# Another St. Louis County municipality decides whether to dissolve

St. Louis Public Radio | By [Jo Mannies](#)

Published April 2, 2018 at 6:54 AM CDT



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Mackenzie village board members, including Pat Arrendell and Dorothy Berry, sat up front for a community meeting on March 21 about what would happen if their village disincorporates.

When Mackenzie Village's voters go to the polls Tuesday, the fate of their south county community will hang in the balance.

They will decide whether to dissolve the 72-year-old village — made up of 134 residents, 68 homes, one park and three streets.

If dissolution occurs, Mackenzie Village would become an unincorporated part of the county. That's already the case for the neighborhoods surrounding Mackenzie Village. Various county departments will take over the services that the village now provides. That includes plowing streets, maintaining the 13 street lights and providing police protection.

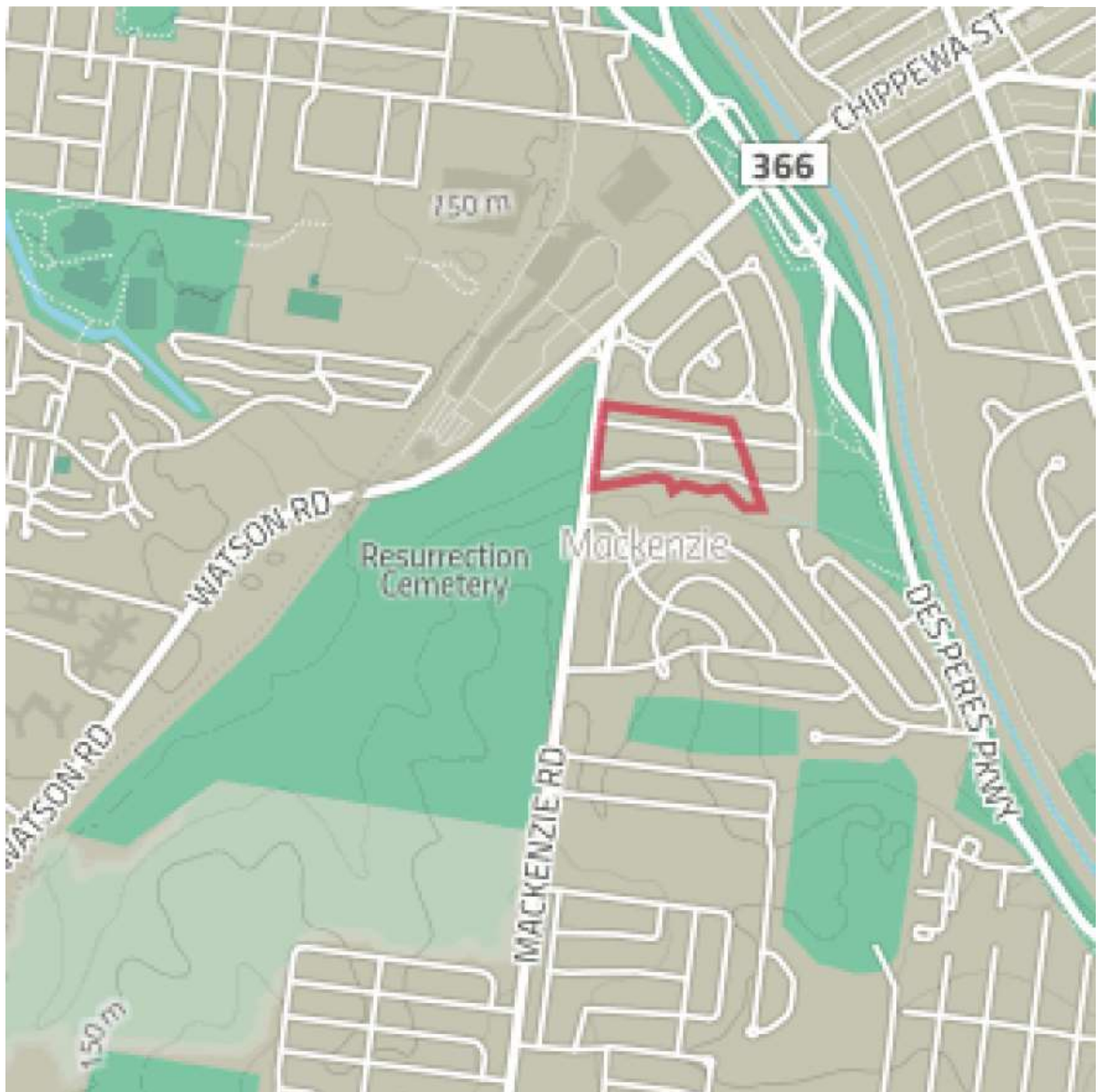
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the region.

Mackenzie Village treasurer Pat Arrendell, 82, is among those saying it's time for the community she's called home for decades to call it quits.

Arrendell is part of Mackenzie Village's ruling board of trustees – all of whom are women who range in age from 78 to 92. Most have helped run the community for close to 20 years.



*Credit Brent Jones | St. Louis Public Radio /*

Mackenzie Village is a small municipality in south St. Louis County near River des Peres.

"It is becoming overwhelming for all of us," Arrendell said. "We're, I hate to say, elderly, and it's a lot of responsibility. We have to take care of a lot of things. And we don't get any support from the people in the village."

Trustee Dorothy Berry, who's 92, says they've unsuccessfully tried for years to enlist other village residents to replace them.

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Fellow Trustee Carol Zander is more blunt: "Our income is less and the expenses go up and the villagers don't care."

But resident David Fondren, a 55-year-old lawyer, says he does care. Although Fondren sympathizes with the aging trustees, he wants to keep Mackenzie Village intact.

"It'd save us a little bit of money," he said. "But I kind of like the fact we get our snow removal done before some of the highways are even done. They take good care of the park. They take good care of the roads and stuff like that. I think we have better attention to our needs, as opposed to coming from the county level."

Village resident Steve Waffle, 64, agrees. "When you like what you've got, you don't want to get rid of it."



*Credit Carolina Hidalgo | St. Louis Public Radio /*

Following a meeting about Mackenzie's possible disincorporation, a few residents spoke against the idea, and are offering to run to become village trustees.

## County trying to stay neutral, while laying out facts

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About 20 supporters and opponents showed up at a recent town hall where county officials, including police, explained what will happen if Mackenzie Village residents vote Tuesday to disincorporate.

County Planning Director Justin Carney kicked off the evening with a power point presentation that laid out the basics. The bottom line is that some taxes will drop, and some fees will increase. Overall, most Mackenzie households would see their costs drop by roughly \$40 a year.

The county parks department promised to take care of the park and its dusk-to-dawn lights.

Precinct Captain Melissa Webb with the St. Louis County Police assured the residents that they'll get plenty of law-enforcement attention. Mackenzie Village currently contracts with the Shrewsbury police department for a specified number of daily patrols.

Webb said that county police will provide "24-7 service" to the village.

Resident Earl Bush, who's on the fence about the dissolution proposal, appreciated the information.

"I don't want to be holding the bag, or left holding the bag," Bush said. "I want to know what happens if it passes, you know. If I vote for it, or didn't vote for it, I want to know what's going to happen."

### **More county communities are disappearing**

County Councilman Pat Dolan, a Richmond Heights Democrat who represents Mackenzie Village, emphasized that the county isn't taking sides in what its future should be.

But he has an opinion.

"I definitely think it's the right move for MacKenzie Village, somebody that size," Dolan said. "The ladies, God love them, they worked very hard to keep it as good as it is. But they don't want to do it anymore. And nobody wants to take their place. So what are you going to do?"



*Credit Carolina Hidalgo | St. Louis Public Radio /*

St. Louis County Councilman Pat Dolan speaks to Mackenzie residents at a March 21 community meeting.

Dolan added that he understands the nostalgic affection that the residents have for their village. And that shouldn't change, he added.

"Life will be the same as the day before, except their bills will be cheaper," Dolan said.

He predicted that Mackenzie Village will likely remain the neighborhood's unofficial title, even if it is officially gone.

The Municipal League of Metro St. Louis represents many of the region's communities, including Mackenzie Village, which pays dues of \$400 a year.

League assistant director Steve Ables is staying out of the debate. But he says the league understands the pressures facing many area small municipalities.

"Financially, some smaller communities are having difficulties," Ables said. "Costs continue to go up and revenues are sort of stagnant. That's probably the biggest factor."

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## *If Mackenzie Village residents vote to dissolve, the number of St. Louis County municipalities would drop to 88.*

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If its voters agree, Mackenzie Village would be the fourth county municipality to consider the idea of dissolution since 2011. The village of St. George voted to dissolve in 2011, and Vinita Terrace residents voted in 2016 to merge with neighboring Vinita Park.

In 2013, voters in Uplands Park narrowly rejected a dissolution proposal. At the time, state law required approval from 60 percent of voters. The law now only requires a simple majority.

If Mackenzie Village dissolves, Ables and Dolan predict more will follow.

More recently, Hanley Hills — with a population of roughly 2,000 — has formally asked the County Council to set up a dissolution vote later this year.

### **County election officials predict low turnout**

The St. Louis County Election Board is projecting that voter turnout countywide may be only 10 percent on Tuesday.

The board's Democratic Elections Director, Eric Fey, blames the low turnout on the lack of high profile contests or ballot issues. In April 2017, for example, county voters were paying close attention to Proposition P, which increased the county's sales tax to increase police pay.

For Tuesday's election, Fey predicts that a few county communities or school districts with spirited contests or ballot measures might see higher turnouts closer to 20 percent.

Mackenzie Village has 94 registered voters. If it reaches 20 percent turnout, that means the community's future will be decided by less than 20 votes.

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## Jo Mannies

Jo Mannies has been covering Missouri politics and government for almost four decades, much of that time as a reporter and columnist at the St. Louis Post-Dispatch. She was the first woman to cover St. Louis City Hall, was the newspaper's second woman sportswriter in its history, and spent four years in the Post-Dispatch Washington Bureau. She joined the St. Louis Beacon in 2009. She has won several local, regional and national awards, and has covered every president since Jimmy Carter. She scared fellow first-graders in the late 1950s when she showed them how close Alaska was to Russia and met Richard M. Nixon when she was in high school. She graduated from Valparaiso University in northwest Indiana, and was the daughter of a high school basketball coach. She is married and has two grown children, both lawyers. She's a history and movie buff, cultivates a massive flower garden, and bakes banana bread regularly for her colleagues.

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