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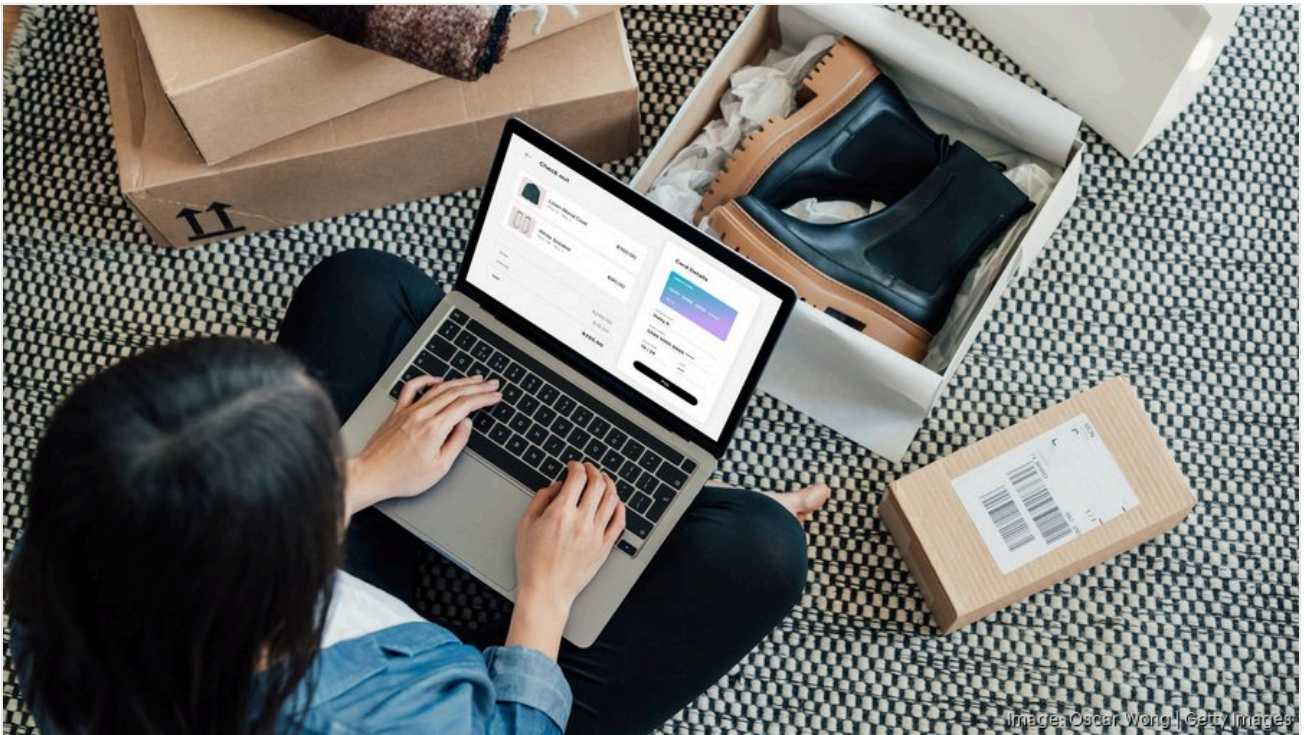


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A St. Louis County use tax would apply to online purchases.

OSCAR WONG | GETTY IMAGES

By Pat Kelly – executive director of the Municipal League of Metro St. Louis

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St. Louis County voters in August will decide [whether to approve a local use tax](#). While tax proposals often generate debate, this measure deserves support because it is fundamentally about fairness, modernization and protecting local services without increasing property taxes.

For decades, local businesses have collected sales taxes on purchases made in their stores. But as online shopping and remote sales have expanded, many out-of-state purchases have avoided the same local tax structure. That imbalance puts local retailers at a competitive disadvantage while reducing revenue that communities rely on for essential services.

The proposed use tax simply applies existing voter-approved local tax rates to qualifying remote and online purchases, creating a more level playing field for businesses that already operate, hire workers and invest in St. Louis County communities.

This concept is not new. The U.S. Supreme Court's Wayfair decision established the legal framework allowing states and local governments to modernize tax collection for the digital economy. Missouri has already adopted policies based on that decision. The question now is whether St. Louis County will fully participate in that modern economy or continue losing revenue tied to online and out-of-state purchases.

The financial impact could be significant. Based on 2024 retail sales data and national trends showing approximately 16% of retail sales occurring online, the use tax could generate millions annually for local governments and regional institutions throughout St. Louis County.

Municipalities would receive additional revenue to support police protection, street maintenance, parks, infrastructure and other neighborhood services residents depend on every day. Great Rivers Greenway would benefit through additional funding for regional trails, greenways, and park connections that continue to improve quality of life and economic development throughout the

region. The [Saint Louis Zoo](#) and other regional institutions supported through existing sales tax structures would also benefit from a more modern and equitable tax system.

Importantly, this proposal does not create a new tax rate. It applies existing local tax rates more fairly across today's economy. Residents already pay similar taxes when purchasing goods at brick and mortar stores locally. This measure simply ensures remote sellers operate under comparable rules.

Supporting the use tax is also about maintaining local stability during a time of uncertainty surrounding future state tax policy discussions. Strengthening local revenues now will better position St. Louis County, municipalities, and regional assets to maintain services and avoid future cuts.

Consumer habits have changed dramatically over the last decade. Local revenue systems must adapt as well. Supporting the use tax is a practical step toward fairness for local businesses, modernization of the tax system and long-term fiscal stability for the region.

A "yes" vote on the St. Louis County use tax is a vote for fairness, local services and the future strength of our communities.

Pat Kelly is executive director of the Municipal League of Metro St. Louis.