

# JOBS

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Katz is cofounder of New Localism Associates, a firm that helps cities design, finance and deliver transformative initiatives that promote inclusive and sustainable growth.

The STL 2030 Jobs Plan recommends five strategies to drive growth, and they involve building an inclusive economy; restoring the core of St. Louis as job and cultural center of the metropolis; creating “a world-class ecosystem” for small businesses and entrepreneurs; attracting and building talent; and making St. Louis a hub for next-generation industries and technologies.

Work on the plan began more than a year ago and included extensive analysis of the region’s economy. Local working groups focused on specific strategies. Katz also interviewed community, business, nonprofit and economic development leaders across the metropolitan area.

Worldwide events played into what actually went into the final plan, he said.

“To be frank, this project preceded COVID. We started this without understanding what the impact of a global pandemic would be. It really changed the focus of this jobs plan. I think pre-COVID it was going to be like a lot of job plans in the United States, a very large focus on innovation, infrastructure and human capital,” he said. “We were compelled to focus on small business and entrepreneurship to a much greater extent than you normally would see.”

The subsequent killing of George Floyd in Minneapolis — which became a national, racial reckoning — prompted stress on diversity in hiring.

“Reflecting on this, compared to other jobs plans I have worked on in other



Hall

metros, I actually think this is a more expansive, more inclusive economic strategy than we would have had prepandemic. It forced us to explore new areas of work,” Katz said.

All job plans need to evolve, he told the Illinois Business Journal. “That’s truer more now because we’re living through a period of market disruption, which could benefit St. Louis in some respects.” Other cities are regaining footing, but St. Louis, with this plan, may be one step ahead.

“What this jobs plan basically says is, St. Louis is able to compete domestically and globally in a way that it can get back on track” from the economic stagnation and population flatlining experienced in the last decade.

“I think St. Louis can join a broader section of American metros with better growth rates, focus on quality jobs and more focus on reducing racial and spatial disparities on income and wealth, but it’s going to have to align itself and pay very close attention to fast-moving market dynamics and this new torrent of federal money, which will only be successful if it’s harnessed locally.”

Joining Katz for the interview with the IBJ were Jason Hall, the CEO of Greater St. Louis Inc., and Valerie Patton, chief diversity, equity and inclusion officer, and president, Greater St. Louis Foundation.

“The metro has not had a jobs plan in more than a decade,” Hall said. “This is



Patton

a very significant body of work. If the metro is going to get to a place of high growth, it starts with shaping directions.”

Hall, a Metro East native, said he personally reached out to elected officials

throughout the bistate.

“If we’re going to move forward as a metro, we can’t do it without talking to each other, without having channels of communication,” he said.

Among many others, Hall said he had conversation with the Southwestern Illinois Council of Mayors, the Leadership Council Southwestern Illinois and its executive team; the Southwestern Illinois Realtors Association; and the County Board chairman’s teams in both Madison County and St. Clair County.

“It was interesting as I got deeper into those discussions how history weighs heavily. The level of distrust because of decisions that in some cases were made decades ago do hang in the present. There is a lot of work to do to rebuild that trust and restore those lines of dialogue,” Hall said.

Some of the conversations are already netting progress. St. Clair County Board Chairman Mark Kern, for instance, helped introduce Hall to Robert Eastern III, the mayor of East St. Louis.

Eastern, in turn, told Hall he needed help pursuing a grant worth \$20 million over 10 years from the W.K. Kellogg Foundation, and Patton, of Greater

St. Inc., is helping pursue the grant.

“I’m part of a collaborative of leaders on both the St. Louis side and the East side, which is a working group on the Kellogg grant, which will be facilitated out of SIUE, their leadership and others leaders, such as Bishop (Geoffrey) Dudley from New Life in Christ Interdenominational Church in Shiloh; the Urban League of Metropolitan St. Louis and others. We have helped put together a memorandum of understanding.”

Patton will be one of three project managers on the grant along with SIUE and an East St. Louis developer, Joseph Gray.

At press time the effort was in Phase 2 of grant review, and proponents should know fairly soon the results.

“It’s competitive, but I think we have a compelling case,” Patton said.

Addressing community cores in this manner will help the entire market, Hall pointed out.

The group was asked if the St. Louis area wants to compete with particular metro markets, with which it is frequently compared, places like Indianapolis or Memphis.

Katz said the market can compete simply by using the assets it has.

“Bottom line, St. Louis is 20th largest metro area and is awash in assets that are distinctive. You have assets in the financial, health services, bio sciences, and infrastructure that many metropolitan areas do not have. I think it’s a question of looking within. Have you unlocked those assets?”

The entire jobs plan and related information are available at [www.GreaterSTLinc.com](http://www.GreaterSTLinc.com).

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