Socioeconomic Trends, Planning, and Budgeting in Rural Counties’ Towns and Small Cities of New York State

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Paul R. Eberts
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The intent of this document is to fill in the gaps in knowledge about towns and town governments by looking at what is happening in the 760 towns and cities in New York’s 44 rural counties during the 1990 to 2007 period by:

1) describing key socioeconomic, demographic, planning, and budgetary trends that have impacted and continue to impact these towns and cities;

2) specifying which trends are most likely to present major challenges or problems, and which trends offer major opportunities for residents, local leaders, and decision makers; and,

3) examining the issues faced by community leaders and decision makers at local government levels in using existing planning and budgeting tools for responding positively to trends’ challenges and opportunities toward the long-range goals of enhancing their citizens’ health, safety, and general welfare.

In doing these things, this document supplements and often parallels the work on counties of a previous document published by the New York State Legislative Commission on Rural Resources, entitled, Socioeconomic Trends and Well-Being Indicators in New York State, 1950-2000. The goals of that report, written by Paul Eberts and Kris Merschrod, were very similar to the goals of this “towns-focused” document. All counties encompass a variety of towns and cities, and dynamics in counties intimately interrelate with dynamics in and among their towns and cities.

This towns document elucidates these dynamics for five separable “types” of towns and cities within the rural counties. Twenty-six rural counties include a small city and seven of these have two such cities (for a total of 33). These 26 small cities and 28 county-seat towns, where a county does not contain a city, total to the 54 places we identify as Central Places. Other types of towns are classified according to whether they are more dense or less dense and adjacent to Central Places, suburban, or not adjacent, rural. Type 2 towns include 198 More Dense Suburban towns; Type 3 has 177 More Dense Rural towns; Type 4 has 48 Less Dense Suburban towns; and Type 5 has 283 Less Dense Rural towns.

Each of the five town types used throughout this document has reasonably distinct characteristics, distinct “directions” in their changes, and distinct impacts on their residents’ health, safety, and general welfare (key goals...
identified for town planning by the New York State Legislature). Central places’ average density in these counties, for instance, was about nine times more than the average for the four outlying (non-Central Place) town types in a county, but, whereas outlying town types had population increases, Central Places on average lost population.

Every county has at least one identifiable Central Place, usually but not necessarily the county seat. County seats include county and city or village government offices, as well as a majority of counties’ commercial businesses. Government activities also form core employment for other services in Central Places. Many private services build from this core, so that Central Places most often have more private employers to stimulate their much higher population densities than those in counties’ outlying towns.

Core public-sector employment in Central Places attracts certain employment opportunities, such as law firms which deal with courts and other government agencies, real estate and other agencies that frequent county clerks’ offices, restaurants and cafes that cater to larger populations, a series of private services not duplicated by public agencies, and so forth. These all result in greater population densities that, when aggregated, represent greater economic “demand” enticing commercial activities to establish themselves in or near Central Places that are county seats.

Compared to other towns, residents of Central Places in general in 2000, had the greatest educational differences – many college graduates, but on average an almost equal number of high-school dropouts. Central Places were the only ones of the five Town Types that, on average, lost populations from 1990 to 2007, especially those having more money, to be almost but not quite replaced by more people from minority populations. Compared to outlying towns, they also have more single people, people in the 20-34 age range, renters, single and low-income mothers, and children in poverty.

At the other extreme, Less Dense Rural towns have much smaller population densities and more commuting for employment to locations outside their residents’ counties. Almost all their residents leave the town for non-farm employment. Such towns lack population densities to attract large numbers of commercial services, but tend to have multiple hamlets in them that have at least one commercial enterprise. For one reason or another from 1980 to 2007, more people in percentage terms migrated into Less Dense Rural towns than migrated into others. But, Less Dense Rural towns are quite varied. Some are quite isolated, having very small population sizes, and almost no significant changes happening in them. Still, others are favorite spots for “second or vacation homes,” and increasing numbers of such homes are found in them.
A relatively small number of towns are classified Less Dense Suburban. They are largely either “farming towns,” where farming is still a very dominant industry or hilly towns, where it is less convenient to build houses. Between 1990 and 2007 in percentage terms, they also experienced large influxes of people, even if small numbers of people.

Both types of less-dense towns are also more likely than others to have more marital disruptions among their residents, the lowest incomes overall, and higher poverty rates than the others. Their budgets show fiscal-stress levels among householders equal to or above those in Central Places. (The two more-dense town types, on average, have the lowest overall levels of fiscal stresses due to government budgets among their householders.) Less-dense towns also have the lowest scores on their roads’ quality and on having planning boards, planning regulations, or written comprehensive plans.

More Dense Suburban towns, being adjacent to Central Places, are more likely than other outlying towns to have shopping malls, apartment buildings, increasing numbers of renters (Central Places have the most renters), and more people in terms of numbers of people moving into them. But many in-migrants choose single-family housing units. The also have higher education levels (more college graduates) and higher incomes than other outlying towns. More-dense towns also tend to have several manufacturing operations and large villages in them that give them some “central-place type” functions and characteristics with their high levels of people employed in services.

As inferred from above findings, towns’ very locations, whether adjacent or not to Central Places, heavily influence their population and density levels, as well as socioeconomic and demographic dynamics. These dynamics, in turn, heavily influence problems such as marital disruptions, and responses such as in their government revenues and expenditures. The levels on such “causation systems” are interactive and virtually impervious to local decision making. Thus, they are “structural” in nature, that is, beyond the control of their jurisdictions’ policy leaders or their constituents (except quite indirectly through State representatives). The best of their policy leaders recognize the situations they are in and try to cope with them through their planning and budget decisions. But, they are often frustrated at nearly every turn. In most cases, towns “in trouble” in their budgets can probably not place blame on their decision makers, or attribute “poor” motivations or “bad” judgment to them. Their decisions are often responses largely based on the “structural binds” the decision makers face.
State legislators and appointed officials appear to be aware of such issues, but find it difficult to justify expenditures, programs, and strategies even in the relatively small magnitudes necessary to “do much” about these “situations.” State Aid for General Purposes goes largely to the cities in the 44 rural counties because they have the most people and householders affected by their fiscal stresses. State Aid for Transportation goes disproportionately to less-dense towns, but its levels are not enough to “correct” for the per household differences in fiscal stresses between householders in less-dense towns and those in Central Places. Although State policymakers as a whole are aware that people and householders in Less Dense Rural towns suffer as such great fiscal stress per household, they, too, feel in structural binds to the point of inaction to do much about them.

The “consolidation strategy” by the Governor and Legislature has promise through funding consolidation studies and giving larger state aid packages to consolidating jurisdictions. Several towns and small cities have taken advantage of the funding for studies, even if by 2008 no consolidation had happened. But, other initiatives for effective programs or strategies from the State to reduce comparative fiscal stresses in Central Places or in less-dense towns to levels comparable, for instance, to the lower levels of fiscal stresses found in More Dense Suburban and More Dense Rural towns have not been achieved. Some of the policy insights and prescriptions offered in the various chapters of this document and briefly summarized in the final chapter might be beneficial to policymakers both in the towns in fiscal distress and in the State Legislative and Governor’s Offices.

The trends described in this document and this Summary, do not include those in school districts or county governments. They are linked, however, because all three of these local governments rely heavily on property taxes. Until increased cooperation happens among State offices and these local jurisdictions, town residents will continue to find themselves in structural binds from which they are unlikely to move forward or to demonstrate much innovation. The situation calls for a new dynamic which can probably only be provided through the State’s more extensive resources. Until then, the unequal fiscal stresses and other socioeconomic and demographic changes at the local level will continue into the indefinite future in the vast majority of the towns and small cities in these 44 rural counties that contain 3.2 million residents, well over half of them over age 35, which are the ones that will have to deal with these conditions.
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Figure 3.1. Original image for this document created by Mr. John Barney and Mr. David L. Kay from data collected by and available from the Tompkins County, New York, Department of Assessment.

Figure 3.2. Original Data collected by Mr. David J. Lieb from maps by MapWorks, Inc., of Rochester, New York, or by Jimpaco of Round Lake, New York.

Figure 3.3. Original Image for this document created by Mr. David J. Lieb.

Figure 3.4. Original data on roadway scores (see Figure 3.2) organized and analyzed by Mr. David J. Lieb.

Figures 3.5 to 3.9. Data collected by Mr. Lieb (see Figures 3.2 and 3.4) from the U.S. Census (see Figure 1.1).

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"If we would first know where we are and whither we are tending, then we could better tell what to do and how to do it." -- Abraham Lincoln, “House Divided,” 1858.

Overview

The overall perspective in this document is based on Abraham Lincoln’s admonition, delivered in a much different context, about requirements for effective policy leadership. Effective policy leadership necessitates prior examination of three sets of issues. The first identifies which set of “indicators” to consider (where we are); a second determines their trends (whither we are tending); and a third generates planning and budgeting strategies and programs (what to do and how to do it) for implementing elected officials’ goals given the trends’ impacts on their goals. This perspective focuses on “trends, goals, and decisions” that form the basis of this work.

Planning and budgeting are the two main policy tools available to town and small city governments and their elected officials (primary audiences for this document). These policy tools (also called “policy levers”) are used in the context of overall socioeconomic-demographic trends that impact officials as they work to enhance their goals. In using these tools, policymakers can effectively ameliorate certain trends’ negative effects and promote programs to re-enforce trends’ positive aspects.

Three main purposes, then, underlay this work:

1) to describe key socioeconomic and demographic trends impacting the 760 towns and cities in New York’s 44 rural counties;

2) to specify which trends are most likely to present major challenges or problems, and which ones present major opportunities for residents, local leaders, and decision makers; and
3) to examine how community leaders and decision makers at these government levels can use existing planning and budgeting tools to respond positively to trends’ challenges and opportunities for enhancing their citizens’ well-being and life-quality.

Two main implications follow from these purposes. First, by becoming aware of potential problems facing local jurisdictions, certain efficiencies in responses can be achieved before problems fester and enlarge. Second, if this approach to local trends is meaningful, then this document could become a resource for future training on issues of local planning, budgeting, and development.

Most people want improved well-being for themselves and their families, and a better quality of life in their communities. These aspects of community life have many facets. Issues of life-quality and well-being intertwine, especially when put in a social-trend context. Certain recent trends show resources being brought into communities to generate well-being, while others signify more problems being generated. Examining patterns in these social, economic, demographic, family, transportation, housing, planning, and budgeting trends, reported below, can give public officials and concerned citizens a better understanding where they are, where they are tending, and where they might want to go in their goal-setting and means-seeking.

Background

New York’s towns and small cities, along with villages, have been given legal authority by New York State for decisions on local land-use planning. Revisions of State-enabled comprehensive planning laws for these governments during the 1990s used the phrase “…for the public health, safety, and general welfare” (www.Guide to Planning and Zoning Laws in New York State, Section 272 b). These three topics provide a wide perspective on the range of activities towns and cities can undertake in their planning. This legislation recognizes that town comprehensive planning is a means “…to give due consideration to the needs of the people of the region of which the town is a part.”

Town planning is no longer confined narrowly to land-use planning, even if land-use planning still remains the heart of local land-use and planning regulations. The enabling legislation now recognizes, permits, and indeed encourages town planning boards to consider how land-use planning affects “general welfare” in the context of social trends. Since planning boards can range widely in the topics they consider, they can also look into what and how budgetary adjustments might aid in promoting general welfare.

Some people contend that local population growth is necessary in order to increase general welfare. Yet, central places in counties have been losing population for several decades, while most “outlying” towns in rural New York counties grew substantially in population sizes up to 2000, even if they have been relatively stable since then into 2007. Still, such growth brought increased sprawl with it, which many citizens and analysts found troubling.
Sprawl implies inefficient energy usages, congestion, environmental degradation, and even contributions to global warming. An underlying issue is how to accommodate a wider distribution of people throughout counties’ towns while also enhancing overall personal well-being and community life-quality with minimal environmental impacts. Such issues represent important challenges for town and county officials, and will be addressed in several chapters below.

Other issues have also been accumulating in towns and counties. Most towns see greater percentages of their employed populations commuting outside their counties for their employment. Although commuting contributes to population growth, it also negatively affects the environment in several ways. At the mundane level, roads must be maintained, water run-off contained, and revenues generated. Do increased revenues offset increased expenditures necessary to maintain higher commuting rates?

Likewise, higher percentages of dispersion of people into a county’s farther reaches can be problematic from a county perspective. Does such dispersion produce greater concentrations of renters or crowded housing (which is happening in more than a few towns)? What happens to their life-quality and well-being when large proportions of a town’s children grow up in disrupted families and/or poverty? … or its elderly are in nursing homes (both of which are also happening in many New York towns)?

Such questions underscore the complexity of issues facing towns’ community leaders and decision makers as they seek greater health, safety, general welfare, life-quality, and well-being for people in their jurisdictions. A key underlying trend is that social changes have produced and are producing more socio-economic as well as ethnic diversity among people, each segment of which is asking that their rights to well-being and life-quality be respected and enhanced. Increased diversity also implies newcomers to communities whose ideas about life-quality often differ from old-timers’. Commuters’ ideas also differ from stayers; renters’ from homeowners’; those poorer from those richer; intact families’ from disrupted families’; elderly from the middle-aged from the younger; those healthier from those less healthy; those employed in services from those employed in agriculture or manufacturing, whether women or men; and so forth. In responding to dynamics that increase such diversity every year, town decision makers have to recognize and sort through the various claims of these social groupings.

Trends on key indicators, then, represent a major part of the context for town officials’ decision making. Behind every “average number” in the chapters’ graphs below (which depict these trends) are many lives being lived in the “real world.” These social groupings all have their special concerns that not infrequently impose on each other and on local government officials. Such claims put decision makers on the spot as they seek ways to decide which trends deserve immediate responses, which do not, and what kinds of responses best facilitate their residents’ public health, safety, and general welfare.
Town boards as well as town planning boards struggle in how to respond to diverse constituencies. Planning for and implementing their responses represents a major form toward providing some unity in the midst of increased diversity stemming from the vast majority of trends. Officials’ decisions are usually made on the basis of the sometimes paradoxical general principles of fairness, social justice, equality, democracy, liberty for people to live as they see fit, caring for each other, and acting locally with global effects. These principles are central in a “society of laws and regulations,” where administrative procedures seek to assist people in their jurisdictions to live together in optimized well-being and life-quality. Town officials, then, often face “optimizing compromises” in resolving issues imposed on them by social trends.

Certain towns compared to others find it essential to engage in planning for dealing with these trends. Those with greater population densities usually have greater diversity and more organizations participating in civic decisions. These towns’ officials usually consider more alternatives in resolving their residents’ latent or manifest conflicts, and often come to more satisfying decisions for everyone involved. In less-dense localities such participation is often limited. Trends in these towns often become well-developed before officials react, even if it is not clear when trends reach their tipping points. Since trends on many key indicators increased significantly in specific less-dense towns between 1990 and 2007, these towns’ officials especially will probably face new decisions required of them now in the 21st century.

Planning for towns’ life-quality and people’s well-being, then, is a special concern of this document. We will interpret the implications of these trends for town officials by frequently suggesting alternatives that may be open to them as they deliberate their responses. We believe this document informs local and state policymakers on trends that have been, are, or will be affecting their towns. Our system of governments requires that, one way or another, elected officials, community leaders, and concerned citizens take ownership for their decisions. Our society has generally benefited from reasonably rapid social changes and from bringing information to bear on decisions that respond to social changes. We expect that most social trends presented here will continue to impose themselves on New York towns so that new decisions will always be necessary. To examine these trends in a relatively systematic form helps inform these decisions.

General Issues in Using Census-Based Indicators
Most indicators examined below are based on “objective” data, taken from U. S. Censuses for 1980, 1990, 2000, and Census estimates for 2007. We will examine these indicators for five types of towns (described in the next section) and for four major New York regions (also described below). We will use graphic presentations of each indicator showing its dynamics over time. In this way, our findings show patterns among “average” towns in the five town types of what is happening on the indicators over time.
Indicators are based on data collected by official public agencies, such as the U.S. Census, the New York State Comptroller’s Office, and/or New York’s Legislative Commission on Rural Resources. Thus, they are reasonably “objective,” reliable, and accurate. Although data from U.S. Censuses are collected officially every ten years fundamentally to determine the distribution of seats for Representatives in the U.S. Congress, secondarily indicators from the Census often represent major issues of general welfare in local-government jurisdictions (cities, counties, towns, and villages). The issues themselves, such as what can be done about those in poverty, may be controversial, but the data about numbers in poverty as such are less controversial.

Most Census indicators for towns, rather than coming from a complete enumeration, are taken from samples of respondents within the towns. Thus, data for towns with very small populations, especially, may vary somewhat from the general patterns. When aggregated with similar towns, as we have done in each graph throughout this report, the trends are reasonably accurate in reflecting what was happening in “average” towns of each type. Due to the sampling, interpretations of trends for individual towns should be made in light of the “general averages.” Census data based on samples of people in towns are still “objective,” and, when aggregated with other similar towns especially, are usually the “best information available” on which town officials can frame their policies.

The indicators will be examined for five rural town types in upstate New York’s four major regions – the Eastern, Central, Western, and Northern. The graphs show how the regions’ rural towns converge or diverge from “average patterns” found when aggregating their towns’ dynamics over time. Such analyses provide details on general patterns, so that community leaders and policymakers can feel more comfortable in using these findings that relatively closely match with their own towns.

Whether a given indicator represents life-quality, well-being, or “general welfare” is also reasonably non-controversial. For instance, a vast majority of people believe that towns having greater proportions of their adult populations gainfully employed are considered to have better general welfare than those where fewer people (for example, as a percentage of all working-age adults) are employed. Similarly, places usually have greater general welfare when they have a population with higher educational levels, and/or with higher income levels, and/or with trends toward increasing educational or income levels. Likewise, most people believe that having higher poverty levels in their towns decreases their overall life-quality and well-being.

Periodically throughout the chapters we will summarize how these indicators overlap and connect. While detailed analyses underlying such summaries will not be presented, they are based on typical empirical analyses used by social scientists. Specifying interconnections is important in gaining efficiencies by being able to devise strategies that respond to several trends simultaneously.
Describing a variety of socioeconomic and demographic trends in graphic form in towns has seldom been attempted with such a diverse set of indicators, and never in our knowledge to the extent provided in this document. Documentation on individual counties, towns, and cities can be found on the Internet. But, a document that attempts to recognize and interpret statewide patterns in trends for five rural town types in four regions for leaders and policymakers has not. A previous report published by the Legislative Commission on Rural Resources (2004) used county data in examining key trend indicators (Paul R. Eberts and Kris Merschrod, *Socioeconomic Trends and Well-Being Indicators in New York State Counties: 1950-2000*). The present report examines indicators’ trends for the 760 towns and small cities in New York’s 44 rural counties.

**A Typology of Towns**

Town in rural counties vary considerably in their densities, compositions, and trends. Central places’ average density in these counties, for instance, was, 555.8 people per square mile in 2000, changing very little to 547.2 in 2007. Their densities were about 9 times more than the average for towns in the rest of a county (at 77.1 people per square mile). Every county has at least one identifiable Central Place, usually but not necessarily the county seat. County seats usually include county and city (or village) government offices, as well as commercial businesses. Government activities also form the core of employment and services in Central Places, but many private services build from this core, so that Central Places most often have more employers (along with their much higher population densities) than a county’s outlying towns.

Core public-sector employment in Central Places attracts a variety of employment opportunities, such as law firms which deal with courts and other government agencies, real estate and other agencies that use the county clerk’s office frequently, restaurants and cafes that cater to larger populations, a series of private services not duplicative with public agencies, and so forth. These all result from greater population densities that when aggregated represent greater economic “demand” that entice commercial activities to establish in or near county seats. Counties having larger population densities and much commuting for employment to nearby metropolitan counties usually have multiple Central Places. Less-dense counties lacking population densities to attract large numbers of commercial services in one place tend to have multiple villages.

For analytic purposes, such differences suggest grouping towns into one of five specific types based on two key criteria: 1) whether a town is a Central Place, a suburb (adjacent) to Central Places, or more distant (rural) from Central Places, and 2) their population densities (greater or smaller). Central Places represent a primary set of jurisdictions in the town typology. Whether a town is located adjacent to, and hence a suburb of, Central Places also heavily influences its population levels and densities as well as their socio-economic and demographic dynamics. These dynamics, in turn, heavily influence problems and responses in towns’ trends.
In order to narrow the scope of our analyses, we chose to examine trends only for the 760 towns in the 44 counties defined as rural in New York State (see *Socioeconomic Trends and Well-Being Indicators in New York State, 1950-2000*, Legislative Commission on Rural Resources, 2004). In general, rural counties are those upstate with populations less than 200,000 people (hence not core metropolitan counties).

Table 1.1 shows the four “outlying” town types in a cross-classified form. We found empirically, as we will show in subsequent chapters, that both population density (with an arbitrary breakpoint of 50 people per square mile that makes different types similar in numbers) and location (whether suburban-adjacent to a Central Place, or not adjacent and rural) are among the most important criteria in showing differences on most indicators among the four “outlying” town types.

**Table 1.1. A Typology of 706 “Outlying” Towns in New York State’s 44 Rural Counties Based on 1) Adjacency (“Suburban-ness”) of their Locations to Central Places, and 2) Population Densities in 2007.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Location of Towns:</th>
<th>Adjacent (“Suburban”)</th>
<th>or Non-Adjacent (“Rural”)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Population Density</td>
<td>Suburban</td>
<td>Rural</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More Than 50</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>People per</td>
<td>2. More-Dense</td>
<td>3. More-Dense</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Per Square Mile</td>
<td>Suburban (N = 198;)</td>
<td>Rural (N = 177;)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Avg. Density =</td>
<td>162.7 people per sq.</td>
<td>Avg. Density = 91.7 people sq.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>or</td>
<td>Mile)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less Than 50</td>
<td>4. Less-Dense</td>
<td>5. Less-Dense</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>People per</td>
<td>Suburban (N = 48;)</td>
<td>Rural (N = 283;)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Square Mile</td>
<td>Avg. Density = 33.6</td>
<td>Avg. Density = 21.7 people</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>or</td>
<td>people per sq. mile)</td>
<td>sq. mile)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Central Places’ average density is 547.2 people per square mile.

The actual typology used throughout this study, then, is:
Town Type 1. Central Places (highest dense towns or cities, N = 54);
Town Type 2. More Dense Suburban towns (N = 198);
Town Type 3. More Dense Rural towns (N=177);
Town Type 4. Less Dense Suburban towns (N = 48); and
Town Type 5. Less Dense Rural towns (N = 283).
This town typology includes five distinct town types, each having at least slightly different socioeconomic-demographic levels, diversities, and growth patterns (see Chapters 4, 5, and 6). Along with the complexities associated with greater population densities, Central Places usually have different orders of problems that, in effect, force them to find different solutions for resolving their problems. Differences are found in their planning activities (Chapter 2), transportation systems (Chapter 3), and budget priorities (Chapters 8 and 9). Often these differences reflect their demographics and diversities (Chapter 4) and education and employment levels (Chapter 5), which together affect their residents’ socioeconomic levels (Chapter 6), and family stability (Chapter 7).

We posit that this typology is not a matter of analytic convenience, but has widespread influence on other socioeconomic and demographic factors. Thus it is a basic structural determinant (or “underlying cause”) of dynamics in indicators’ trends. Although each indicator has its own dynamic, towns’ locations are “structural” because they are “givens” which town officials cannot easily change, and these together, in a causal manner with other factors (examined in the chapters below), affect employment levels and growth (or decline) that further determine towns’ demographic diversity and socioeconomic trends. All these social factors together, also noted below, affect trends in family-stability dynamics, and even towns’ budget expenditures and revenues.

“Structural” indicators show identifiable social patterns relatively, and perhaps entirely, impervious to decisions by local public officials. Structural indicators result from many (seemingly, at least, uncoordinated) decisions by private individuals and organizations responding to multiple stimuli over time. Sometimes the interconnections of these structures create problems for certain town types, for example, how to pay for needed physical infrastructure, as in many Central Places and Less Dense towns. They can also create opportunities, for example, of higher income people moving into More Dense Suburban towns that enhance these towns’ revenues.

In analyses below, problems deemed “structural” are usually connected to the two main structural indicators of location and population density. Such structural problems usually require responses of some kind by public officials or they are likely to fester and negatively affect towns’ citizens’ general welfare. When problem-producing conditions persist over a number of years, the conditions are called “structural binds.” Public officials often have great difficulty dealing with structural binds. They play heavily in towns’ budget decisions. Indeed, in one way or another, they affect nearly all major social indicators, as we will see in the following chapters.

What is happening in society, the state, and communities today is usually a continuation, of what has happened in the recent past. Such structural reasoning fits well with Lincoln’s admonition, “If we would first know where we are [in the structures of our local communities] and whither we are tending [on the trends], then we could better tell what to do and how to do it.” To recognize from the outset that social structures have real
effects on people and their governments’ policies helps in understanding how these structures affect the five town types in different ways.

A Typology of the Four Upstate Regions

Towns also have regional as well as county locations. Regional variations are found on nearly every indicator, whose effects, as with town locations, policymakers can only respond to, not change. We used a common regional distinction in identifying upstate New York’s four major regions, the Eastern, Central, Western, and Northern. (Downstate New York City and its counties, cities, and towns were excluded from our analyses.) Population densities also varied considerably among New York’s four major upstate regions.

In general, as seen in Table 1.2, Eastern New York is south of the Adirondacks, includes the capital district, west to Schoharie and Fulton counties, and extends as far as the first set of counties in the Catskills from the Hudson River north of Orange county. Central New York is found south of the Adirondacks from Herkimer and Oneida Counties to the western suburbs of Syracuse, including Oswego, Jefferson, and Cayuga counties, then south to Chemung (Elmira) and Steuben (Corning) counties and their suburb, Schuyler county. Western New York extends from these Central counties westward to Lake Erie, including on its eastern border Wayne, Seneca, Ontario, and Yates counties, which are commuting sheds of Rochester in Monroe County. Northern New York extends from Lewis County northward and eastward, above the Central and Eastern regions. Almost all indicators will be examined using the town and regional typologies in a combined manner as illustrated in the graphs below.

Table 1.2. County and Town Numbers Varied in New York’s Four Major Regions.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Eastern Region</th>
<th>Central Region</th>
<th>Western Region</th>
<th>Northern Region</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Columbia</td>
<td>Cayuga</td>
<td>Allegany</td>
<td>Clinton</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fulton</td>
<td>Chemung</td>
<td>Cattaraugus</td>
<td>Essex</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greene</td>
<td>Chenango</td>
<td>Chautauqua</td>
<td>Franklin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Montgomery</td>
<td>Cortland</td>
<td>Genesee</td>
<td>Hamilton</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Putnam</td>
<td>Delaware</td>
<td>Livingston</td>
<td>Lewis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rensselaer</td>
<td>Jefferson</td>
<td>Ontario</td>
<td>St. Lawrence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saratoga</td>
<td>Herkimer</td>
<td>Orleans</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Schenectady</td>
<td>Madison</td>
<td>Seneca</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Schoharie</td>
<td>Oswego</td>
<td>Wayne</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sullivan</td>
<td>Otsego</td>
<td>Wyoming</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ulster</td>
<td>Schuyler</td>
<td>Yates</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Warren</td>
<td>Steuben</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Washington</td>
<td>Tioga</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Tompkins</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 1.2 also shows the rural counties’ average population densities, and numbers of towns in each region. Towns in the rural counties of Eastern New York have the highest population densities followed by rural counties’ towns in Central, Western, and Northern New York. The Eastern region’s densities averaged 263.9 persons per square mile in 2000, the Central’s 193.1, the Western’s 171.8, and the Northern’s 73.4 (or barely one-fourth the density of Eastern-region’s towns, and just over one-half the Central and Western’s). Upstate Metropolitan core counties were not included in these analyses.

Average ranges of population density among the five town types within each region also varied – more greatly in the Eastern than the others – in 2000 from 27.2 in Less Dense towns there to 941.3 in Central Places. Average ranges in the Central region were from 15.6 to 681.6 in the same two town types, in the Western region from 31.8 to 570.4, and in the Northern region from 13.3 to 131.2. In other words, the four regions varied considerably in their fundamental population densities.

**The County Typology**

Another form of analysis will be used less often in the following chapters, and is based on the rural county typology (see Socioeconomic Trends and Well-Being Indicators in New York State, 1950-2000, chapter 2). This typology, reproduced in Table 1.3, shows that three of the four rural county types included 12 counties, and the fourth 8 counties. (New York’s Metropolitan counties were Types 1-3, two for downstate and the third for upstate – as noted previously, were excluded from this analysis.) The classification in the County Typology is based on the two factors of size of largest place in a county (above or below 9,500 people in 2000, which is very similar to population density of the counties) and extent of commuting for employment (above or below 35% of those employed outside a county of all those in a county’s work force). Although combining the County Typology with the Town Typology often produces new insights on indicators’ dynamics, only certain indicators using the County Typology, mostly in Chapter 3 on Transportation, will be examined below. To use both the County Typology and the Region Typology on all indicators would come close to doubling the size of this document.

### Table 1.3. Numbers of Counties Varied Only a Little in the Four Major County Types.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Size of Largest Place in County (9,500 or More Persons)</th>
<th>Higher than 9,500</th>
<th>Lower than 9,500</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total Numbers of Towns</td>
<td>186</td>
<td>262</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Avg. Population Density in the Region</td>
<td>263.9</td>
<td>193.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>201</td>
<td>171.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>111</td>
<td>73.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Rural Urban Suburban</td>
<td>6. Rural Suburban</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------------------</td>
<td>------------------</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Higher than 35%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cayuga</td>
<td>Oswego</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fulton</td>
<td>Putnam</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Genesee</td>
<td>Rensselaer</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Madison</td>
<td>Saratoga</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Montgomery</td>
<td>Schenectady</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ontario</td>
<td>Wayne</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Avg. Pop. Density = 100.4)</td>
<td>(Avg. Pop. Density = 423.1)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


**Graphs Presenting Indicators’ Trends: Population Densities in the Five Town Types of the Four Major Regions**

The U. S. Census reports information on demographic and socioeconomic indicators in different ways. Some indicators are in *percentages*, others in actual *numbers*. Figure 1.1, for instance, shows average population densities in actual numbers for the five town types since 1980. In all graphs used herein town types (and regions or, occasionally, county types) are always on the horizontal axis and averages for given indicators are always on the vertical axis. The horizontal axis, then, is constant from one graph to another, while the vertical axis changes from one figure to another and is always identified in the graph’s title. Presenting findings in these consistent forms permit easy comparisons of town types in the 44 rural counties.

**Figure 1.1. Between 1980 and 2000, Average Population Densities Fell in Central Places, but Grew or Were Stable in the Other Four (Outlying) Town Types.**
Still, graphs that report actual numbers, for example, of population sizes, age distributions, total employment, or population densities (as in Figure 1.1) show “scales” (on the vertical axis) with wide ranges, sometimes making it difficult to discern dynamics in the two less-dense town types. The scale in Figure 1.1 on population densities has such a range, so that dynamics in the two less-dense towns are barely discernible in the graphs. Reporting percentages rather than numbers on an indicator for each town type usually shows smaller ranges in the graphs’ scales, making them easier to read.

In interpreting graphs, an analyst looks first at the major comparisons that stand out in a figure. A striking image in Figure 1.1, for instance, is the large difference in densities of Central Places (aggregated over all four regions) compared to other town types (also aggregated over the four regions). Type 1 Central Place towns and cities had the highest overall average population densities in 2007 at 547.2 persons per square mile, falling slightly from averages of 555.8 in 2000, 581.3 in 1990, and 589.3 in 1980. Less Dense Rural Towns had the smallest. The other town types fell in-between these extremes. Figure 1.1 also easily shows that Central Places’ densities were three and half times more than More Dense Suburban towns, five times that of Rural More Dense towns, which, in turn had population densities two to three times greater than Less Dense Suburban or Less Dense Rural towns.

A second major finding focuses on trends over time. Clearly, Central Places lost population from 1980 to 2007, while the two more-dense town types increased in population sizes. It should be noted here that data for 1980, 1990, and 2000 are based on actual counts of the Census, while data for 2007 are the U.S. Census Bureau’s estimates of population sizes for towns based on a number of factors, including, for instance, births, deaths, and migration into a town. This overall pattern will persist on other indicators as...
well, forming the underlying basis for many interpretations of findings below. This finding also demonstrates slowly increasing “sprawl” of people into these rural counties.

Type 2 More Dense Suburban towns averaged densities of 161 persons per square mile in 2000 and 163 persons per square mile in 2007; Type 4 Less Dense Suburban towns averaged 31 persons per square mile in 2000 and 33 in 2007; and, Type 5 Less Dense Rural towns averaged 21.5 in 2000 and 22 in 2007. Type 3 More Dense Rural towns averaged 91 persons per square mile in both 2000 and 2007. These findings demonstrate growth from 1990 to 2000, slowing into 2007, but, still growth overall.

A second form of presentation, the one used most often in the chapters below is shown in Figure 1.2. Figure 1.2 initially looks complicated because of the large amount of information it contains. Close examination of it, however, simply shows the equivalent of Figure 1.1 four times in the same graph, one for each of the four regions. In all four regions, Central Places always had greater population densities than the others and, except for the Eastern region, lost population in the Central, Western, and Northern regions. The pattern among outlying towns in each region was also the same as in 2000. More Dense Suburban towns had the second-most density, More Dense Rural towns the third most, Less Dense Suburban towns the second least, and Less Dense Rural towns always had the smallest population densities. Although Central Places tended to lose people between 1990 and 2000, outlying town types show very slight gains along with some small losses in their population sizes in each region.

Figure 1.2. In 2000, Patterns of Average Population Densities in the Town Types Varied Somewhat Across New York’s Four Regions.
Another finding from Figure 1.2 is that differences among the four outlying town types in the four regions were also much smaller than differences among Central Places in the four regions. This overall pattern will persist on other indicators as well, forming an underlying basis for many interpretations of findings throughout the remaining chapters.

All outlying town types in the Eastern region gained population from 2000 to 2007, while those in the other three regions were more stable, even with some small losses. But, due to the various sizes in the scale, the very small increases and decreases are not discernible in Figure 1.2. It appears, then, that some people moved from Central Places of these counties to outlying towns, but probably some growth can be attributed to people from metropolitan counties moving into the suburban and rural towns.

We will see, for instance, in Chapter 4 on demography that numbers of African-Americans and Hispanic-Americans increased in the towns. In certain counties, especially in Eastern and Northern New York, retirees and/or “second-home” owners, who declare a rural county as their main places of residence, also contributed to their population growth. In these ways, population growth also spawned some “sprawl” in each of the four regions.

Such graphs presenting indicators for the five town types in the four regions over time permit quick recognition of how the town types differ from one another, whether a trend is generally increasing or decreasing, whether the regions vary from one another, and whether a gap in numbers or percentages among the town types is widening or narrowing, and, if so, by how much. Such graphs make it easier to identify prospects, opportunities, and problems, among the 760 towns in the 44 rural counties.

Because we have such large numbers in each town type, results unique to individual towns are not included in this document. The graphs show average or general patterns of levels and trends on an indicator for each town type and every region over time. Individual indicators for each town can be found at several sites on the internet, the most popular being <www.American Factfinder.census.gov>. The 3.3 million people living in New York’s 44 rural counties in 2007 represent a population total larger than that found in 26 other states. This total also grew between 1990 and 2000 at an average rate of nearly 2.0 per cent from 3.223 million people in 1990 to 3.290 million in 2007, and, as we saw above, took place largely in counties’ outlying towns not their Central Places.

A third form of presentation of findings used extensively in Chapter Three on Transportation and Housing presents findings using the town typology (of Table 1.1) combined with the county typology in Table 1.3 (instead of the region typology in Table 1.2 and Figure 1.2). It will be explained in more detail in Chapter Three, and will appear much like Figure 1.2, except for the labels on the horizontal axis.
Social trends using the regional form of analysis in Figure 1.2 will be presented in most chapters to follow. The authors of individual chapters made decisions on which kind of graph was more appropriate for their substantive findings. We believe our decisions have generated an optimal understanding of major patterns in the various social trends and their impacts on different town types in their larger contexts.

In any event, information from the trend-graphs provides a basis for understanding both the various indicators and the structural dynamics that underlie latent and manifest issues in these towns.

**Trends Examined in the Chapters**

Each of the following chapters will examine trends in several indicators on a chapter’s topic – land-use planning, transportation, demographics, employment, socioeconomics, family, and budgets. Chapter 2 examines how the five town types differ in using available land-use planning ordinances. Land-use ordinances, including comprehensive plans and incentive zoning, are major policy tools for influencing locations of future transportation systems, future housing, and future services. Such tools both affect and are affected by population densities as well as conditions and trends on other indicators. Towns’ future growth and general welfare depend in part on how their public officials utilize local policy tools available to them.

Chapter 3 focuses on how towns’ transportation networks affect housing patterns and access to counties’ Central Places. Providing easier access to Central Places, where most social, commercial, and legal services are located, is essential for general welfare not only in the Central Place, but probably in the entire county. Most towns provide very good access, but certain towns have more limited access. Greater access to Central Places’ services usually results in better life-quality and well-being for all residents.

Chapter 4 presents demographic conditions and trends from 1980 to 2007 among town types in the four regions. Demographic indicators include overall population sizes, and age-cohort, gender, and ethnic compositions. Towns with more young people and young adults, for example, are more likely to have better life-quality, well-being, and general welfare than others, but, between 1990 and 2000, average numbers for these young people declined in four of the five town types, rising only in More Dense Suburban town types. Reasons for this important dynamic will be explored in Chapter 4.

Towns’ economic and employment structures affect a wide variety of personal well-being and community life-quality indicators and issues. Chapter 5 describes these dynamics in services, manufacturing, and agriculture in the town types. Together, demographic and economic indicators describe what people do for a living. These structures in towns, in turn, strongly influence education and income indicators, examined in Chapter 6 and family indicators described in Chapter 7. In general, when growth occurs in both employment and population indicators, then local socioeconomic
and family well-being are enhanced. Towns whose populations have higher educational and income levels tend to have better general welfare. Such trends include reductions in poverty and poor housing conditions among families and children in the five town types.

Chapter 7 examines several key family-stability indicators, including those for intact and disrupted families. Towns whose populations have greater proportions of intact families are likely to have better life-quality and well-being. But, most town trends show larger proportions of disrupted families. Discussions of policy alternatives that might lead to better personal well-being and collective life-quality by local decision makers under these conditions could become important to these population segments.

Two chapters describe budget dynamics among the five town types. Chapter 8 deals with expenditures and Chapter 9 with revenues. Average budget trends show unequal per household costs and revenues among the town types. Central Places have the largest budgets per household, with Less Dense Rural towns a close second. The two more-dense town types have the smallest. This dynamic puts people in Central Places and Less Dense Rural towns under greater fiscal stress than those in more-dense towns.

Population and household growth usually translate into larger budgets per household, while reducing increases in per household costs in municipal budgets. Population losses in Central Places tend to increase budget pressures there, while population gains in less-dense towns can help relieve them. This dynamic also often contributes to population sprawl among towns in counties. In certain towns, this dynamic also increases competition for property-tax resources among towns to fund their activities.

**Summary and Conclusions**

An introductory chapter generally tries to accomplish three things. First, it provides a rationale for why the document is being written; then it briefly identifies certain key theoretical and analytic issues that will arise in the document, often by interrelating subsequent topics to be examined; and finally it explains major steps used in analyses. Let us summarize each of these, and then draw some general conclusions.

The basic rationale for writing the document is to aid town and small-city leaders and officials in the 44 rural counties in dealing with the various social trends impacting them. To deal with these things requires planning ahead. Effective contemporary planning involves at least three steps (succinctly summarized by Abraham Lincoln):

1) identifying where a town fits into
2) major trends affecting it, in such a way that
3) goals, strategies, resources and programs can be examined for dealing with trends deemed most detrimental while taking advantage of those presenting the most opportunities for residents' public health, safety, and general welfare (as stated in State enabling legislation on comprehensive planning).
Town boards and small-city councils can appoint town planning boards and staff to help with the many issues raised by social trends. Planning boards’ tasks, though, are not a piece of cake. Towns face myriad issues. Usually, these issues are best handled through generating a comprehensive plan. But, comprehensive plans are easier to ask for than to produce. Each plan varies because patterns in the five town types differ on how social trends affect them. State enabling laws for comprehensive plans allow local town boards to consider a wide range of factors, including those that affect residents’ “…public health, safety, and general welfare,” as well as “…the needs of the people of the region of which the town is a part.” Given such mandates, even though 86 percent of towns had planning boards in 2008, only 68 percent had comprehensive plans (usually Central Places and more-dense towns).

Second, among the many social trends, two in particular stand out as prominent in affecting towns’ structures: increasing commuting and increasing diversity. They have become driving forces in towns and interrelate with nearly every other social trend. Socioeconomic, demographic, family, transportation and housing trends all affect, and are affected by, commuting, diversity, pluralities, and coalitions in various ways. The chapters below delve into each one.

Further, these trends are “structural,” that is, they cannot be easily changed by policymakers at any jurisdictional level, national, state, or local. Yet, they can be influenced incrementally by any jurisdiction to enhance positive directions, or modify negative directions, in the trends.

Most towns have always had some diversity, but, due to dynamics that affect sizes of the minorities (and not only ethnic minorities), many minorities have become vocal pluralities. Emerging pluralities include commuters, newcomers, old-timers, renters, poorer people, people living in disrupted families, ethnic minorities, seniors, the elderly, the younger, the college-educated, those employed in agriculture, those employed in manufacturing, those employed in services, and women (the latter two are actual majorities, but lack solidarity in their undertakings). These groupings often overlap, and coalitions among them continually shift even as they seek better personal well-being for themselves and greater life-quality for their communities. They increasingly express concerns about the directions their communities are taking, formally through their voting but also informally through their various associations.

Community leaders, elected officials, decision makers, and concerned citizens in seeking to implement their general values have difficult work and negotiations ahead. The alternating processes of differentiation (toward diversity of all kinds) and integration (town officials, among others, trying to discover ways to live together in greater health, safety, and general welfare) represent two fundamental forces in “dynamic tension” in all
jurisdictions including towns and villages. To integrate trends that drive differences in towns and small cities is not an easy set of tasks.

A third set of issues focused on methods for examining substantive issues. The methods are based on several premises. First was a determination to use as many “objective” indicators as possible. The U.S. Census was the basis of most indicators used in the chapters below, complemented by planning data collected by the New York State Legislative Commission on Rural Resources (in Chapter 3) and budget data for 2005 collected by the New York State Comptroller’s Office (in Chapters 8 and 9). These data are readily available to concerned citizens. Most are on the Internet. Individual town indicators for 1990, 2000, and 2007 may be found on the internet at <www.census.gov>.

Since many Census data used in the indicators for individual towns are based on sometimes quite small samples of people within the towns, data for individual towns may not be reliably accurate. This is especially true of Census data for less-dense towns especially, on certain indicators (like those for employment, income, and education).

Data inaccuracies for so many towns are also why this document presents general averages for the trends in the five town types. Aggregating to averages based on large numbers of towns usually gives more reliable and accurate averages in showing patterns in trends. Combining individual town data with findings based on such data provide the “best information available” to community leaders and policymakers concerned with responding effectively to key local trends as they consider their collective futures.

Three typologies were generated for the analyses, one for town types, one for regional types, and one for county types. The five town types are based on adjacency to a Central Place (adjacent “suburban” or non-adjacent “rural”) and density of towns (50 persons or more per square mile as more-dense; 49 persons or fewer as less-dense). Cross-classifying these two factors, as in Table 1.1 above, produced five town types, namely, Central Places, More Dense Suburban towns, More Dense Rural towns, Less Dense Suburban towns, and Less Dense Rural towns. The four regions were the Eastern, the Central, the Western, and the Northern. And, the four county types were similarly based on density and adjacency to upstate metropolitan counties (where density was translated as more-dense urban and less-dense rural), producing the four county types of Urban Suburban, Urban Rural, Rural Suburban, and Rural Periphery.

Findings are presented in graphic form, where trends from 1980 are placed on the graphs’ vertical axis, and town types and regional types are combined on the horizontal axis of graphs. Graphs enable readers to quickly see differences in trends of each indicator among town types and regions. Graphs in this chapter examined population densities, with a main outcome of underscoring density’s importance in showing differences between Central Places and the other four “outlying” town types.
Three main purposes in viewing the graphs are:

1) To describe patterns in trends on key indicators for the 760 Central Places and outlying towns in New York’s 44 rural counties;
2) To specify which trends are most likely to represent challenges or problems, and which opportunities for local leaders and decision makers; and
3) To consider, following Lincoln’s maxim with which the chapter led off, how community leaders and decision makers can, using the two major policy tools of planning and budgeting, respond positively to such challenges.

As community leaders and officials become more aware of growth in their resources as well as potential problems facing local jurisdictions, these graphs, along with their interpretations could become resources for understanding local planning and budgeting issues in towns’ changes and development. Planning at town levels is important for reducing land-use and other latent conflicts among social segments as well as for proactively determining how to enhance general welfare within and among towns’ populations. Governmental responses to the trends also offer unity as town and small-city officials work on challenges imposed by the social trends.

Increasingly, none of us are islands. Our personal decisions often affect our neighbors whether we intend them to or not. Population and commercial sprawl into outlying towns is one such trend. As people seek greater personal well-being by moving farther from regions’ and counties’ Central Places, they contribute to greater inefficiencies in a variety of ways – from inefficient energy usages, to dispersal of commercial, professional, and public services across a wider landscape (the basis of sprawl), to various forms of environmental degradation and pollution, and to other conditions happening both locally and also across the globe. Efforts to respond effectively to global warming, a trend now well-established by recent scientific reports, at some point will undoubtedly include localities. Small-city and town officials, even in Less Dense Rural towns, will increasingly be implored, perhaps even required, to take seriously the necessity to “think globally and act locally” on issues like carbon emissions and environmental degradation.

Meanwhile, most of us believe that our life together has generally benefited from previous social changes and thus we are reluctant to change our habits, including movement to outlying towns, even as we recognize that they also create such overall resource-use inefficiencies. We also expect that most trends presented here will continue into at least the near future, some generating large challenges to New York’s policymakers at state and county as well as town and small-city levels, especially as the economic downturn of 2008-2009 takes greater effect.

State policies and programs affect or influence many daily routines in town and small-city jurisdictions. State policymakers’ decisions influence health care or economic development much more than those of town officials. Still, town and city leaders on their own can also affect the conditions and trends, in part at least, because they have authority
to plan land uses for the future and, through incentive zoning, to direct local expenditures into specific locations in ways not open to state and county officials.

To make leaders’ efforts more difficult, trends often impact different town types in ways that make it necessary to face different kinds of issues. One type of response does not fit all towns equally. In what specific directions are New York’s towns moving? Are they moving to enhance “…public health, safety and general welfare,” as called for by State enabling laws on comprehensive planning? Are these the directions citizens will choose? In order to accomplish their goals, which trends might people want to address?

Following Lincoln’s admonition, with which this document begins and tries to follow in subsequent chapters, we intend to elucidate key trends indicating to community leaders, concerned citizens, and policymakers, “where we are and whither we are tending” so that New York’s state, small-city, and town officials can “better determine what to do and how to do it” as they seek to increase their communities’ life-quality, personal well-being, health, safety, and general welfare.
CHAPTER 2
LAND-USE PLANNING AND REGULATION

Paul R. Eberts, Charles C. Geisler, and David L. Kay

State law reserves land-use planning and regulation in New York for town, village, and city governments. Counties or regions cannot preempt these local governments in exercising such powers. Land-use planning and regulation is a key part of “home rule” in New York State. It is also a major policy tool that decision makers use in resolving issues generated by social trends.

Through the “reserved” clause in the Tenth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution (the final article in the Bill of Rights), States were given legal authority for powers “not elsewhere covered” in the Constitution. This provision is the ultimate basis for States’ authority over land-use planning. In New York, through “enabling legislation” the State Legislature has passed certain land-use planning authorities for these local governments to use. Among others, five separate sections in New York’s statutes enable these municipalities to establish five widely used planning regulations:

1) a planning board;
2) zoning regulations;
3) subdivision regulations;
4) site-plan review regulations; and
5) comprehensive (or master) plans.

In the enabling legislation for comprehensive planning, the State Legislature made clear its “findings and intent” (e.g. for towns, see Article 12-A, Section 272, and following, of the Town Law). These statements clarify the general purposes underlying land-use planning regulation and establish major themes for this document. They are proactive, forward-thinking, developmental guidelines for town officials to use when dealing with land-use issues.

Sub-section one, on findings and intent, reads, “Significant decisions and actions affecting the immediate and long-range protection, enhancement, growth and development of the state and its communities are made by local
governments.” The next sub-section reads, “Among the most important powers and duties granted by the legislature to a town government is the authority and responsibility to undertake town comprehensive planning and to regulate land use for the purpose of protecting the public health, safety and general welfare of its citizens.” The next section reads, “The development and enactment by the town government of a town comprehensive plan which can be readily identified, and is available for use by the public, is in the best interest of the people of each town.”

Subsequent sections include such phrases as, “…diversity of resources and conditions…compels consideration…in development…”; “…participation of citizens in an open, responsible and flexible planning process...”; “…optimum town comprehensive plan...”; “…needs of people of the region...”; and “…cooperation among government agencies...” All these apply to village, town, and city governments in their planning activities.

Such forward-thinking phrases demonstrate the state legislature’s awareness of key issues that arise when municipal officials undertake land-use planning and regulation. They also give these officials wide latitude in precisely defining, for instance, what is meant by “public health, safety and general welfare.” Towns can specify many things under these phrases – almost anything that involves a land use. Indeed, the State’s Town Law even provides for “incentive zoning” to ensure that new development helps provide for “…open space, housing for persons of low or moderate income, parks, day-care, elder-care and for other specific physical, social or cultural amenities, or cash in lieu thereof, of benefit to the residents of the community authorized by the town board” (Guide to Planning and Zoning, Section 261-b., Incentive Zoning).

City, town, and village governments undertake planning for multiple reasons, but, traditionally, to establish rational-legal processes for resolving local incompatibilities between land uses. To cluster similarly-used locations is common, such as in establishing zones exclusively for single-family residences, others for apartments, and others for businesses. Not permitting encroachments of the latter into the former is common, although “mixed” uses within these zones are also possible and increasingly of interest to planners concerned about sprawl. Establishing boundaries for such zones, as well as proposals to enact zoning itself, can become the basis for conflict among property owners. The enabling legislation provides a means for structuring response to these conflicts through land-use regulations, institutions like zoning boards of appeals, and related procedures.

Land-use conflicts were probably intensified in the 1990s due to rapid socioeconomic restructuring (to be examined in detail in subsequent chapters).
Almost every social change requires a location from which to effect a change, for instance for new housing developments and/or shopping malls or warehouses that might conflict with existing or other potential land uses.

To reduce such conflicts, local officials can use the State-enabling legislation to a) provide for geographically defined restrictions on certain types of land uses (zoning), b) regulate the basic pattern of real property divisions, development, and accompanying infrastructure to ensure it meets municipal standards (subdivision development regulations), and/or c) review proposed development on specific parcels (site-plan review) to ensure that it complies with certain standards for parking, screening, architectural dimensions and features of buildings, means of access, and so forth. Master or comprehensive planning provides a legal rationale for using these three tools. More specifically, municipalities that adopt comprehensive plans must ensure all land use regulations are “in accordance” with it.

During the 1980s and 1990s, socioeconomic and demographic trends stimulated large numbers of householders to move into suburban and rural locations, especially those adjacent to Central Places. Rural towns and their local suburbs subsequently grew faster than nearby Central Places. Accompanied by manufacturing and services industries utilizing land-intensive facilities (e.g. in industrial parks and retail malls), the immigrating householders were of various ages and backgrounds and often commuted outside the county for employment. They also tended to be relatively wealthy, and imbued with suburban “protectionist” values, they gave impetus to recasting local land-uses and politics.

The environmental movement rose to nationwide prominence in the 1960s and 1970s and influenced the perspectives of professional planners. This movement provided an additional motivation for town officials to adopt local land-use planning regulations. Smart-growth and new-urbanism movements rose in response to perceived problems with existing land use planning and were strongly influenced by environmental and economic development concerns. Many environmentalists and economic developers, for different reasons, desired more effective and rationalized land-use planning regulations. Development interests, for example, wanted to be able to plan for the future with a reduced risk of being “blind-sided” by changed regulations after they had begun to implement their plans.

With these changes, the state legislature also recognized new motivations for land-use planning, moving from “reactive” legislation to resolve conflicts toward “proactive” legislation that encourages local governments to think about
“what they want to be or become,” their municipal “character,” and to establish “comprehensive” goals and objectives for themselves.

Adoption of land-use planning regulations by city, town, and village officials, then, helps to allay, prevent, anticipate, and/or provide a rational-legal mechanism both for resolving land use conflicts among individuals, among individuals and businesses, and among individuals, businesses, and other government jurisdictions, while also giving directions to communities on enhancing local public health, safety, and the general welfare.

The purpose of this chapter is to examine the dynamics in towns which have adopted major state-enabled land-use tools. As noted in the previous chapter, we consider only towns located in the State’s 44 rural counties. We will see patterns in the adoption of the five land-use regulations in the five town types in New York’s four regions according to their overall prevalence. Most of the data for this chapter were collected by the New York State Legislative Commission on Rural Resources, and reported in their publications on land uses in 1992, 2004, and 2008. The 1982 data were collected by the New York Department of State. Our findings and descriptions supplement the excellent maps and descriptions reported by the Commission in 2008. One difference in this chapter is the use of the town typology in the four regions for examining the trends among towns in adopting these basic land-use planning policy tools.

How Widespread is the Creation of Planning Boards?

With a number of exceptions, the usual first step toward land-use planning and regulation is the appointment of a town planning board composed of five or seven members. A planning board has “…full power and authority to make investigations, maps, reports and recommendations in connection therewith relating to the planning and development of the town as it seems desirable…” (New York State, Section 271, 14 b of the Town Law). In other words, a planning board can (not must) consider various land-use issues facing a town, one of which is to determine the need for land-use planning regulations and another is to take basic steps in generating an overall plan for using them.

Figure 2.1 shows percentages of the five town types in the four upstate regions that had a planning board in 1982, 1992, 2004, and 2008. Overall, 86 percent of towns had planning boards. Remarkable variations were found among and within the regions. As early as 1982, almost all towns in the Eastern region had appointed planning boards, and by 2008 almost all towns (93 percent) in the Central region also had planning boards. The Western region averaged 76 percent in 1982 and 80 percent by 2008. Towns in the Northern region averaged only 66 percent in 1982, and 73 percent in 2008.
Figure 2.1. Percent of Towns With Planning Board, 1982-2008

By 2008, 98 percent of all towns in the Eastern Region had planning boards, 93 percent in the Central Region, 80 percent in the Western Region, and 73 percent in the Northern Region.

At 69 percent in 2008, Less Dense Rural towns had the lowest overall averages in having a planning board. In the Western and Northern regions they averaged 53 percent and 61 percent respectively. In three of the four regions, Central Places and the two more-dense town types averaged 100 percent, while in the Northern region, they averaged 86 percent. Overall, the two more-dense town types averaged 91 percent, and less-dense suburban towns averaged 85 percent in having planning boards.

What Specific Land-Use Regulations Were More Likely to Have Been Adopted by Town Boards? Is there a Pattern to the Adoption of Land-Use Regulations?

One way to determine the extent of adoption of planning regulations is to examine how many towns had no planning board or land-use planning regulations -- the inverse of these percentages would be that towns had one or more planning regulations. Figure 2.2 shows that by 2008 an overall average of less than 5 percent of the three more-dense town types had no planning regulations. (Beginning in Figure 2.2, we will highly abbreviate the town-type labels while still identifying them as in previous figures.) In the Eastern region, four of the five town types had at least one planning regulation, and 94 percent of Less Dense Rural towns had at least one regulation. In the Northern region, all Central Places had at least one regulation, but the other four town types averaged in the 70 to 80 percent range in having at least one regulation by 2008.
Figure 2.2. On Average by 2008, Less Than 5 Percent of More-Dense Town Types Had No Planning Regulation, Less Dense Suburban Towns 17 Percent, and Less Dense Rural Towns 23 Percent; Towns in the Northern Region Were 10 to 15 Percent Above these Averages.

Even if less-dense towns, especially in the Western and Northern regions, were less likely to have a planning board or land use regulations, clearly the vast majority of them did in 2008. These findings indicate that certain towns with small populations and who believe they are relatively isolated from social changes are less likely to have planning boards or land-use regulations. In contrast, people who support town planning of some kind have had significant effects in these towns by 2008 and undoubtedly will continue their influences into the future.

Which Regulation was the Most Likely to be Adopted?

The question of whether one of the four major land-use planning and regulatory tools was more prevalent in being adopted by town boards is easy to ask, and by 2008 relatively easy to answer. Our findings show that overall in 2008 an average of 72 percent of towns had adopted subdivision regulations. This percentage is slightly larger than towns with zoning regulations (70 percent) or site-plan reviews (64 percent). In fact, by 2008 more towns had adopted comprehensive plans (68 percent) than those with site-plan regulations. This is a decided shift over time. In 2004 towns with site-plan regulations were more numerous (68 percent) than those with zoning (62 percent) and comprehensive plans (60 percent).
Subdivision Regulations. Subdivisions have been major stimuli, as well as outcomes, to population growth and second-home construction in many towns. Subdivision regulations are important because towns eventually take on responsibility for the quality of road, water, and sewer infrastructure, and other land-use aspects of municipal services such as fire safety and transportation access in the subdivisions. When subdivision design or subsequent construction is of poor quality, towns could become responsible for considerable additional and unexpected costs of various kinds, including lawsuits.

The state has enabled towns to regulate certain aspects of property ownership and planned development that may involve multiple adjacent lots where houses or other buildings are to be constructed. The Town Law, Article 12-A, Section 276, states that the purpose for subdivision regulations is to provide “…for the future growth and development of the town and …[for] adequate facilities for the housing, transportation, distribution, comfort, convenience, safety, health and welfare of its population…” Further, “…the town board may, by resolution, authorize and empower the planning board to approve preliminary and final plats of subdivisions showing lots, blocks or sites, with or without streets or highways, within that part of the town outside the limits of any incorporated village.”

The planning board may be authorized by the town board to consider, review, modify, and, after a public hearing, approve subdivision plans. Such a review can include issues like access to water supplies, buildings, roads and streets, prospective traffic, provision for fire protection and fire alarms, relations to towns’ functional or master plans, drainage, flooding, sewers, adequacy of light and air, neighboring properties, parks, playgrounds, public safety, health, and general welfare, emergency services, lighting, signage, and other things specified in the local law or ordinance. Relationship to “anticipated future needs” and “projected population growth” can also be considered. Compliance with zoning and other regulations is also necessary. Usually the approval process happens in several stages. Any grounds for approval or disapproval are to be stated in planning boards’ records. This regulation, then, gives wide latitude to planning boards in their deliberations.

Figure 2.3 shows the extent of adoption of subdivision-regulations from 1982 to 2008. By 2008, even if not by much, the adoption of subdivision regulations was slightly more common than the adoption of other land-use tools. In 2008, Central Places in all four regions had the highest average levels (93 percent over all regions), More Dense Suburban towns second (81 percent), More Dense Rural towns third (75 percent), Less Dense Rural towns next to last (56 percent), and Less Dense Suburban towns last (54 percent).
In 2008, Average Percentages of All Town Types in the Eastern and Central Regions Increased in Having Sub-Division Regulations, while Most Town Types in the Northern and Western Regions Showed Declines.

Zoning Regulations. Zoning was the first of the major land-use control tools to be established. Its fundamental principle is to separate incompatible land uses from one another by districts or zones. Section 262 of the Town Law forms the basis for town zoning. It states, “For any or all of said purposes the town board may divide that part of the town which is outside the limits of any incorporated village or city into districts of such number, shape and area as may be deemed best suited to carry out the purposes of this act; and within such districts it may regulate and restrict the erection, construction, reconstruction, alteration or use of buildings, structures or land. All such regulations shall be uniform for each class or kind of buildings, throughout such district but the regulations in one district may differ from those in other districts.”

Because zoning controls determine whether and where, rather than how, given uses of property are to be permitted, they can be relatively controversial. Another restrictive element of zoning controls building height and property line setbacks in a manner specific to each zoning district. In general, zoning is more likely to affect the sale and building plans of the full spectrum of property owners, including single family homeowners and owners of existing structures,
than are subdivision and site plan reviews which typically exempt smaller building projects and/or certain kinds of properties from review. People can easily conceive how living in different types of zones might impact their future abilities to buy, sell, alter, or otherwise use their land. Controversy has also followed exclusionary forms of zoning that have been used to keep certain types of people, especially families with less money, from being able to live in particular neighborhoods and communities.

A 1991 addition to zoning law allows “incentive zoning,” which is intended to enhance the possibility of achieving community benefit or amenities. Section 261-b, 1(b) of the town law states, “The purpose of the system of incentive, or bonus zoning shall be to advance the town's specific physical, cultural and social policies in accordance with the town's comprehensive plan and in coordination with other community planning mechanisms or land use techniques”. Incentive zoning enables the municipality to offer the developer the benefits of specified relaxation of existing zoning rules (e.g. an increase in the number of allowable units) in return for the provision of community benefits.

Section 261-b, 1.(b) of the town law defines community benefits or amenities as follows, “Community benefits or amenities’ shall mean open space, housing for persons of low or moderate income, parks, elder care, day care or other specific physical, social or cultural amenities, or cash in lieu thereof, of benefit to the residents of the community authorized by the town board.”

An implication of providing for zoning incentives is that the law recognizes certain “mixed uses” within specific zones as being beneficial to community residents. In this regard, incentive zoning is intentionally proactive (more than reactive) in the planning process. Although the extent of particular forms of benefits or amenities in a community has not been tested in court, the law gives town boards reasonably wide latitude in defining what the “community wants to be” and then in seeking ways, including through monetary incentives, to implement such a vision. In this sense, incentive zoning fits well with the ideas behind comprehensive planning which enables similar purposes.

Overall in 2008, an average of 70 percent of the town types had zoning regulations. A major feature that stands out in Figure 2.4 is the extensive growth in adopting zoning regulations between 1992 and 2008. Increases averaged 20 percentage points between 1992 and 2008, with larger increases in More Dense Rural towns (33.5 percentage-points) than the others and the smallest increases (11.4 percentage-points) in Less Dense Rural towns. In other words, even some outlying towns were finding it to their advantage to have zoning regulations.
Central Places were the most likely to have adopted zoning regulations. By 2008 in three of the four regions over 85 percent of Central Places had zoning, and 83 percent overall. Less Dense Rural towns were much less likely, averaging only 44 percent overall, but rising from 32 percent in 1992 and 41 percent in 2004. Towns in the Eastern region were the most likely, averaging 75 percent, and towns in the Western region at an average of 73 percent ranked second. Towns in the Central and Northern regions averaged 63 and 68 percent. The Central region had the greatest range of average percentages among the town types in having zoning regulations in 2008, from 100 percent in Central Places to 32 percent in its Less Dense Suburban town types.

**Site-Plan Regulations.** Site-plan review and approval regulations were State enabled in 1975. But, data for adoptions of this regulation are available only for 1992, 2004, and 2008.

Site-plan review regulations parallel, supplement, and sometimes apparently substitute for subdivision regulations. Subdivision regulations apply to multiple parcels of land, while site-plan review regulations apply to single parcels. Site-plan regulations tend to apply primarily to large lots for commercial or industrial purposes, but can also apply to condominiums, apartment buildings, and even certain residences. Town boards have wide discretion in assigning components to be reviewed under a site-plan regulation, but they generally include components similar to those in subdivision regulations. In addition, especially in conforming to comprehensive plans, site-plan regulations can cover things such as parking, screening, signage,
landscaping, location and dimensions of buildings, protection of adjacent land uses, and architectural features, depending upon how the regulation reads in particular towns.

Figure 2.5 shows that, again, the three more-dense town types -- Central Places, More Dense Suburban, and More Dense Rural towns -- were much more likely to have adopted site-plan regulations than less-dense towns. Eastern-region towns had adopted them at an overall average of 76 percent among its five town types in 2008, while towns in the Central region averaged 66 percent and the Western region 64 percent. Only 49 percent of towns in the Northern region had adopted site-plan regulations. The lowest adoption rates for all regions were in Less Dense Suburban towns -- they averaged only 20 percent.

**Figure 2.5. In 2008, Average Percentages of Towns in the Northern Region Were Less Likely to Have Site-Plan Review Regulations than Those in the Other Regions.**

The pattern in adopting site-plan regulations also showed large positive growth rates between 1992 and 2004 in all regions (averaging 21 percentage points). But, declines from 2004 to 2008 among certain town types, especially in all but the Western regions, averaged 9 percentage-points overall. In the Western region, in contrast to their “losses” in subdivision regulations, growth rates in adopting site-plan regulations between 2004 and 2008 were especially high, increasing from 52 percent overall all towns in 2004 to 64 percent in 2008.

Possibly due to their sparse population sizes, and low growth in numbers of people, town boards of less-dense towns could accept site-plan regulations as standing alone, or instead of, subdivision and zoning regulations. As town
boards and their residents have become more aware of environmental and life-quality issues, such regulations could also become a key tool in supplementing other regulations for providing additional safeguards for towns’ residents due to various kinds of developments.

Findings on subdivision, zoning, and site-plan regulations indicate that population densities and regional locations are two key factors affect the adoption of these three land-use regulations by town boards. Because of the large ranges in percentages among the town types, population density is the stronger of these two factors in adopting the different kinds of land-use regulations. But, regional location is a second strong factor in adoption patterns. Other factors undoubtedly play roles in specific towns such as when a company of a particular type tries to locate in what residents consider an incompatible location. But, the importance of specific factors, even of regional locations, pales in comparison to the overall influence of town types and their population densities in impacting decisions on adopting land-use regulations.

Adoption of these three types of land-use regulations also shows much variation among towns and regions. The lack of uniform general patterns probably indicates that many local as well as regional variations play into any specific reasons to adopt these regulations.

**What Patterns Appear in Adopting Comprehensive (or Master) Plans?**

Comprehensive planning is a major local policy tool that enables towns to engage in proactive planning in response to socioeconomic-demographic trends examined in the remainder of this document. Many such trends were rather dramatic with strong implications for the locations in which they take place. They can also be disruptive, create land-use controversies, and interfere with towns attaining their development goals. Towns with comprehensive plans that make efforts to update them regularly would undoubtedly be better prepared to avoid or manage such conflicts and disruptions. Some towns experiencing development pressure might be successful at combining incentive zoning with comprehensive plans to produce amenities many residents desire.

Still, many less-dense towns, especially, lack authoritative written comprehensive plans. They may well be relying on the other three major land-use tools to carry them through in dealing with their social trends. As stated in Section 272-a, 2 (b) of the *Town Law*, a comprehensive plan “…means the materials, written and/or graphic, including but not limited to maps, charts, studies, resolutions, reports and other descriptive material that identify the goals, objectives, principles, guidelines, policies, standards, devices and instruments for the immediate and long-range protection, enhancement, growth and development of the town located outside the limits of any incorporated village or

As such, a comprehensive plan can be a development document that anticipates, responds to, and provides guidelines for dealing with many of the sorts of analyses undertaken in subsequent chapters of this report. The enabling legislation, passed in 1995 with sponsorship by the Legislative Commission on Rural Resources, establishes a structured process for towns and cities to adopt comprehensive plans, including specifying goals and objectives of local governments and their residents, and public participation in the formulation and review of proposed plans.

A major finding in Figure 2.6 is the decline between 1992 and 2008 in percentages of towns having comprehensive plans. Although an average of 78 percent of all of the towns in the rural counties considered in this analysis reported having comprehensive plans in 1992, in 2008 only 68 percent overall reported that they had comprehensive plans. Less-dense towns showed the largest declines, averaging 15 percentage-points in Less Dense Rural towns and 21 percentage-points in Less Dense Suburban towns. Central Places and the two more-dense town types lost an average of only 5 percentage-points.

Some caution should be exercised in interpreting this trend. Data from the mid-1990’s for all New York towns, inclusive of the urban ones excluded in the rest of this analysis, shows increases in the number of towns with comprehensive plans through the present. Moreover, in general comprehensive plans do not actually disappear. Rather than being repealed, unhelpful plans instead tend to retreat ever deeper into disuse, perhaps falling out of a respondent’s memory as well.

One specific plausible explanation of the results reported here relates to legislative changes adopted during the early 1990’s. This legislation for the first time articulated in substantial detail the standard contents and role of an adopted, written comprehensive plan. Prior to this, courts had accepted a wide variety of documentation as the legal equivalent of a comprehensive plan. The legislation clearly stated that, “Nothing herein shall be deemed to affect the status or validity of existing master plans, comprehensive plans, or land use plans.” Nevertheless, insofar as this non-mandatory legislative change was in large part adopted in order to educate local officials about comprehensive planning, it can be taken as a sign of success that some towns reporting
comprehensive plans in 1992 would no longer consider them functional in subsequent years.

Figure 2.6. Between 1992 and 2008, Almost All Town Types Showed Smaller Average Percentages of Towns Having Adopted Written Comprehensive Plans.

Figure 2.6 shows that, in 2008, an average of 90 percent of Central Places across all regions had adopted written comprehensive plans, while an average of only 51 percent of outlying less-dense towns had such comprehensive plans. More-dense outlying towns averaged 74 percent. Overall, then, over two-thirds of towns (68 percent) in 2008 had written comprehensive plans.

In 2008, towns in the Eastern region averaged 80 percent in having comprehensive plans, the Central region 73 percent, 62 percent in the Western region, and 57 percent in the Northern region. These numbers contrast with those from 1992. Overall in 1992, towns in the Eastern region averaged 92 percent in having comprehensive plans, those in the Central region averaged 78 percent, 76 percent in the Western region, and 66 percent in the Northern region.

That so many towns in the Northern region had comprehensive plans in 1992 was probably influenced by the creation in the early 1970’s of two regional planning agencies, the Adirondack Park Agency (APA) and the Tug Hill Commission. Both agencies were given authority by the state to promote regional and local planning within their respective regions, though the approach in the Adirondacks from a regulatory standpoint was significantly more centralized, muscular, and locally controversial. Beginning in 1997, New York City also provided an impetus to towns in the Catskills in the Eastern region to engage in comprehensive planning as part of its watershed initiative. More generally, towns have been increasingly encouraged to adopt comprehensive
plans by professional planners at both state and local levels, environmentalists, economic developers, and other constituencies as part of the growing “smart-growth” movement.

What Patterns Appear among Towns that Had Adopted All Five State-Enabled Land-Use Tools?

Compared to towns with fewer such regulations, towns that adopt all five land-use planning tools should, at least in theory, be better prepared to handle land-use conflicts, anticipate changes in trends, and find programs for implementing their goals.

Figure 2.8 presents findings on percentages of towns in the four regions with all five land-use regulations in place (a planning board, subdivision, site-plan, and zoning regulations, and comprehensive plan). Overall by 2008, an average of nearly half, 45 percent, of all towns had all five land-use regulations, up from 24 percent in 1992 and 39 percent in 2008. But, these percentages varied widely among the town types and regions. At 76 percent, Central Places had considerably higher averages than the others. Only 22 percent of Less Dense Rural Towns had all five regulations in place, the lowest average of all. More Dense Suburban towns averaged 53 percent, More Dense Rural towns 44 percent, and Less Dense Suburban towns 27 percent.

**Figure 2.8. By 2008, Overall an Average 45 Percent of All Towns Had Adopted All Five Planning Tools, Up from 39 Percent in 1992.**

Although a majority of towns had not adopted all five tools by 2008, the majority of Central Places and More Dense Suburban towns had adopted all five, and, except in the Central region, a near majority (averaging 48 percent) of More
Dense Rural towns had adopted all five. The largest range in averages was found in the Western region, showing a low average of 12 percent in Less Dense Rural towns to a high of 79 percent in Central Places.

The most surprising finding in Figure 2.8 is the growth between 1992 and 2008 in percentages of towns having all five regulations. The vast majority (four of the five town types in each of the four regions) showed such growth, and their overall average percentage growth rate in 2008 was 6.5 percentage-points over their rates in 2004. From 1992 to 2008, the increases averaged 21 percentage-points. The two less-dense town types had the highest growth rates. Again, the two less-dense towns averages were smaller than those of the more-dense towns. Less Dense Suburban towns averaged a 19.5 percentage-point increase between 1992 and 2008, while Less Dense Rural towns averaged only 13 percentage-points.

As with the adoption of other regulations, overall averages by 2008 (in Figure 2.8) for each town type showed that Central Places were most likely to have adopted all five regulations, more-dense towns second most likely, and less-dense towns least likely. This pattern (of “stepwise downward progression”) offers additional support for the importance of population densities as a key factor for why towns adopt land-use planning regulations. To have all five planning regulations in place by 2008 was not common in outlying less-dense towns (averaging only 24 percent in 2008). Less Dense Rural towns probably saw fewer dynamics in their socioeconomic-demographic trends, and less density in land uses and thus, less need to put the full range of land-use planning tools in place.

**Discussion and Conclusions**

Issues of municipal planning and development usually play out at the local level, but are influenced by larger trends and nonlocal policies. The topic even captured national headlines in June 2005 when the U.S. Supreme Court issued its highly controversial 5-4 decision upholding the use of eminent domain on behalf of a private developer in the City of New London, Connecticut. Justified as a legal “public use” related to the community benefits afforded by economic development, this decision permitted New London to condemn the private property of one party (an energetic early middle-aged single woman named Kelo) for use and development by a second private party, a for-profit corporation.

The environmental movement has also had a large influence on planning. In 1975 New York State passed the State Environmental Quality Review Act (SEQRA) which requires that a thorough environmental review, including an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) for projects judged to have the potential
to have large environmental impacts, be conducted by agencies with permitting authority for individual development projects. This state legislation influences all significant local land use decisions and represents a major backdrop to the challenges in local land-use planning in New York. The driving political and social forces behind SEQRA probably also helped generate momentum for adopting larger numbers of local comprehensive plans and other land-use regulations between 1982 and 1992. The huge socioeconomic-demographic re-structuring during the 1992 to 2008 period represents one of these forces.

As noted above, New York State has provided for five major types of land-use regulations as tools that towns can (not must) use in their land-use planning -- appointing planning boards and adopting regulations for subdivisions, zoning, site-plan review, and adopting comprehensive plans. According to data collected by the New York State Legislative Commission on Rural Resources, in 2008 about 15 percent of the 760 towns in the 44 rural counties had no planning board or any land-use planning regulations. Yet, three times this many towns, an average of 45 percent among the town types, had all five planning tools in place.

The five land-use tools examined above are major policy tools through which towns respond to the land use elements of economic development; they influence mall development primarily through zoning and site-plan review regulations, population sprawl with its housing developments primarily through zoning and subdivision regulations, and other socioeconomic, demographic, and environmental changes through comprehensive planning and its implementation.

Using data on planning tools provided by the Legislative Commission on Rural Resources for 760 municipalities between 1982 and 2008, we demonstrated that towns’ locations and their subsequent population densities and increased sizes certainly influenced towns’ adoptions of the planning tools. The vast majority of towns use one or more of these tools, and the most-dense towns, Central Places and More Dense Suburban towns, are largely the ones increasingly using all the available tools. Population density itself seems to demand this.

Land-use conflicts have occurred especially in places with greater population densities and diversities, such as in Central Places and more-dense suburban and rural towns, and even more especially when growth occurs. But, these same kinds of places have undergone and are undergoing social changes rapidly enough to provide opportunities for them to re-think who they are and what they want to become. Thus, these jurisdictions are more likely to adopt the full-range of planning regulations. Property-rights advocates believe
government should have a minimal role in controlling land use on private land holdings and thus oppose most regulatory forms of land-use planning. However, in most New York communities, and especially in more-dense towns, residents appear to want some assurance that property values will not be damaged due to changes in neighboring land uses, and that community amenities are available to them.

By 2008, in addition to a planning board, nearly 85 percent of the 760 towns in New York’s 44 rural counties had one or more land-use regulations in place. Still, many towns had no professional planning staffs to help in designing or implementing the matrix of regulations, administrative and quasi-judicial procedures for implementing them effectively. Instead, these towns usually relied on county staff, professional consultants, and/or their own ad hoc resources to help them in these tasks. With this context, it is not surprising that land-use plans are often updated only intermittently.

Less-dense towns were most likely to have no regulations, while in 2008 about 75 percent of more-dense towns and almost 90 percent of Central Places had adopted all five planning tools. In any case, many towns did not have all possible regulations, so they have fewer tools in place for handling the variety of land-use challenges and opportunities that might arise due to their socioeconomic trends or to engage in anticipatory developmental planning.

Momentum towards comprehensive planning has probably been facilitated by professional planners at regional and county institutions such as county and regional planning agencies. These include, dating from the 1970’s, high profile regional state agencies such as the Adirondack Park Agency and the Tug Hill Commission, and after 1997, the New York City sponsored Catskill association of watershed towns. Otherwise, only the most-dense towns, Central Places and More Dense Suburban towns especially, had professional planners on their staffs. Towns with higher population densities and those with more spatial and social-structural access (linkages) to wealthier and larger core centers in the Eastern region were also more likely to have comprehensive plans.

In 2008, nearly two-thirds of Central Places had the full range of land-use regulations, while only one-quarter of less dense towns had all five land-use planning regulations. More Dense Rural towns fell in-between these averages, but nearer the top than the bottom. In other words, much room is available for outlying towns to put more planning regulations in place in taking advantage of these important policy tools.

Since in the 1990s economic restructuring was heavily influenced by widespread adoption of new computerized technologies in nearly every
industrial sector, future technologically-based restructuring could become even less dependent on high-density spatial locations. People commuting outside their counties of residence for employment also increased in significant numbers in outlying towns in the 1990s. These two trends induced more sprawl into counties’ outlying towns. Sprawl might also spread more widely into less-dense rural towns in the future. As time-distance costs move toward zero, as they have since about the 1970s (with a few counter-blips such as happened in early to mid-2008), then higher population densities could continue to be more widely experienced among outlying towns.

Such events could also prompt town policymakers to adopt more aggressive land-use planning tools, even in outlying rural towns, to combat the dislocations these trends induce. Planning processes anticipate potential and actual land-use conflicts that always accompany social changes, and set future directions for handling growth. As the array of socioeconomic and demographic trends widens in every town, they are likely to cause future land-use planning usage, especially in outlying rural towns, to become more relevant and prevalent.

As these events unfold, proactive components of comprehensive planning toward enhancing public health, safety, and general welfare and other similar goals will also become more prominent in all town types and regions. Towns will undoubtedly be, literally, forced to become more forward-thinking about the underlying goals they want to achieve in the face of the many conflict-producing changes. Many challenges continue to face New York’s towns, and, although land-use planning tools are limited in what they can do for municipalities to achieve their goals, they are, along with budgets, one of the two major policy tools used in responding effectively to these challenges.
CHAPTER 3
TRANSPORTATION

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Introduction

Contemporary communities are not self-sufficient. They require a variety of linkages to generate their optimum development, and roadway systems are a primary means for linking one place to another, especially in rural areas. In general, when major transportation linkages among places grow, communities on or near them also grow and develop. The development of the Erie Canal system had such effects in the 19th century as did the Interstate Highway system in the mid-20th century. Do such enhanced roadways in rural counties’ towns today have similar development effects? The answer is more complex than it might seem at first blush.

Roadways are only one of several ways rural communities link with each other. Global and regional transportation linkages depend on at least five major forms of infrastructure connecting land, water and air. These include high-speed, four-lane divided highways; railroad terminals that can handle all kinds of freight; airports where commercial or general aviation aircraft can land; seaway terminals for freighters and tankers; and bus and truck terminals and their warehouses. All enable transportation linkages that both result from previous developments and encourage future development. Counties and regions with well-developed transportation linkages are more likely to show greater levels of development than localities with fewer such linkages.

Within most rural and suburban counties only Central Places are large enough to attract multiple forms of transportation linkages. Counties’ outlying towns use enhanced roadways (but usually not four-lane) to link with each other and to Central Places.
Transportation systems are expensive to build and maintain for the nation, the state, and localities. In 2005, the 760 small cities and towns in New York’s 44 rural counties spent varying amounts but often large proportions of their operating expenditures for maintenance and up-grading of roadways. The two less-dense town types spent nearly 65 percent, the two more-dense town types averaged 45 percent, but Central Places – which typically provide a broader variety of services – spent only 20 percent. These expenses included charges for highway staff and their benefits, contracts, and equipment. In general then, as we will also see below, outlying towns have greater proportions of transportation costs in their operating budgets as well as lower population densities, longer distances to reach Central Places, and comparatively lower-quality roads.

Many people believe their living costs are lower and their life-quality enhanced when they live outside counties’ Central Places. The vast majority of workers living in outlying towns commutes outside their town of residence for employment, and an average of one-third of those employed who live in these towns commute outside their county of residence for employment.

Although their transportation costs in dollars and time exceed those for people living closer to their places of employment and services, at least one-third of the employed population makes this trade-off. Lower costs of housing, lower taxes (along with fewer public services), and other cost related factors may influence rural location preferences, but many rural residents simply prefer aspects of life-quality and well-being that aren’t available in more densely populated areas. However, since public transportation is one of the services usually not available to them, outlying towns’ residents tend to drive alone as well as greater distances for employment and services. From both a personal and collective perspective, then, commuting is comparatively expensive and inefficient.

The movement of significant numbers of people to outlying towns, as has happened in most New York rural and suburban counties for decades now, contributes to “rural sprawl.” Such sprawl has cumulative and even some irreversible impacts over time. Initially, a house here and a house there do not seem to place large burdens on the environment or local services, nor do they appear to cause conflicts with farming or forestry neighbors. Over time, the scatter of houses can add up to multiple septic-system breakdowns, sewage-disposal and water-quality problems, increased demand for municipal services (including road maintenance), habitat fragmentation, changes in rural character, and value and life-style conflicts between farm and forestry operators and rural newcomers.
Such inefficiencies have become increasing concerns in town planning. Overall land-use planning usually starts from existing, relatively stable roadway infrastructures into and between rural towns. Town officials recognize the importance of access to various private and public services in nearby Central Places. Access plays a vital role in transportation and land-use planning on issues such as whether to up-grade certain roads. Resultant increased housing numbers and town population sizes and densities usually occur near but not necessarily on towns’ major arteries. Improvements to these arteries will also improve the chances for towns to experience growth in housing units and other development. Such growth provides an incentive to town officials insofar as it increases their tax base and permits them to provide enhanced services to their residents and/or reduce per-household costs.

Existing roadway systems, when enhanced, then, connect towns to regional transportation networks and, through them, to potential new housing, business and industrial development, employment opportunities, and overall fiscal opportunities. They also have consequences associated with sprawl. Town officials are intimately involved in a series of trade-offs among factors connected to sprawl and development especially, but also to overall budget improvements for towns, their life-quality, and their general welfare. These issues set the stage for considering the findings in this chapter.

Roadways and Development: An Informative Image. Roadway systems’ effects on town and village development can be demonstrated by a three-dimensional image for Tompkins County. As seen in Figure 3.1, Tompkins County is roughly a square with Ithaca City at its center. About half of the 44 rural counties have similar configurations. Vertical lines indicating higher property values (as a sign of development) are easily seen for Ithaca City, the Town of Ithaca that completely surrounds it, the village of Lansing adjacent to and north of the Ithaca Town, and villages near the county’s edges. These higher-valued parcels are also seen along roadway arteries to the villages, and for parcels adjacent to Cayuga Lake (in the image’s northern middle left).

Figure 3.1. Property Values in Tompkins County in 3-D (Looking Northeast) Show Very High Values in Ithaca City and its Nearby Towns, Moderately High Values in Outlying Villages and Roads Leading to Them, and along Cayuga Lake’s Shores (Center Left).
The image is slightly tilted so that north is near its upper-left boundary line. The City and Town of Ithaca merging in the center of the image have the highest property values (vertical lines). Less-high vertical lines are also found in more densely packed outlying villages and on roadways leading to them.

Property values in the village of Lansing with its mall development, adjacent to the upper left of the Town of Ithaca, are barely distinguishable from those of the City and Town of Ithaca. Lansing is the county’s largest village. Dryden in the upper-right center is the second largest village, followed by Trumansburg (center-left) and Groton (upper center). Between Groton and Dryden is a road to the village of Freeville. Slaterville (center right, on a major route to Binghamton in Broome County) has almost no commercial development and is therefore barely visible. Likewise, Danby (lower-right center), on a main route to Owego in Tioga County, also has little development. The very low property values beyond Danby signify the roadway passing through a state-owned forest. Newfield (lower center) is another small village on the main route to Elmira in Chemung County. The route northwest to Geneva along Cayuga Lake just east of Trumansburg (left center) also shows higher property values, the highest lines being wineries, restaurants, and a power plant in Lansing Town. House prices there are also higher.

Slightly higher vertical lines along the arterials connecting outlying villages to Ithaca show how arterial roadways impact property values. Although each arterial shows some very low property values, hence no height, property
values along arterial roadways are certainly higher than on other side roads in the image.

The configuration of roadways seen in Figure 3.1 tends to divide Tompkins County into six equilateral triangles. Such a configuration has been shown mathematically (by Karl Fox of Iowa State University) to be the most time-distant efficient system in accessing a Central Place from rural localities. Most counties that lie on a reasonably flat plain without major obstructing hills or lakes between outlying places and Central Places take this form.

Each arterial roadway in Tompkins County has been improved in recent years for road quality by widening and re-paving. The improvements increased property values on the arterials and in outlying villages, indicating how essential roadway networks are for improving tax bases in the various towns best connected by roadways. The image also shows where sprawl, including some “leap-frogging” over vacant land, occurred in outlying towns.

Applying this model to other rural counties shows that major four-lane divided highways are long-standing parts of key state and local roadway arterial infrastructures that stimulated development in upstate cities and almost all towns where interchanges exist. These include the Thruway (Interstate 90), its interchanges, and beltways around Albany, Syracuse, Rochester, and Buffalo, the Northway (I-87) from New York City to Albany to Plattsburgh to Montreal in Canada, I-81 through Binghamton and Syracuse from Scranton, PA, I-88 from Binghamton to Albany, and State Route 17 (the “Southern Tier Expressway,” now becoming I-86). When first built, State Routes 5, 7, 9, 11, 12, 20, and others (the predecessors to these major four-lane highways), which often parallel the interstates, helped link small urban nodes and villages to each other, also with beneficial economic effects to them.

Decisions about quality of access of such powerful influences on local development are usually external to towns in that they are state or interstate routes. As such, final decisions on these roads rest with state or federal officials. Small-city and town officials exerted a great deal of influence on their initial locations, but have only minor contemporary influence on roads’ quality. Yet, these roadways have large effects on towns they traverse. Crossroads and interchanges are usually ideal locations for businesses and housing development that usually have beneficial economic effects in the towns and county.

But, such developments also tend to increase sprawl and associated traffic through which renewed roadways pass, bringing congestion, noise, lower air-quality, health and safety risks, and erosion from re-directed water channels and pollutants from automobiles, certain commercial establishments, and housing
developments. These represent major issues in towns’ transportation and related planning. Comprehensive planning, especially, usually addresses roadway improvements. Existing state and interstate roadways through and among towns play such major roles in town development that town officials sometimes lobby for them and try to take advantage of them.

Such changes make it important for towns to generate ways to measure (or take advantage of the State Department of Transportation’s measures of) existing roadway networks in terms of access to resources in other towns, and to assess how roadway access in planning provides an additional tool for town planners. If people living in outlying rural and suburban towns can reduce time-distance factors in accessing Central Places’ services, then various developments are likely to occur, overall tax bases increase, and overall personal and family life-quality and well-being improve.

Yet, overall economic costs of rural sprawl also happen. People in outlying towns’ populations, not only the poor or working poor, need services generally provided in Central Places or their immediate suburbs. In the current (2008) situation of rising energy and “breadbasket” costs compared to incomes, they need cost-reduced ways to access such services. As towns look to economic development from several sources, including enhanced agriculture and additional housing, an inventory of the ease of roadway accessibility from any given town can serve as a backbone for decision-making on the transportation issues that dominate outlying towns’ budgets.

**Measuring Towns’ Roadway Systems**

Classifying access to and from towns begins by categorizing, counting, and comparing towns’ roadway systems. Several ways are possible to classify road networks, such as mileage of roadways per square mile or mileage per household. But, these numbers provide little information on roads’ quality, or connectivity to each other or other towns. These latter features are essential in understanding and using roadway networks as bases of further planning.

The New York State Department of Transportation provides a way to classify roads by their quality and carrying capacities. But, this system of classification does not account for roadways that cross town borders or feeder roads into arterial roads.

To create new transportation measures for the town-types, we selected a sample of rural counties (explained below), and assessed towns’ various road qualities. The actual classification included quantity and quality of roadways (not including current state of repair) plus whether they entered (or exited) the towns. Information on arterials (through roads), feeders, and their quality are
available on certain commercial maps. Later, we correlate these roadway-accessibility qualities to other important issues in towns, such as commuting, planning levels, and housing indicators such as house values.

**Scoring Roadway Accessibility.** Each road in each town of selected counties was given a score. The scores were derived from applying a road-score typology to county and town maps that displayed similar details. These maps were produced by MapWorks, Inc., of Rochester, New York, or by Jimpaco, of Round Lake, New York. Their classification systems paralleled, and extended, the State Department of Transportation’s system.

Table 3.1 shows seven different types of roads, plus whether they were “through” or “terminal” within a town (which differs from the State’s system). The result gives 14 roadway types. The road types ranged from multi-lane or toll roads to primary highways, to arterial roads, to local roads, to small seasonal roadways. A terminal road ends within a town, often where one end touches a town border but does not cross it. A through road enters and exits a town, crossing two of a town’s boundaries. Through roads were given an additional point to the score on the road typology.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Type 1</td>
<td>Toll, Multi-Lane Divided, Limited Access, Through</td>
<td>14 points</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Type 2</td>
<td>Toll, Multi-Lane Divided, Limited Access, Terminal</td>
<td>13 points</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Type 3</td>
<td>Multi-Lane Divided, Limited Access, Through</td>
<td>12 points</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Type 4</td>
<td>Multi-Lane Divided, Limited Access, Terminal</td>
<td>11 points</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Type 5</td>
<td>Multi-Lane Undivided, Through</td>
<td>10 points</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Type 6</td>
<td>Multi-Lane Undivided, Terminal</td>
<td>9 points</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Type 7</td>
<td>Primary Highway, Through</td>
<td>8 points</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Type 8</td>
<td>Primary Highway, Terminal</td>
<td>7 points</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Type 9</td>
<td>Arterial Road, Through</td>
<td>6 points</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Type 10</td>
<td>Arterial Road, Terminal</td>
<td>5 points</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Type 11</td>
<td>Local Road, Through</td>
<td>4 points</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Type 12</td>
<td>Local Road, Terminal</td>
<td>3 points</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Type 13</td>
<td>Seasonal Road, Through</td>
<td>2 points</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Type 14</td>
<td>Seasonal Road, Terminal</td>
<td>1 point</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Sources: County and regional maps used in this study were produced by MapWorks, Inc., of Rochester, New York, or by Jimpaco of Round Lake, New York, which had similar classifications.)

Utilizing these scores’ hierarchy produced a composite additive score for each town. Although the scores are ad hoc, similar outcomes were found when giving different “weights” to each road type. Since towns’ roadway-accessibility
scores derived from Table 3.1 seemed the simplest, we chose to use them in further analyses.

Because most towns in rural counties are divided by politically-drawn rather than geographically-determined boundaries (roughly a grid pattern with arterial diagonals, as in Figure 3.1 above), town borders are often defined by roadways. In cases where two towns were divided by a roadway that ran along the entire town border but not into either town, we counted the road as being “terminal” in both towns. These roads often provide access to both towns via side roads. For any town with a border road that extended beyond a town border on both ends, the road would be considered a “through” road. Other roads completely inside a town were considered “local” and terminal.

When each road was categorized and counted, a total additive score was assigned to the town. When summed, this score reflects a town’s roadway transportation infrastructure. The scoring was by the inverse of the typology. For each Type 1 road, the town received 14 points toward its score; for each Type 2 road, 13 points; and so forth, to one point for Road Type 14, Seasonal Terminal roads. Seasonal roads were not consistently represented on the maps. Most towns had few seasonal roads, thus adding few points to their totals. Whether they were included in the score or not was negligible for overall town roadway scores. Road Type 12 — local roadways — were by far the most prevalent.

Figure 3.2 shows a fictional town with all fourteen road types used in the roadway-accessibility typology. Various thicknesses of lines in the square represent different road types. Both Road Type 2 and Type 6 were considered terminal because both ends are found within the town. Road Type 6 crosses the entire town but never enters or exits it. Although only a very small segment of Road Type 9 in the illustration passes through this fictional town, it is considered a “through” road because it both enters and exits the town.
The Special Case of Cities in the Scoring. Cities usually have many access roads that funnel traffic into compact centers in small spatial sizes. Such compactness required “standardizing” them. If a county’s Central Place was a town rather than a city, no additional standardization was necessary or made.

Central Places that were cities have much smaller spatial areas than towns. Due to the many intra-city roads compacting into heavily-used commercial, legal, financial, social, and other private and public services, these towns received much higher overall scores.

Such a situation results in very large comparative roadway-accessibility scores that highly skew results. To balance the scores, the small spatial areas in Central Places that were cities – Auburn, Batavia, Elmira, Canandaigua, Geneva, Ithaca, Olean, Salamanca, Watertown, and so forth -- were combined with those of bordering towns by adding the square mileage of the city to the spatial area of any immediately surrounding town(-s) then dividing this total by the numbers of cities and towns involved in building the score. This form of standardization in
effect considered towns surrounding such Central-Place cities as part of the cities. It was, then, a “weighting” factor for cities’ scores.

For instance, the roadway score for the City of Ithaca, according to our routine practice, would = (100 [a constant for putting scores into round numbers] times 172 [road score as weighted in Table 3.1 and given in Table 3.2] divided by 5 [the square miles of the city] = 3,440. Such a high number in a scale with other scores skewed the results. An additional adjustment for the City’s area (in square miles) was then applied, as described in the preceding paragraph, to make the City’s score more comparable to those of outlying towns.

Table 3.2. Roadway-Accessibility Scores for Towns of Tompkins County, with Ithaca-City and Ithaca-Town Scores Adjusted for Comparability in their Total Geographic Area.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Town</th>
<th>Weighted score</th>
<th>Area (sq. mi.)</th>
<th>Adjusted Score</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ithaca – City</td>
<td>172</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>464</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ithaca – Town</td>
<td>165</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>569</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ulysses</td>
<td>134</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>406</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enfield</td>
<td>116</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>314</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Groton</td>
<td>132</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>264</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lansing</td>
<td>148</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>243</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caroline</td>
<td>107</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>195</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dryden</td>
<td>166</td>
<td>94</td>
<td>177</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Danby</td>
<td>95</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>176</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Newfield</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>141</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

To calculate Ithaca City’s adjusted score, since Ithaca Town completely surrounds Ithaca City, we added the original score of Ithaca City to the original score of the Town of Ithaca, and divided the combined total by the total square mileage in both Town and City areas. Then, we subtracted the “weighted” road score (in Table 3.2) for the Town of Ithaca from the total combined score for the two. The result was the “adjusted” score for Ithaca City. Finally, to standardize, we multiplied this score by 100 and by the ratio of the city’s initial weighted score divided by the town’s initial weighted score. This last step gave city scores slightly more weight than the town’s.

The actual calculations began with taking Ithaca City and Ithaca Town’s “weighted” scores. The roadway score for Ithaca Town was determined in the usual fashion by dividing its original score by its area in square miles, then multiplying by 100 (for standardization), giving an “adjusted roadway score” for Ithaca Town of 569 (see columns two and three of Table 3.2 (100*165/29 = 569). The combined scores of Ithaca City and Ithaca Town were then multiplied by the
ratio of the City’s weighted score to the Town’s weighted score giving a result of 1033 \( ( = \frac{172}{165} \times 100 \times (165+172)/(29+5) ) = 1033 \). Finally, we subtracted the Ithaca Town score from the combined score to generate an “adjusted” Ithaca City score of 464 <1033 - 569 = 464>.

The adjusted scores brought the original skewed scores of cities in line with scores in other towns, and especially suburban towns that encompass (or nearly encompass) them. Since our underlying concern was to measure roadway-accessibility among the small cities and towns, we believe these adjustments accommodated our concern.

Selecting Counties for Detailed Analysis. Such a detailed process for examining road networks for all rural counties was beyond our resources. For our analyses, we chose four “representative” counties from each rural county type (see Chapter 1 above for a delineation of a county type and see the use of the County Types, especially of Types 4, 5, 6, and 7, in Eberts and Merschrod, 2004). We endeavored, not always successfully, to select non-contiguous counties while excluding those with large portions in the Catskill or Adirondack preserves. The sparseness of roads and populations in such counties’ towns made them less representative for our purposes. Counties inventoried for this report, then, are:

From County Type 4 Urban-Suburban counties: Cayuga, Genesee, Ontario, and Wayne;
From County Type 5 Rural-Urban counties: Cattaraugus, Chemung, Jefferson, and Tompkins;
From County Type 6 Rural-Suburban counties: Livingston, Schuyler, Washington, and Wyoming; and
From County Type 7 Rural-Periphery counties: Allegany, Chenango, Franklin, and Lewis

These sixteen counties totaled 295 towns including Central Places (about 40 percent of the overall 760 towns). Numbers of towns in each type include:

Town Type 1: 19 Central Places;
Town Type 2: 71 More Dense Suburban towns;
Town Type 3: 85 More Dense Rural towns;
Town Type 4: 21 Less Dense Suburban towns; and
Town Type 5: 99 Less Dense Rural towns.

Again, maps with clear town boundaries for each town were used in assessing towns’ roadways. All existing roads, including those entering or
exiting perimeters of each town were inventoried, and towns were assigned a score according to the roadway scoring systems in Tables 3.1 and 3.2.

Roadway-Accessibility Scores for Five Town Types in Four County Types

Adjusted roadway-accessibility scores varied among the five town types in the sixteen representative counties. Figure 3.3 shows that in all four county types Central Places had the highest average roadway-accessibility scores and Less Dense Rural towns the lowest. Thus, a pattern of consistent stepwise-decreasing roadway-accessibility from Central Places to Less Dense Rural towns holds generally, even if not always, in the five County Types.

Figure 3.3. The Pattern of Average Adjusted Roadway Scores among the Town Types Differ a Little in Every County Type.

Central Places had much higher scores in three of the four county types implying that they are clearly their counties’ centers for services and other activities. In Rural Suburban County Type 6, roadway-accessibility scores among Central Places and their four outlying town types were more similar to one another. This small range contrasts to ranges found in other county types. Due to towns’ locations in less-dense Rural Suburban counties, especially in terms of their distance to metropolitan counties, people living in outlying towns there probably have reasonably easy access to adjacent metropolitan counties’ Central Places. This would provide an adjacent county Central Place access similar to access to their own counties’ Central Places.

Overall, then, the two less-dense outlying town types (4 and 5) have scores about one-fourth below averages of the two more-dense town types (2 and 3). People in less-dense towns on average have less convenient and/or more
costly access (in terms of time, distance, and dollars) to services they might need compared to people living in more-dense town types.

Patterns for County Types 4, 5, and 7 also parallel, in reverse, the proportions of money spent on transportation in the five town types. As noted earlier, the two less-dense town types in 2005 spent greater proportions of their budgets (above 65 percent), as well as more dollars per household, on transportation than any other town type, while Central Places spent the smallest. These findings are presented in greater detail in Chapters 8 and 9.

Roadway-Accessibility and Commuting. Commuting outside a county for employment might be higher among outlying towns with higher roadway-accessibility scores and especially in County Types 4 and 6, the higher-commuting counties closer to metropolitan counties. But, is this indeed the case?

Figure 3.4 shows scores for commuting by town residents outside their counties for employment and roadway-accessibility scores (the latter divided by 10 to make them compatible with the graph’s commuting percentages). The figure shows that average commuting rates in County Types 4 and 6 were, as expected, higher than those in County Types 5 and 7 which are usually two counties away from the nearest metropolitan county (and large employment center). In fact, commuting rates were much higher in County Type 6 (an average over 45 percent for all five town types in 2000) than in more-densely populated County Type 4 (whose rates averaged 36 percent).
Despite their lower overall roadway-accessibility scores, commuting outside a county for employment from the two rural town types (3 and 5) in each county type was generally as high or higher than in suburban town types. Such findings tend not to fit expectations with respect to the roadway-accessibility measure. However, these towns tend to be closer in distance to metropolitan counties, and people from there may find it more convenient to commute to metropolitan counties for employment compared to those living in Central Places or in towns suburban to their counties’ Central Places.

If commuters from rural town types in these counties obtained their services elsewhere, then economic impacts from rural residents’ commuting would not be optimal for their counties’ residents. These towns and counties probably miss out on returns through sales taxes because of the commuting. Still, commuting usually produces higher tax bases because commuters live and pay their property taxes in the rural towns. This beneficial outcome almost always attracts attention from towns’ elected officials.

In general, then, as towns and counties plan their futures, they should consider the effects of investments in roadway infrastructures on residents’ overall well-being. All County Types, but those adjacent to metropolitan counties (County Types 4 and 6), especially, can probably expect to see documentation of increased commuting rates between 2000 and 2010 just as they
did between 1990 and 2000. Such findings indicate sprawl continued to occur during the 1990s.

**Roadway Accessibility and Planning.** Most planning tools reviewed in the previous chapter were directed toward specific land-uses. State legislation for comprehensive or master planning passed in the 1990s focused attention on a considerably broader range of planning issues including land-uses impacts on people’s “public health, safety, and general welfare.” Town comprehensive plans usually include detailed analyses of existing and projected locations of roadways, housing patterns, water and sewerage services, and fire and police protection. To examine how roadway-accessibility scores relate to planning in these towns, then, can be informative to town officials.

The 2004 and 2008 studies of planning practices by New York’s Legislative Commission on Rural Resources reported the numbers and types of land-use planning and regulatory tools for all towns, cities, and villages in counties. As noted in Chapter 2, the five major land-use planning and regulatory tools were:

1) Planning board;  
2) Subdivision regulations;  
3) Site-plan review regulations;  
4) Zoning regulations; and  
5) Comprehensive (or Master) Plan.

In generating a single planning score for each town, we arbitrarily used the 2004 data because they were closer in time to the 2005 roadway accessibility scores and few differences were found in them between 2004 and 2008. We assigned one point for the presence of each land-use planning tool and two points for the presence of comprehensive plans because of their relevance to roadway-infrastructures. Each town was then assigned a score from 0 to 6 points for its level of land-use planning. To graph these scores with roadway-accessibility scores, planning scores were converted to averages by dividing the sum by six and multiplying by 100 (a common procedure to obtain percentages). Specifically, having no regulation yields 0 percent, 1 regulation yields 16.7 percent, 2 is 33 percent, 3 is 50 percent, 4 is 66.7 percent, 5 is 83.3 percent, and 6 is 100 percent. Such percentages enabled us to graph towns’ average planning scores with roadway-accessibility scores.

Figure 3.5 shows the graphed results. Patterns among the town types overall showed that average planning and roadway scores were similar -- when one score was higher, the other tended to be higher, and vice versa. Overall, Central Places had the highest averages on both scores, while Less Dense Rural towns had lowest average scores, and more-dense towns’ scores were in-
between, resulting in a stepwise-downward pattern. Both average planning scores and average roadway scores overall were higher in more densely populated Urban-Suburban County Type 4 counties, next highest in More Urban County Type 5 counties, and lowest in Rural Periphery County Type 7 counties.

Figure 3.5. Average Roadway-Accessibility Scores and Average Land-Use Planning Scores Tended to Vary Together in the Town and County Types.

The connection of planning scores with roadway-accessibility scores among the towns within the combination of county and town types (in analyses not shown here) shows a slightly different pattern. Within the two less-dense town types in all four county types, towns with higher roadway accessibility had lower planning scores. Even within more-dense town types of less-dense County Types 6 and 7, towns having higher roadway-accessibility scores tended to have lower planning scores.

These relationships can be affected by population densities. Within all town types, towns with higher population densities had higher roadway-accessibility scores as well as higher planning scores. Also within the various town types, a majority of larger towns spatially tended to have lower roadway scores (and lower population densities) but higher planning scores.

A conventional explanation for such findings is that less-densely populated towns in less-dense County Types 6 and 7 have fewer land-use conflicts, and hence less “need” for roadway or comprehensive planning. They generally have relatively low levels of new housing, commercial, or industrial development in them. Almost all housing units in less-dense towns, for instance, are stand-alone single-family dwellings rather than apartment complexes that can cause traffic congestion among morning and evening commuters.
Yet, within more-dense outlying town types of more-dense County Types 4 and 5, towns tend to have better roadway-accessibility, planning boards, and many land-use regulations. If agricultural prices continue to rise in the future as they did from 2005 to 2007, then both increases in agricultural land-uses and related “value-added” industries such as ethanol plants could change the character of many less-dense towns in rural New York. Projections indicate that such trends will continue, so that comprehensive planning, even in less-dense towns, may also become relevant to certain less-dense towns in the future. If so, our findings show that towns with greater population densities and better roadway-accessibilities, especially within the town types, are more likely than others to undertake such planning.

**Roadway Accessibility and Housing.** Extensive comparisons of patterns in findings on housing indicators for the 295 towns in sixteen counties in the roadway sample to the total 760 towns in the 44 rural counties (in findings not shown here) concluded that the patterns compare similarly. Examining the 295 towns’ road-accessibility scores with selected housing indicators, then, gives a general picture of overall housing patterns in the 44 rural counties and 760 towns. Such a picture sheds light on the issue of whether newer housing, especially, took place on more-accessible or less-accessible roads.

The Census gives us four key housing indicators -- housing values, homeownership, age of housing, and density of housing. Towns’ housing patterns and qualities represent important indicators of people’s general welfare, and are usually considered outcomes of income levels and accessibility to Central Places’ employment and services. People’s homes generally reflect their socioeconomic status as well as their personal and family well-being, and newer homes and homes of more value are generally found closer to Central Places. Residential quality affects towns’ tax bases and rates. With only a few exceptions, improvements in housing between 1990 and 2000 were evident on all four indicators. And, they were much affected by roadway accessibility.

**Road Scores and Housing Density.** Housing density, population density, and roadway-accessibility are largely interchangeable. Population growth happens when more people buy or build homes in certain locations, most often in more-dense suburbs. Changes in housing density in outlying town types also indicate whether people and houses have “sprawled” throughout a county.

Findings in Figure 3.6 show the relations of household densities in 2000 to towns’ roadway-accessibility scores in 2004. In general, Central Places and more-dense towns have higher roadway accessibility scores as well as greater numbers
of households per square mile compared to less-dense towns, again, in a stepwise declining pattern.

**Figure 3.6. Numbers of Households per Square Mile and Roadway-Accessibility Scores Tend to Be Higher in Central Places and More-Dense Town Types.**

Both population densities and household densities declined overall in Central Places between 1990 and 2000. Very slow growth in housing densities in Central Places happened only in less-dense Rural Suburban County Type 6 counties. In outlying town types in each county type household densities increased during the 1990s. Findings for 2000 to 2007 indicate another small growth in housing densities in all county types, but data for individual towns will not be available until the Census of 2010. Growth in numbers of households from 1990 to 2000 was larger in more-dense towns compared to less-dense towns, probably due in part to increases in rental units there.

Within each outlying town type (again, in analyses not shown here due to space considerations), higher roadway-accessibility scores, as expected, were also associated with higher household densities, and, in most of them, with larger increases in their densities from 1990 to 2000. Only in Less Dense Suburban towns were larger increases in numbers of houses in towns associated with lower roadway-accessibility scores. Less Dense Suburban towns’ relatively open spaces seem to have attracted new homeowners despite their roads’ conditions. Within all other town types from 1990 to 2000, towns with better roadway-accessibility scores attracted more growth in numbers of houses and people.
Gaps between each set of vertical bars for roadway accessibility scores and household numbers in less-dense towns are greater than for more-dense towns. Such gaps imply that less-dense towns have relatively easy roadway access to nearby towns, and, through them, to counties’ Central Places. Easy access to Central Places from outlying towns, especially in the two suburban-type counties (4 and 6), surely contributes to growth in household numbers, and sprawl, in their outlying towns.

**Road Scores and Ages of Dwellings.** An image of an older home may call to mind stately Victorian mansions on Main Streets in rural cities and villages. But, for people living in many outlying towns the reality of older houses means dilapidated and sub-par dwellings. Older houses more likely have poor structural conditions (such as disintegrating foundations), energy inefficient doors and windows (not “weatherized”), poor quality water and sewerage in their wells and septic systems, and/or marketability. In addition, houses built over 50 years ago tend to have smaller rooms that are generally less appealing to current life styles. Overall, people pay more for newer houses.

Figure 3.7 presents average percentages of “newer” housing units (built less than 50 years ago) in the five town types of the four county types from 1990 to 2000. It shows in general that growth was greater in outlying towns, especially in More Dense Suburban towns, than in Central Places, and between 1990 and 2000 nearly all town types experienced rejuvenation in their dwellings’ ages. Such growth also tended to follow road scores – more newer houses happened in towns with higher road scores. In percentages of newer housing (not shown here), less-dense outlying towns experienced faster growth than the other town types, probably because they previously had so many older houses. But, overall, numbers in their growth from 1990 to 2000 were about half those of newer housing in More Dense Suburban towns.
Among towns within each town type in the four County Types (in analyses not shown here), the town types tended to show a pattern whereby more newer housing was being built in towns with more-accessible roadways. That greater numbers of newer housing units were being built primarily in more-dense suburban and rural towns provides some optimism for reducing sprawl in these counties.

Road Scores and Homeownership. Homeownership, rather than renting, is a major way people build equity in their economic futures. Studies also show that homeowners, compared to renters, are more satisfied with their lives, more likely to vote, and participate more in community affairs.

Figure 3.8 shows that, perhaps due to people’s slowly rising incomes, homeownership rates also very slowly increased between 1990 and 2000 in outlying town types. In about half of these towns, rates of homeownership averaged over 80 percent in 2000. Less-densely populated towns generally showed the highest homeownership rates with stepwise decreasing rates for more-dense town types and Central Places. Overall, Central Places had markedly lower homeownership rates and smaller increases, or losses, in
homeownership rates between 1990 and 2000. Road scores relate "negatively" to homeownership – where road scores are higher, homeownership is lower.

**Figure 3.8. Between 1990 and 2000 in All Town Types, Average Percentages of Homeownership Were Rather Stable.**

These facts make sense in context. Central Places traditionally have been centers for younger people, single people, more transient people, and, if married, smaller family sizes. They usually feature higher percentages of renters -- the elderly, and lower-income populations renting near services they require, and transient people renting temporarily. Central Places are also often seen as less desirable places for teenagers, so that, if they can, when families’ incomes increase and their children enter junior high school, many families move from Central Places to, primarily, suburban locations where they also often rent.

Higher homeownership rates in less-dense towns are probably related to poor public transportation in outlying towns, but we have no systematic evidence for this. The lower rate could also be due to lower housing values in these towns. Retirees in the baby-boom generation, commuters, younger families seeking lower-cost housing, and second-home owners, have all probably contributed to homeownership growth in less-dense suburban and rural towns. Lower levels of increases in homeownership in the faster growing more-dense towns could also mean that they were attracting more renters during the 1990s.

Among towns within each town type (not shown here), roadway accessibility played a significant but mixed role. In general, slightly higher
percentages of homeowners were found in towns with less-adequate roadway accessibility. But, *increases in percentages* of homeowners between 1990 and 2000 were found in towns with better roadway accessibility. Most towns in County Type 6 Rural Suburban counties, for instance, fit this pattern. But, within less-dense towns of County Type 4 Urban Suburban counties, increases in homeownership were primarily found in those towns with less-adequate roadway accessibility, perhaps because these were the main places with available open space. In the future, these roads may be updated.

**Road Scores and Housing Values.** Housing values are important in understanding life quality in counties’ outlying towns. Housing values are both related to people’s ability to pay for housing, and also, from the perspective of town officials, major contributors to their tax bases. Residents having higher housing values generally have more adequate well-being, but also expect their town officials to deliver more and better quality services than those living in houses with lower values.

But, does better roadway accessibility increase housing values among the town types? Or, does less-adequate roadway-accessibility in certain outlying towns keep housing values there lower?

Housing values in the Census are generated from self-reports by respondents estimating their houses’ values. We suspect many people estimated their housing values from their towns’ tax assessments. Undervalued houses could be due to lack of up-to-date assessments in towns. We suspect less-dense towns especially re-assess housing stock less frequently than more-dense towns where housing turnover is probably more frequent, which, in turn, keeps assessments more current. In some towns, re-assessments are sensitive issues -- such towns often forego difficulties by not re-valuing housing stock frequently. Still, house values in the Census are considered reasonably accurate for comparison purposes.

Findings reported here are not adjusted for inflation between 1990 and 2000. Increases in housing values did not keep up with the very large 34 percent inflation rate between 1990 and 2000. If 1990 values had been inflation-adjusted, they would have declined overall between 1990 and 2000.

Figure 3.9, on average adjusted median values of houses, shows that in three of the four County Types, outlying towns compared to Central Places had higher average housing values, and faster increases in average median housing values between 1990 and 2000 than in Rural Periphery County Type 7 counties. By 2000, overall leaders among the town types in house values were More Dense Suburban towns and Less Dense Suburban towns in Type 4 Urban Suburban
counties. Both showed average house values over $85,000. Overall average house values in suburban County Types 4 and 6 were also higher than in County Types 5 and 7. An “urbanizing” commuting influence appears strong.

Figure 3.9. Between 1990 and 2000, Average Median House Values Grew (Not Adjusted for Inflation) Across All Town Types.

Although housing values were also generally higher in the two more-dense town types, the two less-dense town types had slightly higher average growth rates in housing values from 1990 to 2000 (the gap between 1990 values and 2000 values). In dollar terms, the two less-dense town types, despite their lower roadway scores, increased by $15,181 in housing values during the 1990s, while the two more-dense town types increased by an average of $13,146.

Housing values and tax bases, then, are usually greater in more-dense town types of these counties with some variation among the four county types. Apparently as New Yorkers became wealthier and as roadway access was relatively easy throughout upstate New York, residents disproportionately decided to move farther from Central Places so that, regardless of roadway scores, growth both in rates and in dollar values of housing in less-dense town types exceeded those in Central Places and more-dense towns.

Within each town type of the county types (from analyses not shown here) the relation of housing values to more accessible roadways is not uniform. Less-dense towns with lower roadway scores were more likely to have higher housing values. This finding holds especially true in more-dense towns in the two Suburban Type 4 and Type 6 counties. More-dense towns in County Type 6 Rural Suburban counties also had larger increases in numbers of new houses between 1990 and 2000.
In more-dense towns in Rural Urban Type 5 counties, towns with better roadway-accessibility tended to have higher average housing values in 2000. But, more-dense towns in Rural Periphery County Type 7 counties saw no differences in house values among those with higher or lower roadway scores.

What is clear is that housing values in both 1990 and 2000 tended to be higher in towns with higher planning scores. The association is not one-to-one, but is strong and uniform within each town type. Though cause and effect are hard to untangle, some people apparently perceived, probably correctly, that houses are more likely to keep their values when certain planning regulations are in place. Such an association suggests, then, that within outlying towns, although higher housing values were found in towns with lower roadway accessibility, they were also the ones with higher planning scores.

Conclusions

Towns’ roadway infrastructures link people, places, products, and public and private services to each other. Small cities and towns, especially less-dense towns, spend much of their total budgets on roads, as we will see in Chapter 8 on budgets. Such infrastructures heavily influence levels of commuting, housing, and land-use planning. Changing highway systems is costly, therefore planning usually takes roadway systems that predate current efforts as givens. The road networks change slowly and incrementally. Especially in less-dense towns, however, roadway improvements can stimulate development in various ways.

Convenient ways to measure the linkage aspects of transportation infrastructures, then, are important when considering towns’ overall dynamics and future plans. This chapter documented an easy way, from town maps, for municipal planners to generate and use such measurements.

An important finding was that, in general, Central Places had the highest average accessibility scores, more-dense towns the next highest, and less-dense towns the lowest. Both between and within outlying town types, overall average land-use planning scores correlate strongly with roadway scores -- when roadway scores were higher, planning scores were higher, and vice versa.

Higher roadway-accessibility scores were also associated in our graphs with greater housing density, newer houses, and higher median house values. Higher housing values were more strongly evident when towns also had higher levels on their planning scores.

We also reported findings based on detailed analyses of towns within the different town types of the four main county types. When “nested” within
different county types, as explained in the text above, towns showed several main differences from one another. In certain towns, roadway-accessibility followed stepwise patterns reported above, others did not.

Due to such differences, no general pattern was found within the town types. Outlying towns’ leaders and planners might carefully consider these findings in the context of their own analyses (perhaps using methods derived from this chapter). Town-specific analyses could be helpful, for instance, when comparing particular towns’ road scores with those of their neighbors so that community leaders can determine for themselves, as Lincoln said, “where they are and whither they are tending” in determining “what to do and how to do it.”

Certain guidelines for town planners and policymakers based on our findings are possible, and hopefully helpful. For instance, because each road was assigned a score, following the patterns described above, specific roadway scores can indicate which roads and parcels are more likely to be foci for newer housing and/or higher housing values. Towns with more planning regulations in place provide structures through which changes and conflicts can be handled, and, apparently, in smoothly implementing new developments.

Development, though, can also stimulate increased sprawl of housing, people, and businesses into counties’ less-dense and rural towns instead of into more-dense towns that usually have better services. Residential locations in rural and less-dense outlying towns have been places with increasing percentages of commuters to employment outside a county. Whether due to existing residents taking to commuting or to attracting new commuters, sprawl continued in these rural counties during the 1990s. Sprawl also contributes to various kinds of inefficient energy-usage, traffic congestion, noise, some environmental degradation, at least some agricultural stultification, and even global warming.

Sprawl into outlying towns in counties is in part facilitated by transportation planning geared to easy roadway access to and from other towns, including to places in other counties. Lower housing values in less-dense towns, at least during the 1990s, also played into people’s desires to own their homes on larger lot sizes found in less-dense outlying towns.

In general, people have found greater personal well-being by owning their own single-family dwelling units with sufficient land to screen them from neighbors, thereby providing a sense of serenity and control over their lives. From this perspective, people take advantage of better-quality roadway networks and the amenities they provide.
An important finding focuses on increasing densities of newer housing units in more-dense suburban and rural towns between 1990 and 2000. The largest impacts of sprawl continued to hit these locations. Higher densities in these towns can provide an opportunity through various planning regulations, including incentive zoning, for towns to stimulate both more energy-efficient housing and also greater use of energy-reducing public transportation. This perspective is a central element of several development strategies including “the new urbanism,” “green development,” and “smart growth.”

Concentrated population densities make such outcomes more feasible. If town and county officials could take advantage of these opportunities, perhaps they could stem certain inefficiencies that sprawl into less-dense locations has imposed on them while giving new directions for enhancing collective life-quality, personal well-being, and “public health, safety and general welfare” among residents.
CHAPTER 4

POPULATION AND DEMOGRAPHY

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Introduction

During the 1990s and early 2000s, trends in population demographics of the five town types and four regions in the 760 towns and small cities in New York’s 44 rural counties overall showed very slow population growth and increasing diversity in age and ethnic compositions. Hispanic and African-American minorities, especially, migrated into these counties and probably account for the bulk of population growth.

Numbers of commuters (whose employment was outside a county) also increased almost as fast as total population numbers during the 1990s, but data for them in these 760 towns are not available during the 2000s. Percentages of young people going to college also shifted age-groupings’ sizes in town populations, with differing effects on the town types.

Such changes in population structures accompanied and induced changes in locations of services, which in turn stimulated other population changes. Sooner or later such changes affect community leaders, concerned citizens, and towns’ elected and appointed policymakers to re-examine certain policy decisions. Information on population patterns and trends makes it easier for these leaders to plan for, alter, or generate policies to take their constituents in directions “they want to go.”

Growth in certain towns implies changes in infrastructure such as upgrading highways and bridges, but also locations of schools, recreation facilities, day-care services, nursing homes, medical clinics, commercial services, even industrial operations, and open-space reduction. During the early 2000s, most towns and cities in rural New York experienced continuing declines in numbers of school-age young people and those in their early twenties. Towns also
experienced increases in numbers of middle-aged, senior, and elderly people. Such dynamics could require a reexamination of the locations of health-care services as well as shifts in educational facilities and services. Towns with changing ethnic compositions may require cultural and instructional adjustments in services provided through schools, clinics, and government agencies. Every change has land-use implications. Planning boards and town officials could have their hands full.

Three key issues focus our presentation in this chapter. First is the stimulus behind population growth, decline, and stability. Has the well-publicized “brain drain” of young adults continued? If so, has overall population growth suffered? And, what about losses of school-agers – has this continued? How will school officials and others cope due to such losses?

A second issue is the changing composition of towns and small cities in rural New York in terms of age and ethnic diversity in these populations. Does in-migration of Hispanics and African-Americans “explain” the small population growth during the 1990s and early 2000s?

And, third, are certain changes more prevalent in one region, or are they widespread throughout the regions in rural New York. Have the regions all been growing about equally, or are some stagnating or in decline? Have all regions experienced similar growth in their minority populations?

Population Sizes in the 44 Rural Counties’ 760 Towns

As explained in Chapter 1, the 2007 data are population estimates by the U.S. Census Bureau based on a number of factors, including births, deaths, and migrations. Populations in rural New York towns have changed slowly over the past few decades. In 1990, 3.219 million people lived in New York’s 44 rural counties; by 2000, they grew to 3.284 million, averaging a 2.0 percent growth rate, but grew more slowly in the 2007 population estimate to 3.290 million, at only a 0.2 percent growth rate.

Of New York’s 44 rural counties in 2007, according to these estimates, 16 counties were within 1,000 people (plus or minus) of their 2000 population sizes, 16 saw population losses over 1,000 people, and 12 grew by more than 1,000 people. Those losing people were mostly Central Places in their counties. In this sense, Central Places’ population losses in these rural counties parallel those in larger metropolitan core counties.

Figure 4.1 shows that rural counties in the Eastern region overall grew 2.6 percent from their 2000 population base of 1.219 million to have a Census-estimated 1.249 in 2007. The other three regions all lost small proportions of their
populations. The Central region lost 0.5 percent of its population of 1.017 million in 2000 to have 1.012 in 2007. The Western region lost 2.0 percent of its 2000 population to have a Census-estimated 721,378 in 2007. And, the Northern region lost 1.2 percent of its 2000 population to end with a Census-estimated 311,434 in 2007.

**Figure 4.1. Between 1990 and 2007 Overall, Populations in Less-Dense Town Types Averaged the Fastest Growth, while Central Places Lost Population.**

![Total Population Sizes, 1980-2007](chart)

Figure 4.1 also gives details on populations and changes in the town types for 1990, 2000, and the estimated 2007 numbers. Not seen clearly in this figure is that Central Places had larger populations than any single town. Only 10 rural counties had more than one small-city that was not also a county seat. In contrast, the 44 counties had a total of 198 towns in the More Dense Suburban town type, averaging nearly 5 per county.

Due to such discrepancies in numbers of towns in each type, total numbers of people living in More Dense Suburban towns in an average county outnumbered those living in Central Places. Similarly, More Dense Rural towns together with less-dense towns also had population numbers larger than those living in Central Places. Almost 40 percent of a county’s average population lived in More Dense Suburban towns, about 35 percent in More Dense Rural towns put together with the two less-dense towns, and only 25 percent in Central Places. Overall, then, these counties have definite rural components.

In addition, Figure 4.1 shows that populations in the different town types changed at different rates and in different directions. For all 760 towns between 1990 and 2000, populations grew by a net of 64,229 people, with 105,323 people moving into the towns, and 41,094 moving out, for a 2.0 percent net gain.
Between 2000 and 2007, population changes were only 0.2 percent, for a net gain of only 6,519 people. Net losses to Central Places were 12,361 people, 1.6 percent of their total populations, while net gains in outlying towns were 18,800. The decline of Central Places has persisted since at least 1980, but recently at a slower pace than earlier. Probably many people leaving Central Places moved to another town within the county. But, the distribution of this population was not uniform.

The four outlying town types overall between 2000 and 2007 gained an average net of 27 people per town (nine families of three or seven families of four). In most counties, the greatest growth was in More Dense Suburban towns, with average gains of 295 people per town between 1990 and 2000, but only 68 people per town (a total of 13,369 people) from 2000 to 2007. More Dense Rural towns averaged losses of 40 per town from 2000 to 2007 that contrasts with net gains of 89 per town from 1990 to 2000. The two less-dense town types together averaged gains of 92 people per town from 1990 to 2000, and 27 people per town from 2000 to 2007. Although growth in outlying towns from 2000 to 2007 was spotty, it did happen overall.

Between 1990 and 2007, then, populations were generally “re-distributed” away from Central Places in counties to locations in outlying towns, but primarily to More Dense Suburban towns.

Regional differences are quite apparent in outlying towns’ trends. From 2000 to 2007, the Eastern region grew in all outlying town types. The Northern region had the smallest population size of any region, and after overall losses of less than 300 people from 1990 to 2000, the region lost a net of almost 3,600 people from 2000 to 2007, about 1,300 from Central Places and another 5,900 from More Dense Rural towns. Still, More Dense Suburban towns there gained about 1,300 and Less Dense Rural towns gained almost 3,900.

The Central and Western regions’ population sizes were in-between those of the Eastern and Northern regions. Rural counties in the Western region, gained a total of 13,959 people in the 1990s, but lost 14,654 from 2000 to 2007, about 6,000 of them from Central Places. This was the only region where every town type lost population from 2000 to 2007. In the Central region Central Places lost 5,266 people while outlying towns balanced out with More Dense Suburban and Less Dense Rural towns gaining and the other two losing for a net gain of only 39 people.

Overall, towns in all regions except the Eastern lost population, and Central Places lost many more than outlying towns. Several dynamics among sub-populations in all town types provide additional understanding of specific
patterns of growth and decline. Some shifts were found in age structures and others in racial and ethnic composition. We will first examine trends in age structures and then ethnic diversity.

**Age Structures**

In contrast to population-size data from the U.S. Censuses in 1990 and 2000 which are available for all 760 towns, estimates from the Census Bureau in 2007 for specific age and ethnic indicators are only available at the county level. As we saw above, changes between 2000 and 2007 were quite small. Due to lack of data for specific towns on age and ethnic distributions, we must assume that these dynamics are similar in the indicators to be examined from here on. The major difference, then, was growth in most of these indicators during the 1990s, while minor growth or even declines in population is the watchword for the 2000s up to at least 2007. We will look first to findings from the Census’ estimates from 2000 to 2007 on indicators for counties in each region, and then infer what is happening in their towns based on their 1990 and 2000 data.

In a broad view, age structures indicate the size of a town’s school-aged children and teenagers (age 0-19), potential workforce (age 20-64), and its most “dependent” population (age 85 and over). Sizes in each of these groupings tend to greatly influence people’s general welfare.

Dependent populations are those at either end of the age distribution, those under age 20, due to public education and other expenses, and those over age 85, due largely to their high health-care costs. They tend to bring fewer resources into their households than they consume in their daily lives. Proportions of citizens in each of these age groupings, then, determine, in large part, how community resources at local (and state) levels are spent. People in the 20-64 age groups, the potential work force because about 75 percent are gainfully employed, bring in more resources (and pay more taxes) than they consume as individual persons. In various ways, people in the 20-64 age grouping, then, financially support the dependent populations.

Various age categories within each general grouping (those school-age, mid-life adults, and retired) shows only slightly different trajectories. Thus, Figure 4.2 shows three five-year age groupings, 0-4, 5-9, and 10-14, aggregated into one category. Similarly, the groupings from 35-64 and 65-84 are also shown in key parts. Figure 4.2 also combines men and women.
Figure 4.2. Population Distributions in 1990, 2000, and 2007 in the 44 Rural Counties Show Remarkable Continuity Within Age Groupings.

A major finding from Figure 4.2 is the noteworthy continuity in particular age groupings from one time period to the next in the four regions. When an age grouping declined from 1990 to 2000, it also tended to decline in 2007, and, when one grew from 1990 to 2000, it tended to grow into 2007. This finding holds in every region for the 0-14 age grouping, the 30-34 grouping, the 35-64 grouping, and the 85 and over age grouping. It does not hold for the age 15-19 grouping, the 20-30, and the grouping age 65 to 84.

In 2007, the proportion of the two dependent populations of young people not yet in the potential work force plus seniors and elderly people came to an overall total of 36.3 percent. This was down from nearly 40 percent in 1990. Both younger people (who are supported by parents and taxpayers through education institutions) and those beyond retirement age (who usually collect Social Security checks and healthcare insurance from the federal government) are considered to be expenses to, and supported by, middle-age employed people.

In sheer numbers, young people, age 19 and under, were the major dependent population. In 2007 they were about 26 percent of the total population, and those aged 65 and over were about 13 percent. Numbers of young people under age 19 also determine, in large part, the amount of public inputs in terms of needed schools, educational resources, recreational facilities, and other places where young people get together. Responding to current trends among young people is, therefore, of great concern to local elected and appointed officials and for the vitality of local schools.
In many towns, elementary schools are important features of community life. When students are lost from this age grouping, schools are often shut-down. Once schools close, other village businesses and facilities are threatened with closure, and then, other studies show, these communities’ vitality is sapped.

Figure 4.2 shows large and consistent losses in the 0-14 age grouping and relative stability in the age 15-19 grouping from 1990 to 2007 in every region. In total numbers, between 1990 and 2007 towns lost a net of 81,477 young people, 8.5 percent of the 956,352 total youth age 0-19 in 1990. About two-thirds of these losses were suffered from 2000 to 2007.

The late teenage 15-19 grouping shows slight differences from region to region between 2000 and 2007. It grew slightly in the Eastern, was stable in the Central and Northern, and declined in the Western region. Over all counties and regions, the age 15-19 and age 65-84 groupings were the most stable of all age groupings in population growth or decline.

The 15-19 age grouping probably reflects dynamics in the 40-45 age grouping, generally the parents of the 15-19 grouping. The 40-45 grouping grew in size from 2000 to 2007, but more slowly than the others because of the decline in the 30-34 age grouping ten years earlier. Some who in-migrated to these counties to complement the 30-34 age grouping may not have had children. In any case, these dynamics probably affected numbers in the age 15-19 grouping.

In a study not shown here, findings from 1990 to 2000 show that, in three of the four regions, more young people were located in More Dense Suburban towns, and the greatest losses were in Central Places in all regions. The fewest losses were in Less Dense Suburban towns and the second fewest in Less Dense Rural towns. In the Northern region the fewest young people in total were found in Less Dense Suburban towns, but the most in total were found in the Less Dense Rural towns. This is probably because the central part of the Northern region is the Adirondack Park which has limited population size and growth.

Such dynamics affect events, facilities, and policy decisions in these towns. Schools, cognizant of their slowly declining student numbers, may need to undergo reorganization in order to provide solid education for existing students. Central Places were hit the hardest. But the two less-dense town types and More Dense Rural towns also lost some young people. Some elementary schools, especially, in Central Places and less-dense rural towns likely closed by 2007, and busing, along with the integration of formerly rural and urban students with suburban students probably became more important in the reorganizing. Although such integration may on the surface seem comparatively
easy, the mixing of urban, suburban, and rural cultures in the same school is seldom as easy as it might appear. Certain students and their parents from each culture can easily identify and emphasize potential conflicts due to their different expectations. The chapter on education will explore these issues in more detail.

The age 20-30 grouping, of young adults, has generated much controversy about “brain drain.” As seen in Figure 4.2, between 1990 and 2000, this age-grouping suffered such severe losses that some interpreters argued the losses reflected a “brain drain” from rural counties. Between 2000 and 2007 it increased by 129,262 people (on average, 170 per town), showing a definite turn-around from the declines during the 1990s. The reversal to gains in this age grouping from 2000 to 2007 would seem to put to rest the brain-drain issue.

An implication of the shift to increases in this age grouping certainly infers that more of them are staying home and/or in-migrating to these rural counties. Two important issues in this regard are whether local economies have grown since 2000 in absorbing these numbers of young people, and whether older people were being displaced due to growth among young adults. These are noteworthy issues to be asked and answered in examining the 2010 Census.

A second implication is that fewer of the age 20-30 grouping might have left for college outside these rural counties. In New York many colleges are located in rural counties. Young adults in their early 20s, then, could have gone to college elsewhere outside their county of residence but not outside rural counties. Because college-education is so important to the vitality of local and state-wide economies, it is another noteworthy question to ask and have answered by the next Census in 2010.

Consistent losses in the 30-34 age grouping shown in Figure 4.2 probably have two sources. A first is the smaller number of people in the age 20-25 grouping in 2000 (seven years earlier). These are the small numbers of young adults who were in the age 20-24 grouping seven to ten years earlier, but in the 30-34 year old age grouping in 2007. People in this grouping also tend to be young married couples who have children in elementary schools. In a way, then, they are also a main source of fewer children in the 5-9 age grouping.

A standard pattern in the 1990s was for people to go to college, stay away from rural areas while they got married and settled down, stay away during their early 30s when their marriages were new and/or children were in elementary school, and return to rural areas when they were 35-40 and their children were in junior high school. Junior high school years are apparently times when children start to show considerable independence from parents, and many parents find this behavior threatening. Consequently, some parents,
especially those who grew up in rural settings, often prefer to have their children grow up in familiar places with fewer rather than more (and all kinds of) people nearby, so they “return” to rural counties in their later rather than earlier 30s. Thus, the 30-34 age grouping showed continuing declines in numbers since 1990.

Consistent gains in the age 35-64 grouping have strong implications for communities’ employment health. These are the heart of counties’ potential work forces and primary sources of income (and tax-payers). They hold nearly all the jobs and pay larger proportions of taxes than those in other age groupings. About three-quarters of all adults in this category are employed. Although we believe high school or college graduates move to metropolitan areas in large numbers to work early in their careers, many eventually move to adjacent suburban counties to raise families. In Figure 4.2 certain people in their later thirties or older, then, tended to move to outlying towns in New York’s 44 rural counties.

Consistent growth in the age 35-64 grouping from 2000 to 2007 represents a major life-line for rural counties’ small-cities and towns. Findings in Figure 4.1 suggest people who were migrating to rural counties during the 1990s and early 2000s disproportionately lived in outlying towns rather than in Central Places. The 35-64 age grouping constitutes the bulk of these people.

Distinctions between seniors, age 65 and older, and elderly, age 85 and older, often reveal that those aged 65 to 84 are healthier and wealthier than previous generations of seniors, and a small but increasing proportion of them, especially those age 65-70, still work. Many localities actually seek to attract people from the earlier years of the retiree group even though they may, especially twenty or more years later, require large amounts of health-care services and resources.

Relative stability in the retirement grouping age 65-84 from 2000 to 2007 after its growth from 1990 to 2000 encompasses another issue to be understood. Overall, the Eastern and Northern regions registered very small gains, 327 and 828 people, respectively. The Western region showed losses of 210 people. The Central region saw larger losses of 2,854.

Why there should be any losses at all, but largely in the Central region, after population growth in the 50-64 age group from 1990 to 2007 in all regions is puzzling. Perhaps the relatively large pension funds experienced by this grouping prior to their retirement gave them greater choices for living arrangements in their retirement years, and many of them chose to move away from the relatively cold and snowy winters of Central New York.
In findings from 1990 to 2000 not shown here, the four outlying town types gained in numbers of seniors and elderly since 1980, while Central Places experienced small losses during the 1990s. As with middle-aged adults, More Dense Suburban towns gained the most seniors, but the other three outlying towns also gained some seniors. Central Places lost seniors in all four regions.

The elderly, age 85 and over, grouping spends more money per capita on health care than any other, and certainly more than it brings in annually from social security and pensions. Increasing numbers from 2000 to 2007 in this grouping probably show a need for additional health-care facilities in rural counties such as clinics, home-health services, and nursing homes.

Overall, with a few exceptions these findings show relative continuity with those from 1990 to 2000.

**Age Groupings in Selected Town Types.** The decennial Census provides data on five-year age groupings for all towns and cities. A key tool social scientists use in analyzing population age groupings is a *population pyramid*. Population pyramids give a graphic image to a social unit’s age structures. Essentially, a population pyramid consists of numbers of cases on two axes, one for the various age categories, and a second for numbers of people in each five-year age segment. Conventionally, the age categories are on vertical axes, and numbers of people on horizontal axes, with numbers of males in each age category placed to the left of the vertical axis and females to the right. Vertical age axes usually increase in five-year intervals so that the bottom is for the youngest (0-4) age category and the top for the oldest (85 or more).

Since in most cases there are usually more people in younger age groups at the bottom of the pyramid and fewer people in older ages at the top (as people age, they pass away or tend to leave for more mild climates), the graph takes a pyramidal shape. Hence, such a graph is called a population pyramid.

Our version of population pyramids below is different, even as they have similar shapes. Our population pyramids are turned on their sides, and have both men and women on a single side of the axis. Hence, they resemble a half-buried pyramid. These pyramids also allow us to look at age structures for both men and women for 1990 and 2000 on the same graph. If turned upright and men separated from women, they would take traditional pyramidal shapes.

To look more precisely at population pyramids for 1990 and 2000 for town types helps in understanding more completely certain age-gender dynamics that have occurred. These pyramids aggregate findings across all regions rather than undertake the cumbersome process of disaggregating them region by region.
Since data for 2007 are not available for the 760 towns, these pyramids are limited to findings from 1990 to 2000.

Figure 4.3 presents population pyramids for Central Places. Subsequent figures show the pyramids for More Dense Suburban towns and Less Dense Rural towns. For brevity, population pyramids for More Dense Rural towns and Less Dense Suburban towns will not be presented because the former closely resembles pyramids of More Dense Suburban towns, and the latter resembles Less Dense Rural towns.

**Figure 4.3. Population Pyramids, 1990 and 2000, for 54 Central Places in the 44 Rural Counties Show Unexpected Early Rises and Falls in Numbers across Age Groupings, but then reasonable downward Continuity from Ages 35 on.**

Figures 4.3, 4.4, and 4.5 are comparable in most ways, but contrast in a few. All three graphs have comparable overall shapes. In all three pyramids, numbers in the age grouping, 0-9 for 2000 are always below the 1990 numbers. Such small total numbers are also a-typical of most population pyramids. Numbers of early teenagers (age 10-14) in 2000 are always above (even if only slightly above) 1990’s numbers. Numbers in the 20 to 34 age groupings in 2000 are always below those in 1990 (and the source of “brain drain” notions that apparently turned around by 2007). Numbers of adults in the 40 to 59 age categories for 2000 are always above those for 1990 (signifying a “brain gain” that continues into 2007). Numbers in the oldest categories in 2000 are always slightly above the numbers for 1990.
Figure 4.4. Population Pyramids, 1990 and 2000, for 198 More Dense Suburban Towns in the 44 Rural Counties Show Several Differences from Central Places in Younger Age Groupings.

Low numbers of people in the 0-4 and 5-9 age groupings in 2000 indicate that, without in-migration, elementary schools in Central Places, especially, would decline. But, in-migration has occurred so that by age nine numbers in 2000 were about the same as in 1990 in suburban and rural elementary schools, and only slightly smaller in Central Places. Numbers in their early teens continued upward in More Dense Suburban (Figure 4.4) and Less Dense Rural pyramids (Figure 4.5) in a sharper trajectory than in Central Places (Figure 4.3).

Figure 4.5. Population Pyramids, 1990 and 2000, for 283 Less Dense Rural Towns in the 44 Rural Counties mostly Parallel Those of More Dense Suburban Towns in their Age Groupings.
A major difference among these three figures is in the 15-34 age categories. Figure 4.3 for Central Places contrasts with the other two especially in the earlier years of these categories. In Figure 4.3 Central Places show increases in the 15-34 age groupings while Figure 4.4 for More Dense Suburban towns and Figure 4.5 for Less Dense Rural towns show slight declines.

These shifts probably occurred because, as noted earlier for 2007 as well, many in the aged 18 and 19 of the age 15-19 grouping probably went off to college from their towns of residence in outlying suburban and rural towns. Since most college campuses in these rural counties are in or very near Central Places, the majority of such college students would live in these counties’ Central Places.

These data are also the source of the work hypothesis noted earlier. Those who find work in rural counties probably do so in Central Places. Thus, when young they move to Central Places from outlying towns to be closer to their work (and farther from families where they grew up). In the process, suburban and rural town types experience a disproportionate deficit of older teens and younger adults compared to Central Places.

Those in the 25-34 age group in 2000 are below those in 1990 for Central Places, but generally above the age 20-24 numbers in the two outlying towns’ pyramids, but below the numbers age 20-24 in Central Places. Such a pattern suggests that some from the 20-24 age group have completed college and gone home, while others have gone elsewhere to start their careers.
From age 40 on, numbers in the 2000 pyramids are almost always higher than those in 1990. The only difference is that numbers of mid-lifers age 40-64 in More Dense Suburban and Less Dense Rural towns increased much faster than in Central Places. As noted earlier, one growth factor in towns is due to in-migrating numbers of mid-lifers. In New York as a whole, as in these rural towns, annual birth rates were below annual death rates, so that the total population, even in rural counties where birth rates tend to be slightly higher, tended not to reproduce themselves. In-migration made up the differences.

Many in-migrating people in rural counties probably held jobs in nearby metropolitan counties and thus still commuted for employment. Other differences could be due to college-educated young adults returning to rural and suburban towns in their late twenties and thirties, if they can, once they have job-producing incomes and especially if they have started a family.

In both 1990 and 2000, all town types showed gains of middle-age people in the 35 to 54 age categories (as also seen in Figure 4.2). This form of “middle-age bulge” in the pyramids also maintains growth of those in their late teens (age 15-19) as middle-aged people bring their teenagers with them to their new suburban and rural locations.

Such gains offset losses of young adults in the 20-34 age categories. Net increases in total populations in these towns between 1990 and 2000 could be deemed a “brain gain.” A brain drain would have permanently affected rural counties, which appears not to have happened. All three sets of population pyramids reflect this return to rural counties, even if in 2000 it took longer for this grouping to return, peaking at age 45, not age 25 as in 1990. But, fewer young people went to college in 1990 than in 2000, delaying their career starts.

Still, many people in the mid-life age 35 to 59 bulge never left, choosing not to migrate, but spent their lives’ prime and retirement years in these rural counties and towns. Percentages of people who aged in place between the two Censuses in 1990 and 2000 can be “seen” by adding 10 years to the ages of people in 1990 and then locating them in the 2000 graphs.

All three figures also show another explanation for increased population sizes in these towns, namely, in increasing life expectancies. Numbers of people age 65 and over in the pyramids in 2000 are slightly larger than in 1990. In 2000, a 70 year-old apparently feels as good as a 65 year-old in 1990, perhaps due to the better health care they receive as older people in 2000 compared to 1990 and greater focus on healthier life styles.
In all three figures, the pyramids show a greater number of women than men in the oldest age groups. Both in 1990 and in 2000 in all town types, almost two-thirds of people age 85 and over were women. Despite whatever health and other disadvantages women face in child-rearing, they tend to outlive men. Yet, the longevity gap between men and women has recently declined. This means that, where women used to outlive men by relatively large numbers of years, they now outlive men by smaller numbers of years. One explanation for the narrowing gap may be lifestyle changes, for example, that increasing numbers of women still smoke while decreasing numbers of men smoke.

Lifestyle changes and consequent health changes for those in older age groups require flexible and effective health-care services, and supportive and preventive health education at younger ages. Even though towns seldom provide healthcare services as such, through incentive zoning they can provide more convenient locations for doctors’ offices, clinics, and nursing homes. These are essential for well-rounded healthcare, and should probably be spread more widely toward population aggregations in outlying towns. Some towns actually provide locations, facilities, and occasionally even subsidies for medical-school expenses to entice certain kinds of doctors to locate in their jurisdictions.

For brevity we will not show population pyramids for each of the five towns in each of the four regions. In general, large differences among the town types in the regions were not found. For the purposes of this study, we will assume that town types’ patterns in each region were quite similar.

Considering people’s longer life-spans in each generation, an issue for the future is whether there will be enough younger adults to replace the working-age group. An increasingly larger group of older people will need special care and services. Without greater in-migration of younger and middle-age people into these towns, disproportionate increases in the various age groupings on fixed incomes plus the increased tax burdens from this change could become unmanageable.

Another major demographic category is ethnicity, to which we now turn.

African-Americans and Hispanic-Americans

The two major minority groups in the 44 rural counties in 2007 were African-Americans and Hispanic-Americans. Although larger numbers of African-Americans lived in these 760 towns in 2000, in general Hispanic-Americans had faster growth rates than either African-Americans or Whites. Such dynamics have considerable impact on various local institutions, including where they live, what they buy, and where they go to school.
**Growth in African-American and Hispanic Populations.** African-Americans are the largest non-White population segment in the 44 rural counties. Their ancestors lived in most of the 44 rural counties since before the Civil War. Upstate New York was a center of the religiously-based Abolitionist movement, and one of its key leaders, William H. Seward of Auburn, Cayuga County (one of the 44 rural counties), a former U.S. Senator and Governor, became Secretary of State under President Abraham Lincoln. Auburn was also the home of Harriet Tubman, a former slave and key figure in the Underground Railroad. In contrast, the Ku Klux Klan and John Birch Society also had visible and invisible presences upstate.

Partly due to their longevity upstate, and partly due to recent immigrations, probably from metropolitan counties, African-American numbers have increased substantially in rural counties over the years. In 2000 their numbers reached 101,214 people, 3.1 percent of the total population in these counties. This number included 16,731 people added since 1990, for a very large growth rate of 19.8 percent. By 2007 these numbers had increased to a total of 136,602, and 4.2 percent of the total population in the 44 counties.

In recent history, Hispanic-Americans became the largest ethnic minority population in New York State. With a total of 111,795 people in 2007, they were 3.4 percent of the total population (just below the 4.2 percent of African-Americans). The Census does not differentiate between Hispanic-Americans who have legal status in the U.S. and those who do not. But, because of documentation issues, most analysts believe these numbers underestimate the actual numbers of Hispanic-Americans living in rural counties in 2000.

Figure 4.6 presents findings on numbers of African-Americans and Hispanics (or Latinos) by region in the 44 rural counties. It shows continued growth among both these minority populations in each region. In fact, each county actually increased in their percentages of both ethnic groups. Figure 4.6 also shows that between 2000 and 2007, percentages of African-Americans were still larger than percentages of Hispanic-Americans. Together these two minority percentages represented an overall average of 7.2 percent of the total population in rural New York in 2007.

**Figure 4.6.** Between 1990 and 2007, Total Numbers of African-Americans and Hispanic-Americans Increased their Numbers, More in the Eastern than Other Regions.
Growth in African-American Populations in Towns. The most recent data available on minority groups for each of the 760 towns were in 2000. Overall town types during the 1990s, Figure 4.7 shows numbers of African-Americans growing in all regions. Only in Western and Northern regions did any town type lose people from this minority population. In the Western region, More Dense Rural towns lost 686 from a total of 4,787 African-Americans and only 13 of a total of 61 in Less Dense Rural towns (these latter numbers cannot be seen in Figure 4.7). In the Northern region, More Dense Suburban towns lost 686 out of a total of 1,024 African-Americans.

Figure 4.7. Between 1990 and 2007, Total Numbers of African-Americans Increased More Rapidly in the Eastern than Other Regions.
A major difference for African-Americans from the total population in Figure 4.1, presented previously and which includes all races, is that, while overall combined populations declined in Central Places between 1990 and 2000, findings in Figure 4.7 show decided growth in African-American populations in Central Places between 1990 and 2000.

From 1990 to 2000 in the 54 Central Places over all regions, numbers of African-Americans grew by 9,275 people to a total of 48,956. In More Dense Suburban Towns during the 1990s, numbers of African-Americans grew by 5,229 people (half the numbers for Central Places), to a total of 30,960 in these 198 towns (just over 26 per town). In the remaining three town types overall, numbers of African-Americans grew by a total of only 2,227 between 1990 and 2000 to a total of 21,298, the vast majority living in More Dense Rural towns.

Patterns among the five town types in the four regions differed considerably in their population sizes and growth rates. The Eastern region had the most African-Americans in their rural counties in 2000 (46,986) and much faster growth rates than the others. The Eastern and Central regions were, as seen in Figure 4.7, rather similar in their patterns. Central Places had the most African-Americans (and the fastest growth), More Dense Suburban towns the next highest numbers, More Dense Rural towns the next highest, and the two less-dense town types had generally quite low numbers (and growth). Overall, growth among African-Americans in the Central region was the lowest.

Patterns in the Western and Northern regions differed from each other as well as from the Eastern and Central regions. More Dense Suburban town types in the Northern region declined in numbers of African-Americans faster than in
any town type. Growth in the other three outlying town types in the Northern region was quite high. More Dense Suburban towns in the Western region grew faster than any town type in any region, while two town types there declined.

In other words, the major generalization for which there is strong evidence in all the regions is that Central Places increased in their numbers of African-Americans while declining in overall total population. A second is that the four outlying town types together grew in numbers of African-Americans, but their growth numbers varied considerably, from very slow in the Central and Western regions to much faster in the Eastern and Northern regions.

**Growth among Hispanic-Americans.** Figure 4.8 shows total numbers of Hispanic-Americans increased overall from 1990 to 2000 in all five town types and all four regions. The one exception was small losses in More Dense Suburban towns in the Northern region. In total, Hispanic-Americans in Central Places grew by 28,097 people. This growth from 1990 to 2000 was faster than African-American growth by about 11,400 people. But, from 2000 to 2007 African Americans grew by about 10,200 more than Hispanic-Americans.

**Figure 4.8. Between 1990 and 2000, Total Numbers of Hispanic-Americans Increased Over All Town Types by More Than 30 Percent.**

As with African-American growth, growth of Hispanic-Americans during the 1990s helped stem even larger overall population losses in Central Places. In More Dense Suburban towns, the Hispanic-American population grew by about 12,027. The remaining town types showed much slower growth in numbers for a combined total of only 5,904 people. In other words, in 2000, many more Hispanic-Americans in the 44 rural counties lived in the two most-dense town
types than in less-dense towns. Such numbers suggest that they, too, like African-Americans, were an “urbanized and suburbanized” population, even if not entirely, in these 44 upstate rural counties.

The Eastern region grew faster during the 1990s than other regions, probably due to their relative adjacency to New York City, which in the last 25 years has been the major entry point for Hispanic-Americans coming to New York State. A second entry point appears to be in the relatively large-scale agricultural operations of the Western region.

Population pyramids for Hispanic-Americans in Figure 4.9 show their dynamics in more detail, and contrast somewhat with the total population’s pyramids. A first contrast is that numbers of Hispanic-Americans peak at age 20-24. In the total population, this age category is close to the trough.

Figure 4.9. Population Pyramids for 1990 and 2000 for Hispanic-Americans in the 44 Rural Counties Show Large Differences between Numbers of Men and Women in Younger Age Groupings.

Second, numbers of teenagers among Hispanic-Americans are comparatively low (in a trough) whereas they peak in the total population’s pyramids. This finding suggests that teenagers do not migrate as such, but are the offspring of those in their thirties or forties who probably migrated much earlier. The steep upward curves of children in 1990 provide additional evidence for this idea.
Further, the proximity in both 1990 and 2000 of men’s and women’s trajectories in their later years contrast with the large separation between them in the earlier years of the pyramid. This finding for every age grouping supports those of other studies that find more men than women migrate.

Overall, Figure 4.9 shows that the pyramids are typical of groups that migrate over longer distances. Males in their early twenties migrate first, followed by their wives, who bring some of the children, followed by parents and/or other relatives. Single males find wives, marry, and have children here. These processes have now been happening long enough that corroborating numbers for Hispanic-Americans appear in the age categories.

The most important differences between Hispanic-Americans and African-Americans were in their growth. During the 1990s, average growth in the Hispanic-American population outpaced that of the African-American population by just less than three to one. During the 2000s, growth among African-Americans outpaced that of Hispanic-Americans.

High growth among these minority populations also challenges the “white flight from Central Places” hypothesis. The “flight” is apparently not because of minorities moving in as much as for other reasons. Such reasons probably include higher income people moving out for other reasons, such as fleeing higher densities along with school quality for their children.

The wide-spread migrations of both Hispanic-Americans and African-Americans to outlying towns also have significant policy implications for institutions and decision makers in these towns. Foremost among the institutions where such policies play out are in educational institutions. Let us turn for a moment, then, to consider the dynamics of these two minority groups among school-age youth, age 0 to 17.

African-American and Hispanic-American Younger People. General growth by African-Americans and Hispanic-Americans in the town types raises the issue of how much the growth included younger people. Earlier in Figure 4.2, trends among total numbers of young people age 19 and under in the five town types declined between 1990 and 2000 and again from 2000 to 2007.

Although data for 2007 are not available for towns, Figure 4.10 offers findings for African-Americans and Hispanic-Americans together who are ages 19 and under in 1990 and 2000. The general pattern in this figure contrasts from that of the total population in that during the 1990s. Taken together, African-Americans and Hispanic-Americans increased their numbers of young people in all town types and regions. Even though Hispanic-Americans overall lost young
people in Less Dense Suburban towns, African-Americans increased theirs in this
town type by more than enough to increase their numbers overall. Likewise,
whereas African-Americans lost young people in Less Dense Rural towns,
Hispanic-Americans increased theirs. Overall then, minority populations of
young people grew between 1990 and 2000 in all town types and regions.

Figure 4.10. Total Numbers of African-Americans Combined with Hispanic-
Americans Age 19 and Under Increased In All Town Types.

Percentages in these minorities were small overall, averaging only 4.7
percent in 1990 and 5.5 percent in 2000. In Central Places, however, averages
were 7.8 percent in 1990 and 10.3 percent in 2000, contributing 3,703 young
people to the age 17 or under grouping, or about 70 additional young people per
town in these 54 places. Due to overall population growth in these two
minorities together of about 35 percent, we expect that by 2010 the two
minorities together will be one-third larger, to reach a 15 percent average in
Central Places, and at least an 8 percent average elsewhere.

These two minorities together contributed a total of 6,646 additional
young people to this age grouping. The gains to any individual school district,
then, would be small in outlying towns. More Dense Suburban towns would
have an additional average of only 10 minority young people, More Dense Rural
towns 3, and the two less-dense town types 1 student each from these two
minorities.

In any case, African-Americans and Hispanic-Americans grew in total
numbers of young people age 17 and under in all towns, and especially in
Central Places. Meanwhile, Whites and other ethnic groups in this age grouping declined overall, growing only in More Dense Suburban towns. Growth in numbers, of course, is quite important in justifying the large educational infrastructures in most towns and small cities.

School, town, and small-city officials in the 44 rural counties, then, have been and will be faced with small but steady increases in ethnic diversity among their “new” student generations both in minority-ethnic differences but also educational differences in family backgrounds (as will be seen in Chapter 6). This adds to existing and increasing diversities in the same schools.

As numbers in each social grouping in this diverse mix increase in rural towns and counties, they bring somewhat different cultures with them. School issues also spill over into towns’ communities, generating challenges that are also likely to increase into the 21st century. With increased diversity, community leaders, decision makers, and concerned citizens face additional challenges and opportunities.

Conclusions
The chapter began by focusing on three basic questions:
1) What stimulated population growth (and decline in Central Places), and how does the so-called “brain drain” of young people fit into the growth?
2) How does in-migration of Hispanics and African-Americans fit with population growth and decline, and are these populations concentrating primarily in certain locations or becoming more widespread in the town types?
3) Have regions been growing about equally, or is one or more stagnant or in decline, and have they all experienced similar growth in their youth and minority populations?

At least four identifiable themes emerged in response to these questions. Let us enumerate them, and then draw some policy implications.

1. Towns’ demographics have changed, whether slowly or rapidly, over the last ten to twenty years in all town types and regions. Population growth was small (2 percent overall) between 1990 and 2000 and smaller still (0.2 percent overall) into 2007. The Eastern region grew faster than the other regions. Minorities’ growth was more rapid in Central Places than elsewhere, but is still small in total numbers. Growth also happened more quickly in More Dense Suburban towns than the others, probably indicating that these once “rural” counties were increasingly “suburbanizing.”

2. Increases in Hispanic- and African-Americans represented nearly three-fourths of the population growth from 1990 to 2000, and from 2000 to 2007,
while the total population increased by only 12,640 people, the minority populations of Hispanic- and African-Americans increased by more than 58,850. This suggests that large numbers of white people are leaving these counties. Although the 2007 population estimates for town types that included ethnicity are not available, the overall population of Central Places continued to decline from 2000 to 2007 (by about 12,360 people), while the remaining town types all increased overall (by slightly over 25,000 people). Thus, the large numbers of minorities suggested that some, perhaps many, also settled in outlying towns.

3. Decreases in numbers of young people but greater diversity among them happened in most town types between 1990 and 2000. African-Americans and Hispanic-Americans, when combined, increased over all town types and regions, and were the only groupings to increase in Central Places. Although in small numbers and percentages, both minorities increased overall at much higher rates than Whites. Population increases probably came from nearby metropolitan areas (giving them “small-bump” growth rather than from more distant places and “big-jump” growth). Hispanic-Americans probably had both - - slow bumps from nearby locations in the Eastern region (upwards from the New York City area), but also big jumps in the Western region by dropping-out of farm-migrant streams. Many minority in-migrants also brought urban culture with them, and settled more often in Central Places. This “urbanizing” character contrasted to the suburbanizing culture of commuters from nearby locations.

4. About twice as many elderly people (age 85 and over) in 2000 lived in outlying towns than in Central Places, and increased from 1990 to 2007. Although percentages of those over age 65 were substantial (13 percent of the population in 2007), percentages of elderly over age 85 were quite small (1.8 percent). Over two-thirds of the latter were women. African-American elderly lived disproportionately in Central Places.

Growth of minorities in Central Places and losses of Whites there during the 1990s, and undoubtedly during the 2000s, raise the large set of issues associated with “flight” from Central Places to outlying towns (especially More Dense Suburbs). But, between 1990 and 2000, because nearly one-quarter of all African-Americans and Hispanic-Americans also settled in More Dense Suburbs, the flight was probably largely an income flight. Still, a key result from this phenomenon is to add to increasing fiscal stresses on Central Places’ budgets.

These findings raise many leadership and policy issues for State and local officials. Many stem from the “flight” that affects Central Places so negatively financially. Many Whites (and/or higher income people) apparently left Central Places during the 1990s, usually, as we shall see in subsequent chapters, leaving behind lower-income people (including more single mothers and seniors). The
higher vacancy rates (and rents) possibly attracted lower-income people to the Central Places. Overall, they probably also lowered prices for the same houses in Central Places compared to those in the suburbs. Lowered comparative housing values reduce (or stabilize) comparative assessed property valuations in Central Places so that their policymakers were under greater constraints to raise tax rates to meet higher budget demands. Higher taxes tend to further erode Central Places’ housing values. The processes probably became, then, a vicious cycle of people leaving, higher vacancy rates, lower housing values, lower overall assessed valuations, higher taxes, and lower-income people.

Many who leave Central Places buy or rent homes in More Dense Suburban towns, resulting in increasing numbers of households and housing values there that contribute to their higher comparative assessed property values. One result is that More Dense Suburban towns can usually keep their tax rates lower than Central Places (as seen in Chapter 9 on town revenues). They also tend to facilitate the building of shopping malls that compete and beat out downtown businesses. Consequently, Central Places’ total assessed valuations comparatively erode even more due to losses of businesses.

Another outcome is that, when more people live in More Dense Suburbs, they put increased transportation-service demands both in terms of bus services and of major arteries leading into Central Places. Heavier traffic on key roads raises repair costs on these roads and their bridges. These situations in turn raise Central Places’ physical infrastructure costs, including for parking garages, to facilitate traffic accommodation and usage. Such costs also feed into higher taxes in Central Places.

Minorities that move to the suburbs probably also have more income than those remaining, or arriving, in Central Places. Since lower-income people generally rely on social services more than higher-income people, these movements of people also add to Central Places’ taxation-fiscal-stress problems. “Income flight,” then, apparently has several negative effects on Central Places compared to effects on outlying towns. Such situations cause structural binds for Central Places to the point where their policymakers often seem stymied for dealing with them. They thus tend to rely on State Aid to help them out.

A second major set of policy issues stems from trends in numbers and percentages of younger people. Trends between 1990 and 2007 show that numbers and percentages of younger people declined significantly overall except for More Dense Suburban towns and the two ethnic minorities, which increased their numbers (even though 2007 data for towns by age and ethnicity are not available).
Such movement affected downtown schools. Most of them probably saw (and will continue to see) declining numbers of students and increasing ethnic-minority populations among them. Findings also show that suburban schools have become increasingly diverse ethnically. Such changes present cultural challenges to both Central Places and More Dense Suburban schools. Still, even in 2007, minorities were a small percentage of the total population, averaging 7.5 percent in 2007, but 10 percent in Central Places and growing reasonably rapidly. Our estimate for 2007 is that the Hispanic- and African-Americans together averaged nearly 15 percent in Central Places.

Increased diversity of all kinds, including small ethnic but larger rural-suburban-urban diversity with their historical background cultures, is a general trend in all outlying towns. Such diversity is projected for more prominence in the future. This diversity offers both challenges and opportunities, especially in suburban school systems (the ones that are growing). Cultural interactions tend to become comparatively intensified in schools. They could become firing lines for handling diverse students whose family backgrounds include those from Central Places, rural towns, suburban towns, ethnic-minorities, the more educated, the moderately educated, high-school dropouts, and so forth.

Frequently, school interactions carry over into town and community activities. Local officials from all town types including school officials will undoubtedly have to deal with them into the indefinite future. Again, policy options are in flux for responding in ways that satisfy people concerned with integrating such diversity in their schools and towns. Much is yet to be learned about programs for effective responses to these issues, but “diversity-interaction training” for administrators, teachers, and students seem necessary when dealing with diverse student bodies. Only a few school districts employ such trainers full-time, although others hire consultants for dealing with certain situations.

A third policy area from the findings is to develop ways to respond effectively to larger numbers and proportions of seniors and elderly. In 2000, two-thirds of the elderly (age 85 and over) were living in outlying towns. An aging population requires health-care accommodations through hospitals, clinics, nursing homes, emergency and home-health services, and other health-care facilities. Most such facilities have been located in counties’ Central Places and More Dense Suburbs. Insofar as the elderly live in outlying towns and often lack vehicles to readily access existing health-care facilities, there will probably also be increasing pressures for locating clinics and nursing homes in outlying towns, and for adequate transportation to and from outlying towns for them and those who care for them.
Policymakers know that seniors (13 percent of the population in 2007) have become increasingly vocal in seeking to satisfy their needs. Yet policymakers know also that they have to consider everyone’s needs for the general welfare, not only those with louder political voices. They will, then, seek to find a balance for accommodating medical facilities called for by the aging population, with providing resources to address emerging problems of young and mid-life populations.

Demands on decision makers, then, will probably require increased attention to affordable housing, schools, transportation, health-care, emergency services, parks, recreation, and other commercial and public services. All such facilities, especially insofar as they require locations in which to be built, fall within the decision purview of elected and appointed town officials and policymakers. Such decision points at which physical-infrastructure planning overlaps with socially-related infrastructure planning, may be instances where incentive zoning, as enabled by the State Legislature, can be used effectively.

Although outlying towns’ planning in the past has been largely for physical infrastructure, including for roads, bridges, parks, and recreation facilities, more of this infrastructure in the future will probably have to deal with socially-related infrastructures that induce safe and constructive interactions among diverse people. Policymakers, then, will need to consider what types of attention and resources such emerging groupings will require in order to integrate them into the towns’ institutions and goals. In the short run, with the economic downturn in 2007-08, such decisions will be made only more difficult.
CHAPTER 5
EMPLOYMENT

Paul R. Eberts and Sarah C. Giroux

Introduction
Over the past fifty years, national, state, and local economies and their employment compositions have undergone extensive restructuring. A main shift was movement away from a strong manufacturing base, producing a variety of tangible products, which employed over a quarter of the workforce in rural New York counties in the 1950s. In 2000 with its “post-industrial” services economy, only 15 percent of the workforce was engaged in manufacturing. Most workers don’t make things, but instead engage in managing, distributing, selling, and accounting for these products through such services as finance, government, retail and wholesale trade, education, and health care (see Eberts and Kris Merschrod, Socioeconomic Trends and Well-Being Indicators in New York State Counties: 1950-2000, Albany, NY: Legislative Commission on Rural Resources, 2004, chapters 4 and 5). This revolutionary shift in our economy and society fundamentally altered patterns of employment in the recent past which will probably continue into the future.

An economy is usually characterized as having three sectors, called primary, secondary, and tertiary. Together these three sectors comprise the entire set of activities in an economy. The primary sector deals with extraction of products from natural resources. Industries in the primary sector include agriculture, forestry, fishing, mining, drilling, etc. The secondary sector involves processing or manufacturing the primary sector’s resources into useable consumer products, both durable (generators) and nondurable (mainly food processing). During the 1990s especially, these processes might more appropriately be called “compu-facturing” rather than “manu-facturing” since computers are used so extensively in manufacturing processes and “hands” (as in “manu-”) are used today very differently from in previous generations. A viable compufacturing sector produces computers, printers, and other electronic devices, but also generators, railroad engines, and airplanes.

The tertiary sector includes a wide range of jobs considered services that are not included in primary or secondary sectors. Typical jobs are those in finance, insurance, and real estate; retail, wholesale, import, and export trade; education and healthcare; transportation, utilities, the professions, scientific endeavors, government; recreation,
entertainment, accommodations, tourist attractions, and so forth. The tertiary sector encompasses some twenty-five or thirty separate services, but, as we will see below, only about a half dozen employ more than five percent of the work force.

In contemporary society, employment in the primary sector engages only three to four percent of the total work force, the secondary engages about fifteen percent, and the tertiary, together, over eighty percent. In previous decades, the three sectors worked in tandem in localities – the primary sector extracted products from natural resources, transporting them to local manufacturers, which then worked them into useable durable and food products, and sold them to local wholesalers and retailers and then to local residents for their consumption. In contemporary society, extracted natural resources are shipped longer distances to manufacturers and consumers located throughout the world, with the transactions coordinated by trade industries in the tertiary sector through complex financial exchanges. Such changes have had revolutionary impacts on local economies. These impacts will be discussed in this chapter.

Below we first examine overall trends in employment patterns during the last couple of decades in the five town types and four regions, focusing on employment levels, commuting rates, and women’s participation in the workforce. We then identify sectors where jobs have been declining and where they have been growing (the latter almost entirely in the tertiary sector). This approach provides community leaders, planners and local government officials with a better understanding how towns’ employment trends affect the three economic sectors in influencing their towns’ overall employment conditions and opportunities. Having large percentages of people gainfully employed is usually considered desirable for personal well-being, community life-quality, and development.

**Total Employment**

Not surprisingly, employment levels differ among the five town types and the four regions in New York’s 44 rural counties. Still, trends have been relatively similar across town types. Employed persons reported in this chapter are residents of towns but whose employment is usually outside their towns of residence. Nearly all people commute to employment outside towns where they live, and about one-third commute outside their county of residence for employment.

Because updated number-employed estimates for 2004 and 2007 are not available for the 760 towns, in Figure 5.1 we use estimates for the 44 counties (and the county typology) found on the website of the New York State Department of Labor. Figure 5.1 shows total numbers of people employed who lived in each county type and region between 1980 and 2007. Overall, employment grew in these counties up to 2004, then plummeted by 2007. Data in 2007, however, were collected differently, and the variation in collection methods may account for differing findings between 2004 and 2007. Data collected by the Census in 2000 were self-reported as based on people’s responses to questions about their employment history for the year. The 2004 data approximated those collected by the Census for 2000. Data for 2007 were much more
stringent; people were counted as employed only if they were employed for two consecutive quarters during the year.

**Figure 5.1.** Between 1990 and 2004, Total Numbers of Employed People Increased in All Town Types, But They Lost Numbers of Employed People by 2007.

Since 2007 was a transition year to lower employment in 2008 and 2009, the drop from 2004 to 2007 seen in Figure 5.1, amounted to a loss of almost 8,200 jobs. However, the net loss from 2000 to 2007 by the more stringent criteria in 2007 was only about 300 net jobs lost. Still, we can safely say that 2007 brought some job losses to the rural counties. The Eastern and Central regions showed the highest losses, the Northern showed the lowest. In interpreting findings in the remainder of this chapter; job gains up to 2004, then losses by 2007, should be kept in mind.

Figure 5.2 shows total numbers of people employed who lived in each town type and region between 1980 and 2000 (the most recent years consistent Census data were available for towns). This figure closely parallels the numbers of people in the age 18-64 categories presented in Chapter 4. The work force over all towns and regions grew from 1.454 million in 1990 to a total of 1.5 million people in 2000, for a growth rate of 3.2 percent during the decade, which was larger than the towns’ average total population growth of 2.0 percent. This employment growth, with less population growth, is usually accounted for by increased numbers of women joining the work force. They are usually also the first to drop out during employment recessions.

**Figure 5.2.** Between 1990 and 2000, Total Numbers of Employed People Increased in All Outlying Town Types while Central Places Lost Employed People.
As also seen in Figure 5.2, employment growth rates between 1980 and 1990 were larger, reaching 17% overall. Such growth rates occurred even as, and perhaps because of, large declines in proportions and numbers of employed people in core metropolitan counties. During the 1980s many people moved to outlying rural and suburban counties who then commuted into metropolitan core counties for their employment. But during the 1990s, Central Places in rural counties also lost numbers of people employed. The result, then, was that population movements for employment during the 1990s slowed down compared to the overall gains in the 1980s and paralleled what was happening in metropolitan core counties.

We imply above that commuters from metropolitan counties were another basic reason for population growth in rural towns. However, the picture is actually more complicated. Non-commuters, apparently without jobs, have moved in as well. It is very difficult in Census data to separate people and jobs. From these data, we cannot exactly determine which came first, job growth or population growth.

Only from patterns in the findings can we infer that people moved out of, or otherwise chose not to locate in, Central Places or metropolitan core counties between 1990 and 2000. We cannot assume that jobs offered by businesses moved with them to suburban and rural locations. We do know that commuting rates also increased and that many people living in suburban and rural towns commute to Central Places for employment. Declines in numbers employed in Central Places in our findings, then, do not necessarily mean loss of employment opportunities there, even if more employed people were living in outlying towns.

Trends between 1990 and 2000 in Figure 5.2 show that even within these 44 rural counties, movements of people away from Central Places occurred and growth also happened in outlying towns. Many of these people apparently also commuted back to Central Places for employment. Such movements parallel the general trends of people.
moving to outlying counties from metropolitan core locations or to outlying locations within metropolitan counties.

Figure 5.2 also shows where full-time employed people lived in the five town types in the four regions in 2000. Three of the four regions show similar patterns of more employed people living in More Dense Suburban towns, with Central Places second, More Dense Rural towns third, and the fewest living in Less Dense Suburban towns. The pattern in the Northern region differs considerably. In 2000, more employed people lived in Less Dense Rural towns in the Northern region, in the fringe towns of their counties, than in any other town type. Further, only a relatively small percentage of these people, 22 percent, commuted outside their county for jobs.

The height of each bar for the town types was determined in part by the numbers of towns in each type. In total in 2000, more people who were employed (619,508) lived in the 198 More Dense Suburban towns than anywhere else. About one-fifth, 349,901, lived in the 54 Central Places even though this number was down by roughly 15,000 from the 365,015 employed there in 1990. About equal numbers of employed people, 322,691 overall, lived in the 177 More Dense Rural towns. The 283 Less Dense Rural towns’ employment levels of 173,083 were well below those of the 54 Central Places. Only a total of 35,356 who had jobs lived in the 48 Less Dense Suburban towns.

On a per town basis, the 54 Central Places had the highest average numbers of full-time employed residents, averaging 6,480 in 2000. These numbers were more than double the average of 3,129 people with jobs in More Dense Suburban towns or More Dense Rural towns that averaged 1,825. An average of 737 employed persons per town lived in Less Dense Suburban towns in 2000, and an average of only 612 lived in each of the 283 Less Dense Rural towns.

**Figure 5.3. Between 1990 and 2000, Average Numbers of Employed Residents among the Regions’ Town Types Show Similar Patterns.**
On a per town regional basis, the patterns in most regions are similar. In the Northern region, More Dense Rural towns averaged 2,559 employed people per town, slightly more than lived in More Dense Suburban towns, which averaged 2,134.

Only Central Places declined in numbers employed between 1990 and 2000. Almost all outlying town types showed slow but steady increases in numbers employed. Such employment losses in Central Places during the 1990s may be surprising, considering the booming economy then. Yet, we know that Central Places between 1990 and 2000 also lost total numbers of people age 18-64, the potential workforce, while suburban and rural towns gained in these mid-life populations.

Figure 5.4 adds another dimension to these trends by showing average percentages (not numbers) among residents age 18-64 employed in each town type in each region. The percentages were calculated by dividing total numbers of those employed full-time (35 hours per week or more) in each town type by the potential workforce population of individuals aged 18-64. Of course some jobs are held by young people under the age of 18 and others by seniors age 65 and over. Percentages in Figure 5.3, then, are indices of employment percentages in the potential workforce ages 18-64. Still, we estimate that these indexed percentages approximate actual percentages of residents employed in this age grouping.

Figure 5.4. In 2000, Outlying Towns Showed Higher Average Percentages than Central Places in Employed People Age 18-64.

In 2000, our index shows overall average employment of 74 percent of people in the age 18-64 categories. Across all town types and regions in 2000, Central Places averaged 70 percent, the lowest of all town types. The other four town types averaged 77, 73, 76, and 74 percent, respectively. Although percentages varied among the town types, people age 18 to 64 in outlying towns had higher percentages employed compared to Central Places. Those not employed could include homemakers, the disabled, retired, unemployed (not looking for work), or part-time employees. Still,
even with the varying percentages among the town types, such large percentages employed show the commitment of people to find full-time employment. In contemporary society, two-income households implied by these percentages are increasingly necessary in order to maintain people’s suburban or rural lifestyles.

Trends in Figure 5.4 parallel those in Figure 5.3 (which presented numbers employed). Both figures show overall growth in percentages in four of the five town types, the exception being, again, Central Places whose percentages (as well as numbers) declined.

Percentages increased less in the 1990s than in the 1980s. In 1980 overall employment averaged 65 percent of those ages 18-64; in 1990 it averaged 72 percent; and in 2000 it averaged 74 percent. The nationwide boom in employment during the 1980s stimulated employment growth in these towns to jump by 7 percentage points between 1980 and 1990, but only 2 percentage points between 1990 and 2000. Employment in New York’s 44 rural counties reflected the rest of New York State in showing slower employment growth in the 1990s than in the 1980s - an implication of these percentages is that more women and/or more people age 65 and over were employed. We shall examine the extent of women’s employment below.

Figure 5.4 also shows few differences among the four regions in percentages employed. The Eastern, Central, and Western regions had similar patterns. At 68 percent employed, Northern New York’s averages lagged slightly behind the others. Of the potential workforce of people ages 18-64 average proportions employed in Central Places and the two rural town types in the Northern region in 2000, were lower compared to these town types in the other three regions.

Why did Central Places lose employed people in the 1990s compared to those in outlying locations? As noted above, many people living in outlying locations were probably employed either in their counties’ Central Places or More Dense Suburban towns, and, comparatively, in counties outside their places of residence. But the percentages in Figure 5.4 can actually reflect several sets of additional conditions as well. For instance, numbers in poverty among families and children was higher in Central Places; others were retired. Central Places also tend to be where more disabled people live who want to be near services they need.

**Commuting**

Although almost everyone in outlying towns commutes outside their towns for employment, an increasingly important part of life in all town types is the percentages of people commuting for employment outside the county in which they reside. Such percentages imply longer daily commutes. In general, commuting is a double- or even quadruple-edged sword. While commuting longer distances for employment from a particular town is helpful to the town in terms of increasing its tax base, commuters also tend to participate less in town affairs but, when they do participate it is often about additional quality services. Commuters are often the first to complain about potholes and spatial layouts of roads. Commuting also puts wear and tear on people and their families, even as they enjoy the amenities of suburban and/or rural living such as better
schools, more house space and land for given prices, and more open space and privacy away from neighbors.

Commuting longer distances also raises several environmental issues. It puts more carbon-emissions into the atmosphere, uses up increasingly precious fossil fuels, and causes environmental damage as more and faster roadways come on line to replace those which were narrow, curvy, and more dangerous. Unless they are committed to protecting the rural character and environment, commuters usually want wider and all-weather straighter roads in excellent condition where traffic is not interrupted due to congestion, in order to reduce their fatigue and travel time. They also want water drained into ditches rather than left standing on roadways where ice could easily form. To accomplish such things is expensive for rural towns and often strains their highway departments and their budgets.

Higher annual commuting rates appear to be another structural feature of rural counties and towns. This is also an indicator where county types show greater differences than regions. Figure 5.5 presents findings on residents commuting outside a county for employment for the five town types in the four county types in 1990 and 2000. Although increases in such commuting between 1990 and 2000 were reasonably similar among the town types, the most striking features of Figure 5.5 are the significant differences in commuting rates between the twenty-four suburban counties (those adjacent to core upstate metropolitan counties) and the twenty rural counties (those not adjacent). In 2000, commuting in the two suburban county types averaged 45 percent, while employed residents in the two rural county types averaged 24 percent. The overall average, then, was 35 percent, slightly over one-third of all employed residents. In all 760 towns and cities, commuting is very important for people’s employment.

Figure 5.5. From 1990 to 2000, Average Percentages of the Workforce Commuting Outside a County for Employment Increased in All Town Types of the County Types.

![Graph showing average percentages of people commuting outside a county of residence for employment in county types, 1990 & 2000.](image-url)
Important for economic development is the remarkably similar growth in commuting among town types in these counties. In 1990, an overall average of 31 percent of these towns’ workforces commuted to work outside a county; by 2000 commuting rates increased to an average of 34 percent. In general, both more-dense town types had the highest average levels of commuting, but less-dense towns increased slightly faster. Commuting, then, was an important source of increased employment in all county types, but especially to residents of Rural Periphery counties, presumably the ones with the farthest distances to drive for their employment.

Not surprisingly, these rates also varied among town types in the four regions. Figure 5.6 presents findings on residents’ commuting for the five town types in the four regions in 1990 and 2000. Towns in Eastern New York had the highest commuting rates, averaging 42 percent, with 48 percent, nearly one in two employed persons, commuting from More Dense Suburban towns. The latter rates exceeded those of any town type in any region. In addition, commuting from Central Places in Eastern New York, at 40 percent in 2000, was nearly equal to the highest rates for any town type in other regions.

Figure 5.6. From 1990 to 2000, Average Percentages of the Workforce Commuting Outside a County for Employment Increased in All Town Types.

Commuters in the relatively isolated Northern region had by far the lowest commuting rates, averaging only 13 percent, one-third the percentages in Eastern New York. No town type in Northern New York saw even one-fourth of its residents commuting outside a county for employment. The highest were those in Less Dense Rural towns which averaged 22 percent. Other towns’ rates were much lower; in 2000 a very low 8 percent of workers in Central Places in the Northern region commuted outside a county for employment.

Of course travel distances from Central Places to other counties in the Northern region tend to be much greater than for residents of Less Dense Rural towns, many of which are on the region’s periphery. In contrast to findings for other regions, then,
commuting in Northern New York is largely a phenomenon on the region’s edges rather than from its Central Places and More Dense Suburban towns.

Towns in Western and Central New York had commuting rates that fell between the extremes of towns in the Northern and Eastern regions, 31 percent for the Central and 34 for the Western. Overall, More Dense Rural towns had the highest average commuting rates, averaging 42 percent. More Dense Suburban towns averaged 30 percent. Central Places, at 29 percent in 2000, had the lowest average commuting rates. Both less dense towns had very similar rates between these extremes, Less Dense Suburban towns averaging 35 percent, and Less Dense Rural towns 33 percent.

In Figures 5.2 and 5.3 we saw that fewer people from Central Places were employed compared to other town types, and in Figure 5.6 we see that 27 percent of employed people living in Central Places commuted outside the county for employment in 2000, rising from 25 percent in 1990. Over one-fourth of residents even from Central Places in New York’s 44 rural counties were commuters in 2000. For this reason, Central Places have added commuting to their main features of being centers for county-wide employment in commercial, public, and professional services. These percentages do not reflect “reverse” commuting which is also happening between metropolitan core counties and these towns.

It should be noted as it was in Chapter 4 on demographic changes that a mismatch occurred in towns with the highest commuting growth and those with the highest population growth. Although commuting grew between 1990 and 2000 by 60,709, about the same amount as populations grew (64,229), it did not grow in the same places. For instance, commuting grew in Central Places, but population sizes declined. Commuting numbers also grew slightly faster than population numbers in More Dense Rural towns where many people who were residents in 1990 started to commute between 1990 and 2000. Numbers in commuting grew more slowly in More Dense Suburban and the two less-dense towns than population sizes.

Women in the Workforce
Employment of women represents another important indicator affecting life-quality and well-being of families and people. Working women have become commonplace in contemporary society, and have been increasingly well-integrated into work places. Studies show that working women, whether single, married, or married with children still at home, are generally happier than those not working. Two-income families are also more likely to separate or divorce.

Figure 5.7 reports percentages of women employed of all women ages 18-64 (the potential work force of women most likely to be employed). The results are striking, with women in the work force averaging 72 percent in 2000. All town types showed increases in 2000 over their 1990 levels. The largest percentages of women employed were in More Dense Suburban towns, where nearly three-quarters were employed. Less Dense Rural towns, as well as towns in the Northern region, averaged over two-thirds. Differences in percentages between More Dense Suburban towns and Less Dense Rural towns may be due to women finding employment more easily when
they are closer to higher-dense Central Places and More Dense Suburbs where job opportunities were more abundant. Of course other characteristics of less-dense towns may also discourage women from entering the work force, such as the necessity for owning a well-functioning car to commute to employment and/or finding child-care.

**Figure 5.7. Between 1990 and 2000, Average Percentages of Employed Women of All Women Age 18-64 Increased in All Town Types.**

![Graph showing average percentages of women in the workforce, 1990 & 2000]

Trends between 1990 and 2000 saw increases in all town types in their average percentages. In 1990, these averages stood at 67 percent, while in 2000 this percentage jumped by 5 percentage-points to 72 percent. Also as seen in Figure 5.6, the overall 5 percentage-point average increases from 1990 to 2000 were slightly smaller in Central Places and More Dense Suburban towns and slightly larger in outlying towns. These dynamics indicate that even more women in outlying towns found the attraction of employment greater in 2000 than in 1990. A major difference is that women in the Western region were slightly more likely to be employed (averaging 73 percent), while those in the Northern were slightly less likely to be employed (averaging 68 percent).

These findings make it clear that women played important roles in the 2000 economy throughout New York. Future economic growth may also be partially dependent on the ability of places to entice women to join the workforce, whether through increased employment opportunities or declines in work-related costs such as those associated with more convenient transportation and childcare. With employment declines from 2000 to 2007, it may seem that women might be the ones to drop out of the work force first. But, reports in the national press indicate that more men than women were unemployed both 2007 and 2008. The 2010 Census (that comes out in 2012) should give everyone a clearer picture of women’s employment dynamics.

**Overall Dynamics of Employment Sectors**

Employment trends over the past twenty years are aggregates of trends in the industries comprising the three main economic sectors (extractive, manufacturing, and servicing). Figure 5.8 shows rather dramatic trends in the three major economic sectors
since 1980. The shifts saw the services sector grow steadily, while manufacturing and extractive sectors slowly declined. Manufacturing was still dominant in these towns in 1980, employing an average of 26 percent of all workers across the town types. By 2000, these percentages declined to 15 percent. Likewise, extractive-sector employment declined from an average 6 percent across the town types in 1980 to 3 percent in 2000. In contrast, service-sector employment grew from an average of 70 percent in 1980 to 83 percent of the work force by 2000. In other words, in 2000, an average over four of every five workers, even in these 44 rural counties, worked in services.

**Figure 5.8. Between 1980 and 2000, the Services Sector Experienced Steady and Large Gains in Percentages of Employed People, while Manufacturing and Extractive Sectors Experienced Losses.**

A major cause of these dynamics is attributed to computerization and advanced technologies within each industry in the three economic sectors. In general, industries most affected by these forces lost greater numbers and percentages of workers. The two major exceptions to this generalization were the scientific and information-processing industries, neither of which represented large proportions of workers in 1980, but both of which experienced increases in their employment numbers and percentages by 2000. Gains were also made in certain other services industries where personal attention was a requirement, as in healthcare and education.

**Declining Industries**

This section highlights industries that declined in their total employment from 1990 to 2000.

**Retail and Wholesale Services.** Retail and wholesale services were not evenly distributed in all its sub-sectors from 1990 to 2000. During the 1990s, retail and wholesale trade were two services that experienced large declines in numbers and percentages of employees. More jobs were lost in retail services over this time period than in any other single industry, including manufacturing.

Figure 5.9 shows that, despite substantial employment growth in retail sales during the 1980s, during the 1990s all town types saw huge declines in average retail-
service employment. Nearly 68,000 jobs were lost in these 44 rural counties alone. Such job losses also occurred in metropolitan counties. Statewide, a total of over 440,000 jobs were lost in retail trade from 1990 to 2000 (Eberts and Merschrod, 2004). Considering both the booming economy in the 1990s and the lack of media attention and concern over low-wage retail jobs lost during this period, it seems counterintuitive that between 1990 and 2000, people employed in retail trade declined by an average of 6 percentage-points in Central Places, 5 percentage-points in More Dense Suburban towns, 5 in More Dense Rural towns, and 4 in both less-dense town types. Each percentage-point loss (or gain) represented about 15,000 jobs.

Figure 5.9. Between 1980 and 1990, All Town Types Experienced Gains in Residents Employed in Retail Trade, but between 1990 and 2000 They Registered Huge Job Losses in Retail Trade.

These retail-sector losses represent an average of 28 percent of all full-time jobs that were present in retail trade in 1990 (even if part-time jobs might, actually, have increased a bit). Such lower-skilled job losses were huge for people who worked full-time in retail trade in the 1990s and relied on these jobs for their incomes.

In 1990 retail-trade employment averaged 16 percent of all employment, varying widely from region to region with a range from 14 to 21 percent (slightly smaller than average numbers employed in manufacturing). By 2000, this average had declined to only 11 percent employed in retail trade, ranging between 10 to 13 percent across the town types. Still, in 2000 the retail sector provided an average of about one in nine of all jobs in all regions, since all regions averaged near the overall 11 percent average.

The Northern region experienced slightly greater losses, 6 percentage-points in their average retail trade employment, while Eastern New York lost an average of only 4 percentage-points. Since the Eastern region also had lower levels of employment in retail trade in 1980, these differences could be due to retail-trade employment in the Eastern region being located in relatively centralized mall locations much earlier than
1990, whereas in Northern New York communities were smaller and retail-trade establishments were spread out over larger locations.

Social scientists now almost universally attribute such decreases in percentages employed in retail (and wholesale) trade to increasing numbers of “big box” retail stores in their towns or nearby towns. Traditionally, retail jobs were available in larger numbers of smaller businesses, offering a wide variety of employment and products. Although such jobs were considered less skilled and lower-paying than other forms of full-time employment available to younger, older, and/or less-educated people, they still provided income for these people and often health and sometimes retirement benefits.

In contrast, big-box stores tend to employ more part-time workers who do not receive health or retirement benefits. These big-box stores often are deemed “anchors” of larger malls, and “sell themselves” to communities on the basis of the “jobs they will bring to communities.” However, the reality seems to be that they replace many formerly full-time jobs with highly developed computer systems doing tasks that previously required human skills, such as cataloging, tracking inventory, ordering new items, pricing, customer services, and so forth.

Wholesale trade is an industry traditionally associated with retail trade, even if only one-fourth the size. Whereas in 2000 retail trade represented 11 percent of total employment across all town types, wholesale trade accounted for only 3 percent of total employment. In previous decades, manufacturers would sell to wholesale traders in larger communities who in turn would sell to retailers throughout their regions. Still, some people employed in wholesale trade lived in rural and suburban counties.

Findings on wholesale trade are not given in graphs here because they parallel so closely those in retail trade. Although the pattern of decline in wholesale trade was not as dramatic as in retail trade -- losses ranged from only 0.1 to 0.5 percentage-points during the 1990s -- all town types overall experienced declines in wholesale-trade employment. In 2000, wholesale-trade employment ranged from a high of 4 percent in the Western region’s More Dense Suburban towns to a low of 2 percent in the Northern region’s Less Dense Rural towns. All four regions experienced relatively similar wholesale-trade employment losses during the 1990s.

Overall, big-box stores tend to be their own wholesalers, thereby eliminating the necessity for “middlemen” wholesalers. Even if they tend to offer lower prices for similar items than smaller merchants, they sell more products with fewer numbers of employees than were previously found in retail and wholesale trade in these localities. The net result for towns has been a loss of full-time jobs, as well as losses in the numbers of small businesses and total numbers of employees that once provided wholesale and retail services in towns.

Still, town officials usually find that, when big-box stores are located in their towns, they also provide larger tax revenues than the previous small retail businesses combined. But, such big-box retailers also require more public services such as police
protection, water and sewer facilities, traffic control, and so forth. In any case, the retail-wholesale sector was thoroughly restructured during the 1990s in these towns and counties, with several direct and indirect effects on towns’ life-quality and persons’ well-being, a few positive and others negative. In assessing cost-benefit ratios such retailers might bring to their localities, community leaders and town officials need to consider carefully both gains and losses in full-time employment due to this re-structuring, and to overall quality of employment including healthcare and retirement benefits, as well as to their budget revenues and expenditures.

Manufacturing. In years past manufacturing provided a wage and tax base for communities. It was the gold-standard equivalent used by most observers to measure an economy’s viability at federal, state, or local levels. Whether for durable goods, such as electric-power generators or diesel engines, or non-durable goods, such as agricultural canning or freezing operations, manufacturing was usually considered a community’s export (economic) base. Manufacturing added value to natural resources and products that were sold elsewhere. In effect, manufacturing brought useable new money into a community from other communities. In turn, this money paid workers’ wages and benefits, which were then used to buy various products and services in the community. Manufacturing enhanced overall community well-being and life-quality.

As the U.S. economy became more globally integrated and manufacturing methods were relatively easily transportable, many manufacturers took advantage of cheaper labor and resources out of state and overseas. Since 1950, New York lost about half of its manufacturing employees. In 1950, New York had 1,704,022 employees in manufacturing, 29 percent of its workforce. In 2000, it had 839,425 employed in manufacturing, roughly 10 percent of its workforce (Eberts and Merschrod, 2004). Between 1990 and 2000 alone, the state lost 393,135 manufacturing jobs, 53,417 of them from the 44 rural counties. Such job losses stood second only to losses in retail-trade. As a result, some manufacturing workers left the state to find employment elsewhere, while others were able to find employment locally, usually in the growing services sectors, but sometimes among other manufacturers. In their new employment, workers often experienced losses in total income as well as health and retirement benefits.

Findings in Figure 5.10 document the dramatic losses in percentages of workers employed in manufacturing across all town types and regions over the past two decades. More manufacturing jobs were lost in the state in the 1980s (7 percentage-points) than in the 1990s (4 percentage points). From 1990 to 2000 the largest average losses (5 percentage-points) were among people living in More Dense Suburban towns, the second largest were in Central Places (4 percentage-points), and the smallest average losses (3 percentage-points) were among people who lived in Less Dense Rural towns.
Figure 5.10. During both the 1980s and the 1990s, Average Percentages of People Employed in Manufacturing Declined in All Town Types.

Manufacturing employment varied a good deal among the four regions. Figure 5.10 shows that both in 1990 and in 2000 outlying towns in the Western region had the highest percentages, averaging one in five manufacturing jobs. In 1990, the Northern region had the lowest manufacturing employment, averaging 14 percent. In 2000 the Eastern region had the lowest, 11 percent. In other words, the Eastern region experienced greater losses in manufacturing jobs during the 1990s (5 percentage points) than the Northern region, whose losses averaged less than one percentage-point.

Manufacturing has also often downsized into smaller firms employing less than 100 workers. These firms were relatively more land-extensive in their facilities (Eberts and Merschrod, 2004, Chapter 6). Consequently, land-values in Eastern New York were probably too expensive during the 1990s to make manufacturing operations viable there, while land-values elsewhere were more affordable. During the 1990s losses in Western New York averaged 4 percentage-points and Central New York’s losses were 3.5 percentage points. While both these percentages are considerable, they were less than the 5 percentage-point losses in the Eastern region. Manufacturing employment in towns in 2000 averaged 15 percent of jobs overall, and 20 percent in Western New York, and were larger than in any other single industry. Future manufacturing jobs will probably be in firms employing less than 100 workers.

Strong competition for larger manufacturing employers including through providing tax-break, facility-construction, and low-interest financing incentives still exists. Most local officials and leaders are aware how maintaining a local manufacturing base can be helpful to communities. Still, many local officials do not recognize the viability of smaller locally-owned manufacturing firms. Since almost all job-creation programs require some form of support from local government officials, much job-growth depends on towns’ adaptive land-use plans. Thus, town officials can contribute to slowing their manufacturing-employment losses by working with smaller
manufacturing firms and taking advantage of state and federal rules, regulations, and economic-development incentives.

**Extractive Industries.** The extractive sector is also called the primary sector largely because, before any other industries can operate, primary industries extract raw materials from natural resources that supply manufacturing industries. Five major industries comprise the primary-extractive sector: farming, forestry, fishing, mining, and drilling. The largest in rural New York is farming, which continues to have significant statewide economic relevance by generating $3.117 billion dollars in the state and local economies in 2002. In terms of land use, agriculture is the state’s largest industry in producing quality food and fiber, while the other four extractive industries contribute additional food, timber, water, natural gas, and other mined resources.

Yet, in employment, the extractive sector declined over the last-half century in all towns and regions, losing almost 30 percent of their workers between 1980 and 2000. They declined an average of 5.5 percent from 1990 to 2000 to an overall 4 percent level in 2000, employing less than 1 percent of the total statewide workforce. Statewide numbers, though, mask this sector’s importance for certain towns.

Figure 5.11 shows the extractive sector provided few significant jobs in 2000 for Central Places, employing an average of less than one percent, More Dense Suburban towns an average of two percent, and More Dense rural towns an average of three percent. Extractive industries are important to Less Dense Rural and Suburban towns, averaging 7 and 6 percent, respectively, of people employed.

**Figure 5.11.** During both the 1980s and the 1990s, Average Percentages of People Employed in Extractive Industries Declined in All Town Types.

The pattern of decline in Figure 5.11 is evident in all four regions. In 2000, town types in Eastern New York comparatively had about half the extractive employment of other regions, averaging two percent, compared to the other three regions’ averages of 4 percent. Further mechanization in agriculture and other extractive industries will undoubtedly reduce these percentages further in the future. Considering various local
benefits from extractive industries, community leaders, planners, and government officials will continue to encourage further development in these industries in their planning activities. Recent rises in prices of extracted products in the first decade of the twenty-first century have been boons to agricultural and drilling production in many less-dense towns.

Growing Sectors

As noted above, employment trends over the past twenty years are aggregates of trends that occurred across a variety of industries in the three general economic sectors. Even as certain industries declined in employment (while growing in total output), total employment grew. In this section, we highlight growing industries in the tertiary-services sector.

The Tertiary (Services) Sector. Wide-ranging economic restructuring throughout the U.S. during the 1990s resulted from technological efficiencies and movement away from the primary (extractive) and secondary (manufacturing) sectors toward the services sector. In total, since 1990, the services sector constituted well over 80 percent of employment in the 44 rural counties. The largest employment growth among service industries with nearly five percent of the work force in 2000 were health, education, government (public administration), and a catch-all “other” services. “Other” services is composed of about fifteen smaller services, such as professional, scientific, utilities, arts, entertainment, finance, insurance, and real estate (these latter three usually combined), recreation, food services, hotel-motel accommodations, transportation, communications, information, personal, and business services. Each “other” service is small in scope and difficult to track over time due to changes in their definitions by the U.S. Census from one decade to another. But, many of them were and still are fast-growing, if small in percentages, and, when combined, grew quite rapidly in the 1990s.

Clearly, the services sector in a post-industrial society is also disparate in income levels. Certain services jobs are among the highest paid, such as for chief executive officers of various services corporations, doctors, lawyers, and accountants. Other services’ jobs are among the lowest paid, such as for non-unionized day laborers, housekeepers, waitresses, healthcare workers, and retail-sales associates. Overall employment growth in the services sector, then, is a mixed blessing for people, with wide effects on the entire economy’s health.

As Figure 5.12 shows, employment in services as a whole grew rapidly over the past two decades. In 1980 over all towns and regions, average employment in these industries was 70 percent, growing to 77.5 percent in 1990, and 83 percent in 2000. Thus, the 1980s saw slightly larger increases in services employment, by an average of 7.5 percentage-points. The 1990s grew by only 5.3 percentage-points. This contrast may seem slightly counterintuitive, considering the general economic boom in the U.S. during the 1990s, and the mild recessions in the 1980s.
Percentages employed in services among the town types in 1980 ranged from 54.5 percent in Less Dense Suburban towns in the Western region to 80 percent in More Dense Rural towns in the Northern Region (a heavy tourism region that includes many food, motel, and entertainment services). By 2000, these numbers ranged from 72.5 percent in Less Dense Suburban towns in the Western region to 90 percent in Central Places and More Dense Suburban towns in the Eastern region. Employment in tertiary industries steadily grew from 1980 to 2000 in all town types and regions, and most likely continued into the 2000s.

While overall growth in numbers and percentages employed in services occurred across all town types, important variations are seen within the four regions. Services employment in the Northern region averaged 82 percent in 2000, and 87 percent in the Eastern region. The Central region averaged 79 percent and the Western region 76 percent.

Lower percentages in services in the Central and Western regions probably indicate that manufacturing and extractive (mostly farming) employment were more prominent in these regions, which also have much better soils for farming than the other regions. Movements from land-intensive agriculture and manufacturing facilities as well as higher population densities in the Eastern region offered more services-employment opportunities, while declines in agriculture in Northern New York along with improved tourism brought people into services employment.

In any case, services employment is the contemporary growth sector in these 44 rural counties, even if growth rates among specific services were not uniform among the town types.

*Healthcare Services.* The major growth-employment service between 1990 and 2000 was in healthcare. These services are also disparate, including hospitals, clinics, nursing homes, “full-service” senior and elderly communities, as well as individual medical and caregiver providers. Occupations within this sector have some of the best-
paid doctors and other professionals, and some of the lowest paid in room attendants and janitors.

As shown in Figure 5.13, the healthcare sector saw dramatic expansion between 1990 and 2000, averaging a 50 percent increase in numbers of additional jobs. Overall, 65,494 jobs were created in healthcare services between 1990 and 2000. In 2000, an average of 13 percent of the workforce was employed in healthcare across the town types and regions. These percentages and numbers of jobs put them second only to manufacturing in extent of employment in the 44 rural counties.

**Figure 5.13. From 1990 to 2000, Average Percentages Employed in Healthcare Services Increased Dramatically in All Town Types.**

At 15 percent of their workforces, Central Places recorded the largest averages employed in healthcare services over the four regions, with the other town types averaging 12 to 13 percent. These findings suggest that Central Places are centers for healthcare, probably because these are the locations of the largest populations in counties.

The average range overall was quite low, only 3.5 percent, and the range among the 20 towns was also small, from 16 percent in Central Places in the Northern region to 10.5 percent in Less Dense Rural towns of the Eastern region. The five town types in Northern New York employed an average of 14.5 percent in healthcare industries in 2000, slightly above the averages of 12 to 13 in the other regions.

Such rapid and general increases in healthcare employment over the 1990 decade were generally attributed to the aging of New Yorkers and care for them, the extension of healthcare to cover lower-income children who otherwise did not have healthcare coverage, and an increasing demand for quality healthcare services as well as by the ability of New Yorkers to pay for these services. As they undertake updating land-use plans, since every facility needs a location, town officials need to be aware of towns’ dynamics in healthcare industries, and take necessary planning steps to locate facilities...
for meeting the needs of their aging and/or lower-income residents, especially those facilities that emphasize prevention rather than treatment. In doing so, they might also create job opportunities for younger workers in this growing industry.

**Education Services.** While healthcare services experienced rapid growth, other growing industries within the services sector experienced slower growth. Education services saw slow employment increases between 1990 and 2000 in most town types and regions, but not even all.

Our society relies on well-educated people to operate its technologically complex economic, political, and social structures. Education is also important to individuals because college graduates on average earn over twice as much on an annual basis as high school dropouts, and in this way contribute more to society/the economy as a whole. In other words, the educational system is core in our society, and educational dynamics affect what happens in many communities.

As seen in Figure 5.14, average employment in education services was 12 percent in 1990, growing very slowly to 12.5 percent in 2000. These aggregate percentages were remarkably similar over all town types in two regions, but not in the other two regions. Educational-services employment during the 1990s varied little among town types in the Eastern and Western regions, averaging 11 percent in the Eastern region, and 11.5 percent in the Western region. Averages in each town type were within one percentage point of these region’s averages. Greater variations were found in Central and Northern regions. Their averages were 14 percent and 13 percent, respectively, with averages among the town types in these regions ranging from 11 percent to 17 percent in the Central region and from 9 percent to 17.5 percent in the Northern region.

**Figure 5.14.** From 1990 to 2000 Average Percentages Employed in Education Services Increased Slowly in Most Town Types in Three Regions, but not in the Northern Region, which Experienced Overall Losses among the Town Types.
The Northern region was especially different. Only Central Places experienced increases in their education employment levels while percentages employed in education in outlying towns were stable in one and declined rather substantially in the other three. The largest declines were in Less Dense Rural towns in the Northern region. By contrast, the vast majority of town types in the other three regions showed increases. Only Less Dense Rural towns in the Western Region showed relatively large losses. Such declines probably occurred in the primary and secondary school systems in these towns, since most colleges tend not to be located in less-dense towns in the Northern region. Such losses could also devastate overall employment levels in these small rural towns.

Total numbers of employees in education services increased over all regions and towns by a modest 13,551, over 90 percent occurring in the two more-dense town types. Over all regions, Central Places lost a small total of 1,339 education employees (about 25 per town). All other town types showed some growth, even if Less Dense Rural towns grew by an average of just over two employees per town. As parents and children tended to move to suburban locations, certain school districts in more-dense towns expanded to take advantage of economies of scale in their student distributions.

Such gains and losses affect many aspects of towns’ life-quality and well-being, including whether smaller communities can maintain viability if their elementary schools close. Since schools also rely on property taxes for large proportions of their revenues, and although their jurisdictions usually overlap only in part, town budgets can be greatly affected by decisions in the educational re-structuring of school districts. Such shifts in education employment levels affect their residents by school closings. In some towns, town officials work closely with school boards and officials in optimizing negative and positive effects on their towns.

Public Administration. The past half century increasingly demonstrated that public administration plays a key role in local development. Public administrators are involved in approval processes for a variety of programs originally initiated at national and state levels, and often administer such programs. These programs include those related to public safety, police and prisons, employment and housing offices, local economic development, and even state fisheries. Such programs have been slowly expanding in contemporary society. In addition, programs administered through local governments from highway departments to financial offices contribute to overall local public administration employment and growth, as more funded and unfunded mandates devolve from national and state governments to local governments. As such, these programs contribute to overall local employment growth.

Figure 5.15 highlights increases in percentages of workers employed in public administration between 1990 and 2000, not all employed by town governments. Over all towns and regions in 2000, public administration constituted an average of 6 percent of employment in 1990 and 6.5 percent in 2000, to a total of 97,296 employees. The 2000 total includes 9,864 jobs added between 1990 and 2000. Although this sector is not growing as rapidly as health services or service industries in general, it has provided a
steady source of new local jobs across time. These jobs are also usually less sensitive
to macro-economic fluctuations than many others in the services sector.

Figure 5.15. From 1990 to 2000, Average Percentages Employed in Public Administration Increased Slightly in Four of Five Town Types in All Regions.

The biggest surprise in Figure 5.15 is that public administration employees in Northern New York greatly exceeded those in other regions. Averaging 9 percent, these towns’ rates are double the 4.5 percent of public administration employees in the Western region (which had the lowest rates), and also exceed the 7.5 percent in Eastern New York, where so many state employees, including prison employees, are found. Central New York averaged 5 percent of its workers in public administration.

A major explanation for these findings is that Northern New York is the location of many state prisons and several colleges, whose employees also count as part of public administration employment. Although percentages of public administration employees in the Northern region have declined in Central Places and More Dense Suburban towns, they have increased in the other three town types there, increasing the fastest in Less Dense Rural towns.

As easily seen in Figure 5.15, the town types varied greatly in percentages employed in public administration compared to the two growth services previously examined. Levels of public-administration employment ranged from an average of 4 percent in More Dense Suburban towns in the Western region to 10.5 percent in Less Dense Rural towns in the Northern region. In addition, during the 1990s, employment in public administration increased in all regions, the most in Central New York, and the least in Northern New York, thus making it unlikely that growth in numbers of prison guards explains the entire growth rates in public administration employment in these regions.

More than likely, a number of factors representing specific aspects of the industry contributed to overall growth in public administration employment. For
instance, in response to citizens’ interests, local governments continued to systematize and even expand their approaches to dealing more efficiently with their roads and bridges programs as they shared equipment and purchases with nearby governments. Different varieties of county government social services also contributed to local job expansion during the 1990s, thus creating more jobs overall. In any case, for a variety of reasons public administration employment expanded in four of the five town types (except Central Places in three regions and one More Dense Suburban town type in the Northern region).

“Other” Services. A final set of growth industries considered here is the myriad of “other” services. Each of these fifteen or so services is less than five percent of the workforce, and they also vary from one time period to another because of changes in definitions by the Census. “Other” services include, for example, professional, scientific, finance, insurance, real estate, arts, entertainment, recreation, construction, transportation, warehousing, utilities, communications, information, personal services, business services, food, and hotel and motel accommodations (“not elsewhere classified,” that is, separate from those above).

Findings in Figure 5.16 show that aggregated “other” services grew rapidly between 1990 and 2000. They averaged 30 percent in 1990 and 35 percent in 2000 for a total base of 544,242 employees, including 99,192 jobs created between 1990 and 2000. People employed in other services in 1990 were relatively similar in all town types in each region, being within three percentage-points of a region’s average. Regional averages varied in 2000 between 40 percent in the Eastern region to 32 percent in the Northern region. In the Central region they averaged 34 percent and in the Western region 33 percent. Between 1990 and 2000, each region tended to grow by 5 or 6 percentage points. By 2000, levels among the five town types varied greatly, by 14 percentage-points, from 29 percent in Less Dense Suburban towns in the Northern region to 43 percent in Less Dense Rural towns in the Eastern region.

**Figure 5.16.** From 1990 to 2000, Average Percentages Employed in “Other” Types of Services Grew in All Town Types.
Together, employment in these services represented a little more than one-third of the work force. Detailed analyses (not shown here) showed that between 1990 and 2000 growth occurred among these “other services” in food, accommodations, arts, recreation, entertainment, professional, scientific, information, and communications services (not elsewhere classified) faster than in the others. The remaining services were either relatively stable (for example, finance, insurance, and real estate) or declining (transportation, utilities, and business services).

Many of these services depend on the mobility of people to commute from towns where they reside to work elsewhere, such as in information, communications, and scientific services, and could benefit from improved Internet access in less-dense towns especially. Many rural towns lack such web-based services, and public officials there may want to take steps for their provision in order to become more attractive to people in these growth industries, where so many employed in “other” services already reside. But others, for instance those in food, arts, and accommodations, find employment locally, and can often benefit by better housing conditions and access to health services.

Diverse “other” services have been growth industries, but often receive less attention in local officials’ development plans because no one of the services employs a very large proportion of the local work force. Yet in the aggregate, they constitute a major set of growth industries which contribute to development. Such issues could all be included in development plans of outlying towns as well as in Central Places.

**Summary and Conclusions**

The employment picture even in relatively small rural towns and counties is complex, and made more so because data on employment are built from responses in Census records on where employed citizens *reside* rather than where they *work*. To give exact locations of jobs through using the Censuses of Population and Housing, then, is not possible. Data in the New York State Office of Real Property Services show that most jobs in counties tend to locate in or near Central Places and their More Dense...
Suburban towns. Details on numbers and types of jobs there are unknown. Thus, this chapter’s concerns were not where people work but rather with knowing more about the people who reside in the towns.

A review of our major findings depicts the complexity of contemporary employment in town and city economies.

1) The vast majority of people commute for employment outside the towns in which they live, and one-third in a work force of over 1.5 million commute to work outside the county where they live (but nearly one in two in the twelve Urban Suburban Rural counties).

2) Although employment growth was not as substantial in the 1990s as during the 1980s, on average 3.2 percent more people were employed in 2000 than in 1990. The total increases in numbers commuting were slightly below overall employment growth from commuting. Further, commuting growth and population growth did not occur in the same towns in these rural counties. Thus, not all population growth was due by any means to growth in commuting. Many people already living in outlying towns, especially, began to commute between 1990 and 2000.

3) About 70 percent of women were employed in 2000, so that women were an increasingly important part of the workforce in all town types. This growth was especially strong in the two more-dense town types.

4) Only Central Places had smaller proportions of their people employed in 2000 than in 1990. Employment growth between 1990 and 2000 was negative for Central Places, while outlying towns grew by a rather large 5.5 percent.

5) Massive losses, a combined 10.5 percent of the work force of 1.44 million in 1990, occurred in retail, wholesale, manufacturing, and extractive employment combined between 1990 and 2000. Still, surprisingly, overall job growth also occurred.

6) The dominance of big box stores and large manufacturing operations put further employment in doubt beyond current levels in retail, wholesale, manufacturing, and extractive industries. In 2000, one in 6.5 workers were employed in manufacturing, and one in six in retail and wholesale trade, making them the first and second largest job categories of employed people.

7) Healthcare employment grew by an average of 4 percent in the 1990s, making it the single fastest growth category (covering a disparate set of jobs). All town types experienced similar increases. In all its variety, by 2000, healthcare industries averaged 13 percent of the workforce, the third largest industry in contributing to total employment.

8) A variety of fifteen or so “other” services, each employing less than five percent of the workforce, when aggregated, averaged 31.5 percent of the workforce.
Along with healthcare, these other services contributed the largest employment growth in all town types and regions.

Overall, growth in town workforces has certainly become more diverse, and complex. Unlike even 50 years ago in rural New York’s economic history, a few job categories do not dominate the others. Instead, the structure of employment in different parts of town economies has been tending toward a complex system of interrelated job categories that are, somewhat paradoxically, both decentralized yet also linked with national trends. Nationally-linked local economic trends seem immutable; it usually takes strong concerted efforts at national, state and local policy levels, which happen infrequently, to affect these nationally linked structures by much at all.

Still, responses to such trends by local policymakers can make some differences in a town’s development and people’s jobs and well-being. Jobs are central in development.

1) A foremost problem raised by findings above is on commuting. Commuting has been a major contributor to employment growth in these towns, as well as to growth in towns’ tax bases. Yet commuting raises several policy issues, especially about urban sprawl and its accompanying environmental issues.

2) A second contemporary employment-growth issue is healthcare. Most policymakers agree that while good healthcare is essential, payments for employees’ health benefits, plus Medicaid costs by counties, have created mounting problems in most local budgets.

3) A third major area of job growth is in the fifteen or so “other” services (aggregated into one category). Core growth in these services comes from information processing, arts, entertainment, recreation, food, and hotel-motel accommodations, the latter four having lower pay scales. These services affected all towns and cities. Policies in certain communities focus first on making Internet access more broadly available, second on well-organized yet selective advertising campaigns, and third on selective subsidization. Again, town and city policymakers might be well-served by giving growth in “other-services” more attention, perhaps through incentive zoning.

4) The local education industry contributed small numbers to employment growth in the 1990s. Our national and local economies require rather sophisticated training. The future will require even more complex education if town and city residents are to maintain their personal well-being and life-qualities. Yet, municipal officials often find themselves competing with school boards for local property-tax revenues. To make these systems work together requires coordination. Particular overlapping issues could focus on potential school dropouts and/or demonstrating educational effectiveness and efficiency in meeting constituents’ training, re-training, and other life-satisfying educational needs.

5) A fifth issue is what to do in meeting the needs of women as they enter or re-enter the work force. A major problem is affordable and effective childcare and/or
eldercare. One county saw a mismatch between where employed women live and where childcare facilities were found, one being in the county’s northern part and the other in the southern. Facilities were there; they simply were inconvenient to use. Bringing such issues to light in policy-formulation processes can aid in finding viable resolutions to them.

6) A final major policy area is to stem the outflow of local jobs and wealth, especially in retail and wholesale trade and in manufacturing. One focus is the trade-off between benefits from increased tax revenues versus costs of physical infrastructures and employment quality in dealing with big-box corporate operations. Certain towns have formulated policies on these two issues, first by identifying profitable services that complement big box stores, and, second by supporting certain generally smaller retail and manufacturing operations in ways similar to those received by big box stores. A third is to canvass other communities about productive responses they found in generating reasonable and viable policies in addressing these issues. These issues are too important for towns and cities to let national market forces alone determine them by default.

Employment growth almost always plays a major role in local leaders’ development strategies. Community leaders and elected and appointed officials concerned with employment do have alternatives in dealing with them. Since almost all employment and policy changes require specific land-use locations on which to carry out their activities, local leaders should probably start by re-thinking their land-use, water, sewer, and transportation planning policies in terms of multiple strategies for taking advantage of diverse employment opportunities. The large growth in healthcare facilities and “other” services along with the newly emerging fields of alternate energy, energy conservation, and natural gas development seem to offer special opportunities.

Almost all state and local job-creation programs require cooperation by local elected officials. Town officials also have multiple opportunities to explore available policy options through cooperating with creative and innovative people in their communities on issues of future employment growth, even if they do not follow “traditional” economic-growth strategies. No single industry can automatically be ruled out by town officials as they seek larger tax bases through employment and residential growth in their towns.

Finally, local officials and community leaders can take advantage of available training for themselves as well as volunteers on planning and zoning boards. More training can provide additional tools to help in achieving these goals.
EDUCATION, INCOME, AND POVERTY

Paul R. Eberts, Thomas A. Hirschl, and Brendan R. Shera

People’s incomes and education are generally basic factors in producing enhanced well-being. Studies show that people with more education and income are more likely to find better employment with higher incomes and more satisfying jobs, be unemployed less often, adjust more readily to the stresses and strains of society, and in general find life more satisfying.

A well-educated work force also usually helps employers achieve greater productivity. Towns with higher education levels among their residents usually have more of their populations employed and in more lucrative jobs, better employment and higher education levels also contribute to collective life-quality, those with larger aggregate incomes also tend to have larger tax bases that enhance local government expenditures and services which in turn produce more satisfied residents with fewer community-level problems. In general such towns also find it easier to come to consensus in identifying community problems, in finding alternative strategies for resolving them, and in implementing effective programs to address problems.

By comparison, towns with lower education and income levels, and lower employment levels often feel and, by objective indicators, are “left behind.”

In this chapter, we examine the levels, trends, and gaps in major education, income, and poverty indicators in the five town types and four regions. Most previous studies address levels and trends in these indicators, but seldom the “gaps” – from one part of a county or of a state to another. More densely populated and urbanized towns in the Eastern region, for instance, generally have higher socioeconomic levels while more geographically isolated and sparsely populated towns in the Northern region have fewer such strengths. If such gaps are widening, then they could present challenges to policymakers in
finding more effective strategies for narrowing the gaps. If they are narrowing, then towns would have additional opportunities to re-deploy their resources to a variety of community problems.

**Education**

Until the 2007-08 economic downturn, trends in education in the past decade were generally quite positive in nearly all towns of New York’s 44 rural counties. Every town type saw improvements on three major education indicators -- high school dropouts, those attending college, and those graduating from college. Despite gains on these three indicators, differences in levels of education among town types remain relatively high, leaving room for improvement, especially in the two less-dense town types.

**Adults Who Have Attended College (Whether Graduating or Not).** The most common indicator of education is percentage of the adult population that has been to college, whether they graduated or not. Figure 6.1 presents recent trends on this indicator. In 2000, an overall average of 45 percent of adults age 25 and over (after most people have completed their education) in all town types had attended college, and the trend increased by an average of 6 percentage points from 1990 to 2000. Clearly, more people went to college in 2000 than in 1990. This trend has continued, at least until recently.

Figure 6.1. Between 1990 and 2000, Percentages of People Age 25 and Over Who Had Attended a College Increased in All Town Types.

At an overall average of 52 percent over all regions, More Dense Suburban towns clearly had the highest percentages of adults who attended college. Despite losses in employment levels in Central Places seen in the previous chapter, Central Places had the second-highest averages (46 percent). More
Dense Rural towns, averaged 45 percent, close behind Central Places in their averages. At 40.5 percent, the lowest averages overall were in Less Dense Rural towns, 11 percentage-points below More Dense Suburban towns. Together the two less-dense town types averaged 41 percent. The education advantage between people living in the two more-dense towns is that slightly over one in four more adults age 25 and over living there attended college during the 1990s compared to those from less-dense towns who attended college.

During the 1990s the gap between people living in more-dense towns and less-dense towns widened in terms of attending college. Such increasing gaps put people in less-dense towns at a greater disadvantage every year in the complex and competitive contemporary workforce where college experience seems so important in finding satisfying employment.

The four regions also varied from one another. The Eastern region averaged 47 percent of its adults over age 25 having attended college, the Central region averaged 45 percent, the Western 43.5 percent, and the Northern 40 percent. In other words, the Eastern region had one in six more of its adults over age 25 having attended college than the Northern region.

Growth rates in educational attainment also varied among the regions. Growth was slower in the Northern than the others. This gap in educational levels among adults age 25 and over in having attended college between those living in the Northern region and those living in the three other regions actually increased between 1990 and 2000. On average in the Northern region, two in every five adults were less likely to have attended college during the 1990s compared to adults in the other three regions combined. This increasing gap in educational levels also helps explain in part the income differences between these two sets of regions (examined below).

**Adults Who Have Graduated from College.** Findings on other education indicators show similar patterns. Figure 6.2, on percentages of adults over age 25 who graduated from college, shows a similar pattern to the previous one among town types and regions, but at lower levels. In 2000, among adults age 25 and over, less than half of those who entered college actually graduated. College graduation rates in Central Places and More Dense Suburban towns averaged over one in five, while rates fell to one in six in More Dense Rural towns and one in seven in the two less-dense town types. College graduates in More Dense Suburban towns averaged one more person in every four who had graduated from college compared to those living in Less Dense Suburban towns whose overall average percentages were the lowest. This is a very large educational gap, comparatively, for people living in Less Dense Suburban towns.
Changes in college graduation rates from 1990 to 2000 among adults age 25 and over show a similar advantage between town types according to their density levels. During the 1990s, growth in college graduation rates was faster for the three more-dense town types, largely due to faster growth in More Dense Suburban towns compared to less-dense towns. Thus, the college-graduation gap was also growing.

The four regions also varied from one another in college graduation rates. The Eastern region averaged 21 percent of its adults having graduated from college, the Central region averaged 17.5 percent, the Western 20 percent, and the Northern 16 percent. Between 1990 and 2000, the college-education gap among regions, then, widened. On average, the college-graduation growth rate in the Eastern region was double that of the Northern region. If current trends persist into the future, people in the Northern region could find themselves even more disadvantaged compared to those in other regions.

**Adults Who Have Not Completed High School.** The reverse pattern is found in Figure 6.3, for percentages of adults age 25 and over who have not completed high school (high school dropouts). On this indicator, the lowest average percentage is, again, for More Dense Suburban towns, which in 2000 averaged 15 percent of all adults age 25 and over who did not complete high school. Average high school dropout rates among the other town types hovered around 19.5 percent (about one in five more). The highest dropout rates overall were in Central Places, where over one-fifth (20.5 percent) of all adults age 25 and over did not complete high school.
A major difference from previous figures is that Central Places in 2000 had about the same high overall percentages of high school dropouts as the two less-dense town types, an average of 20 percent compared to 19.5 percent for the two less-dense towns. This small percentage-point difference contrasts with the larger percentage-point difference between these towns and More Dense Suburban towns. At an average of 18.5 percent dropout rate among adults age 25 and over in 2000, More Dense Rural towns fall closer to the 19.5 overall averages of the two less-dense town types.

Less Dense Rural towns, by dropping an average of 7.5 percentage points between 1990 and 2000, moved from the lowest overall average dropout rates in 1990 to being middle-ranked among the five town types in 2000. Although Central Places had slightly higher dropout rates than the others in their average percentages in 2000, their rate still decreased roughly 5 percentage-points during the 1990s. More Dense Suburbs maintained the lowest overall proportions of high school dropouts, from roughly 20 percent in 1990 to just over 15 percent in 2000, also a five percentage-point improvement. Between 1990 and 2000, then, the gap between those with the lowest and highest percentages of high school dropouts narrowed among the town types.

In general, older people tend to have less education than younger people, so that less-dense towns, which have more seniors and elderly than the rest, are also more likely to have lower education levels. According to the website of the New York State Department of Education, the estimated contemporary high school dropout rate among young people upstate is around 15 percent. Aiming
for a minimum of at least a high school education is a fair goal for any school district. And, reducing the current dropout rate can be helped when school districts cooperate with municipal agencies in providing programs for their young people.

The four regions once again varied from one another in their dropout rates. The Eastern region averaged 18.5 percent of its adults over age 25 having dropped out of high school, the Central and Western regions averaged 18 percent, and the Northern 22 percent. The Northern region, then, had more of its adults over age 25 dropping out of high school compared to other regions.

Between 1990 and 2000, the dropout-rate gap narrowed among the regions. Rates of decline were again slower in the Northern region compared to the others, putting people in the Northern region at a relative disadvantage.

Several words of caution are necessary in interpreting these data. First, although the dropout indicator represents an accurate portrayal of the demographic proportions of the population age 25 and over in 1990 and 2000, they do not actually portray contemporary dropout “rates” in a given municipality. Data presented here do not account entirely for the various ages of people in a town’s population, or migration into or out of a region, or proximity to Central Places that have colleges in them. Older people are more likely to have dropped out of high school, and towns with colleges nearby are more likely to have more people who did not drop out of high school. The Northern region had more older people and fewer colleges nearby most towns.

Second, many of these findings could refer to school districts as well as towns, however school-district boundaries often cross town boundaries, and therefore these findings cannot easily be applied to school districts.

**Ratios of College Graduates to High School Dropouts.** Ratios of college graduates to high school dropouts show the diversity of educational backgrounds among parents and grandparents of children presently in a school system. When numbers of adults who are college graduates equals those of high school dropouts, a ratio equals 1.0. Ratios above 1.0 indicate more adults have college degrees than those who are high school dropouts, and ratios below 1.0 indicate the reverse.

A ratio above 1.0 may also indicate a greater “desire for getting more education” in a school. But, any ratio can imply potential tensions in school systems, and probably their communities too, as some students whose parents have less education in their backgrounds might feel dominated by students
whose parents come from a background that includes college graduation, or, vice versa.

In general, the dominant contemporary culture encourages more students to go to college. Studies also show that students whose parents have a college education have an easier time getting a college education. Other studies suggest that parents with a college degree compared to high school dropouts have more skills for acquiring higher incomes, participating in community affairs, and contributing to community life-quality in a variety of ways.

Figure 6.4 shows that overall in 2000, ratios for More Dense Suburban towns averaged 1.6 college graduates for every adult that dropped out of high school, while averages were below 1.0 in all other town types. Less Dense Suburban towns had the lowest ratios, averaging only 0.72, indicating that in their populations they had approximately 1.5 adults who were high school dropouts for every adult who had a college degree. Ratios for the remaining towns varied between these two extremes. In Central Places the ratio averaged 0.96 in 2000, More Dense Rural towns’ ratios averaged about 0.99, and Less Dense Rural towns had average ratios of 0.80.

Figure 6.4. In 2005, Average Ratios of College Graduates to High School Dropouts among Adults Age 25 and Over Showed Large Differences among Most Town Types.

Consistent with other findings on education in previous graphs, between 1990 and 2000, these ratios showed small increases, again demonstrating increasing educational attainment among adults. Once again, gaps among town types on this ratio widened during the 1990s between More Dense Suburban
towns and the others. From 1990 to 2000, in terms of college educated adults, the gap between More Dense Suburban towns and other town types widened.

Three of the five town types in these 44 rural counties demonstrated fairly large educational gaps one way or the other. More Dense Suburban towns were unbalanced toward more educated adults, the two less-dense town types showed a significant gap in less educated adults, and More Dense Rural towns and Central Places fell in-between. Schools in localities with a ratio below 1.0 may find it difficult to create an educational culture that supports students who might wish to pursue higher education. Such gaps can also spill over into other town issues as well.

Although all town types in each region experienced significant increases in their ratios, such increases were usually greater in the Eastern and Central regions than in the Western and Northern regions. Whereas the four regions showed relative similarity in their ratios in 1990, by 2000 distinct differences stood out among them.

Averages in the Eastern region were higher for each town type compared to town types in the other three regions. In 2000, four of the five town types in Eastern New York had ratios above 1.0, for a very high regional average ratio of 1.2 ratio points, indicating that adults age 25 and over who were college graduates in these towns outnumbered those who did not complete high school. No other region matched these heights. In the Northern region no average among the town types reached a ratio higher than 0.8. The average ratio in the Central region was 1.03, in the Western region 0.8, and in the Northern 0.7.

Clearly, then, educational gaps widened during the 1990s among the towns and regions, with More Dense Suburban towns and the Eastern region leading the way. People in Eastern New York and More Dense Suburban towns clearly have comparative advantages in college graduate levels compared to the others. Low ratios in the Western and Northern regions may reflect and/or contribute to relative stagnation in the economies of these two regions.

Since all five town types are usually found in any given county, based on these findings, counties in all four regions undoubtedly demonstrate large amounts of educational-background differences among adults between towns as well as within the towns individually. Since obtaining a college education in contemporary society is so very important for individuals in their job and income opportunities, as well as for localities to have more robust economies, such inequalities probably put major strains and constraints on individuals and localities in their development efforts.
Incomes

Average income in towns is almost universally recognized as one of the most important indicators for people’s well-being and towns’ life-quality. There is always an argument over which set of indicators is more important, education or income, in affecting people’s well-being. The two are quite inter-related at any level. Even though many more services are provided by county governments than town governments, aggregated incomes in towns usually determine the availability and quality of private and public services.

A primary indicator for incomes is per capita income, but another often used (and in some ways more important) indicator is median family income (which is also highly interrelated with average household incomes). Since differences are found between them, we will examine both indicators. Findings for both income indicators in the five town types and four regions require an adjustment in order to be comparable over the 1990 to 2000 time period. They were “adjusted” by a multiplier of 1.34 reflecting the 34 percent inflation rate of the Consumer Price Index between 1990 and 2000. This adjustment makes the indicators more comparable in terms of inflation-controlled (“real”) income.

**Per Capita Incomes.** Per capita income is the most widely used income indicator. A fundamental finding in Figure 6.5 is that in both 1990 and 2000 per capita incomes varied among the five town types at rates similar to the patterns discovered when analyzing educational levels. In keeping with their higher educational levels, people in More Dense Suburban town types had the highest per capita incomes, averaging $19,717 in 2000. In contrast, at $16,748, people in Less Dense Suburban towns had the lowest averages. Even if the relationship is not one to one, the nearly $3,000 difference demonstrates how educational differences reflect income differences among adults.
Figure 6.5 also shows that adjusted per capita incomes in these cities and towns grew by $2,007 from 1990 to 2000 to an average of $17,717 per person in 2000 for a respectable growth rate in “real” dollars. This growth also parallels growth in education indicators. In contrast to widened gaps in educational levels among the town types from 1990 to 2000 however, income differences among the town types show narrowed gaps in income growth.

Per capita income growth from 1990 to 2000 in Central Places averaged $1,592 per person, in More Dense Suburban towns $1,858, in More Dense Rural towns $1,892, but in Less Dense Suburban towns incomes rose by $2,208 during the 1990s, and in Less Dense Rural towns by $2,482. Income growth, then, was progressively greater from lower levels in Central Places to higher levels in Less Dense Rural towns. Average incomes in Less Dense Rural towns grew by nearly $1,000 over averages in Central Places, and $600 over the income growth among people in More Dense Suburban towns. Whereas gaps on educational indicators increased during the 1990s, income growth favored the two less-dense town types so that average gaps in income among the town types narrowed.

Yet again, the four regions varied from one another. In 2000, the Eastern region averaged $19,929 in its per capita incomes, the Central region $17,102, the Western $17,048, and the Northern $16,573. In other words, people in the Northern region averaged $3,356 less in their income levels on a per capita basis compared to people in the Eastern region. Between 1990 and 2000, however, average growth in per capital incomes, at $2,416, was slightly higher in the Northern region compared to the income growth of $2,378 in the Eastern region. Gaps in income levels, then, narrowed very slightly (by $38) during the 1990s.
Still, income growth in these two regions was much higher than in the Central and Western regions, which grew during the 1990s by $1,850 and $1,774, respectively. Thus, even if income gaps narrowed between the Northern region and Central and Western regions, income gaps between the Eastern region and the Central and Western regions widened.

**Median Family Incomes.** Family stability is indicated in part by family incomes. In general, Americans expect their median family incomes to grow in inflation-adjusted terms from one decade to the next. Median-family income is also considered a very good indicator of income because it measures the “middle” income of the full range of families, from those with the lowest incomes to those with the highest (in contrast to the “average” incomes measured by per capita income, which is based on averages). For all intents and purposes, then, median family income is the income of the “middle-class” family.

Figure 6.6 presents findings on average median family incomes in the five town types and four regions, again adjusted for inflation. Compared to per capita incomes, median family income averages showed a somewhat different pattern on how people fared during the 1990s. At an overall average of $49,407 in 2000, families in More Dense Suburban towns had the highest median family incomes, $9,146 ahead of the $40,553 median family incomes in Less Dense Rural towns which had the lowest median family incomes. Median family incomes in More Dense Suburban towns were also ahead of those in More Dense Rural towns, which had the second highest overall median family income averages. Apparently such differences persisted right up to the recent economic downturn.

**Figure 6.6.** Between 1990 and 2000, Average Adjusted Median Family Incomes Grew in the Outlying Towns, but Not as Much as Per Capita Incomes Grew; Central Places’ Median Family Incomes Actually Dropped Slightly.
In contrast to growth patterns for per capita incomes and education, growth in adjusted median family incomes from 1990 to 2000 increased by less than an average of $863 in the two more-dense town types, by $2,166 in the two less-dense town types, and actually declined by $221 in Central Places. In this regard, median family incomes were, like per capita incomes, equalizing among the five town types between 1990 and 2000, but at much smaller levels. Despite large differences in educational levels among the town types seen earlier, and despite growing per capita incomes in all outlying town types, growth in median family incomes (the incomes of middle-income families) from 1990 to 2000 was quite modest, even if above inflation levels.

Whereas average per capita incomes in the five town types grew between 1990 and 2000, and no town type experienced a decline in per capita incomes, average median family incomes over all the five town types grew much more slowly during the 1990s, and, people in Central Places also saw their incomes slowly decline (largely due to losses there in the Eastern region, and no changes during the 1990s in the other regions). The main growth was in Less Dense Rural towns, which gained $2,461 in median family income in this period. All these dynamics were probably caused by in-migration of people with differing income levels to these towns.

The 10 percentage-point difference in overall averages between per capita and median family incomes is usually interpreted as indicating that, during the 1990s, wealthier people saw their incomes grow much faster than middle-income people. Middle-class families’ incomes grew, but more slowly than wealthier families. Poverty indicators below show patterns with more similarity (and thus more related) to median family incomes than per capita incomes.

Regional differences in incomes were also apparent. At $46,974 in 2000, families in Eastern New York’s towns had higher median family incomes than those in the other three regions whose combined average was $42,219. Adjusted median family incomes in 2000 in the Western region averaged $43,788, in Central $42,483, and in the Northern $40,386. Overall differences among the four regions were $6,601, between the Eastern and Northern regions, but only about half this amount between Eastern, Western, and Central New York. Such differences again parallel the averages for educational or per capita incomes.

Growth in median family incomes in the Northern region averaged $1,550 per family, and the Western’s was $1,615. These averages were considerably larger than the $949 growth in the Eastern and the $940 in the Central regions. In this regard, gaps in median family incomes among the regions, though somewhat stagnating during the 1990s, were very slowly narrowing.
The importance of growth in incomes, both personal and family, cannot be overestimated in American community life. In general, when incomes increase in localities, collective life-quality and personal well-being also increase. Since during the 1990s real median family incomes rose, if modestly, life-quality in general probably increased. Still, although incomes rose in all town types during the 1990s, median family incomes fell overall in Central Places (again, mostly due to losses in the Eastern region and stagnation in the other regions), while they rose in the More Dense Suburbs. These two trends may well have resulted in “income flight” by people from Central Places to More Dense Suburban towns, with the deleterious effects identified in several previous and subsequent chapters.

That income gaps among town types as well as among regions narrowed, while educational gaps widened, tells us that education did not effectively translate into income growth during the 1990s as some analysts have generally assumed. The relationship of education to income is positive, but certainly not one-to-one. Comparatively, income gains lagged behind educational gains in the Eastern region, and incomes grew in the Western and Northern regions despite slower educational gains in there.

Still, median family incomes grew faster during the 1990s in towns where per capita incomes grew faster, and per capita incomes grew faster in towns with more growth in proportions of college graduates. For whatever additional reasons, except for Central Places in the Eastern region, income growth in the 760 towns in New York’s 44 rural counties grew between 1990 and 2000, and gaps among the town types and between the regions narrowed, even if in slightly different patterns from one town type to another, from one region to another, and from one indicator to another. On the basis of these findings, the current economic downturn will probably have stagnating or negative effects on these cities and towns.

**Poverty**

Poverty is one of the most significant conditions affecting the lives of people in their social and economic relationships. Extremely low rates of poverty are considered a universal good for both individuals and their communities, while higher poverty rates raise the specter of people struggling to keep their lives together while other struggles continue over public fiscal costs and lowered housing values in communities. In the U.S. Census, poverty rates are officially (if also controversially) determined based on the “shopping basket” of minimum expenditures of *essential* categories in family budgets, primarily for food, clothing, shelter, and transportation.
Three key poverty indicators are families in poverty, children in poverty, and seniors and elderly in poverty. This section will examine all three. As in previous sections in this chapter, certain towns show some promising trends, especially significant decreases in poverty in less-dense towns during the 1990s.

**Families in Poverty.** In 1990, poverty affected 63,112 families in the 760 towns; in 2000 these numbers increased by 2,750 families to 65,862 families (about 87 families per town). After 2000, we have no data for individual towns, but most contemporary reports at the state level since 2000 indicate very similar slowly increasing percentages of families in poverty. The current economic downturn undoubtedly increased these levels even more.

Figure 6.7 presents findings on families in poverty for the five town types and four regions. Levels and trends generally decreased in outlying towns, but differed somewhat among the towns. The most surprising finding in Figure 6.7 is that by 2000 family poverty levels were below 10 percent in almost all outlying towns. In all regions in 2000, Central Places had the highest family poverty levels, increasing from an average of 11 percent in 1990 to 12 percent in 2000. Less-dense town types across the regions generally decreased slowly from 1990 to 2000 with an average of 10 percent in 1990 and 9 percent in 2000. In 2000 in all four regions More Dense Suburban towns had the lowest rates, averaging 5.5 percent, but this was an increase from the 5 percent in 1990. Even if they varied from one region to another, overall average rates in More Dense Rural Towns were more stable than the rest at 7 percent in 1990 and 7 percent in 2000. Two regions showed increases and two decreases in their overall rates. These patterns are generally consistent with towns’ income growth, where less-dense towns grew more rapidly than the others.
At 7.5 percent, the Eastern region’s towns generally demonstrated a lower average than the other regions’ rates, even if their rates increased faster during the decade. At 10 percent, the Northern region’s towns’ average was generally higher, but also declined faster than other regions’ rates. In other words, the gaps in family poverty rates were narrowing from one region to another.

The pattern of poverty changed considerably then, among the five town types and regions between 1990 and 2000. Because the Census does not present enough details underlying these dynamics, we cannot determine exact reasons for the shifts. Most analysts believe the nature of families in poverty shifted during the 1990s, from older families with no children at home to younger families with children, especially those of single-mother families (as seen in the next chapter). Older families in general had better access to Social Security income during the 1990s than previously, taking many older families out of poverty. Due to time limits placed on younger families by the 1996 Congressional Act called TANF (Temporary Assistance to Needy Families), fewer young families were on welfare but some were also more subject to living in poverty.

Children in Poverty. Percentages of children in poverty have been a continuing issue since the indicator was generated in 1960 (see Eberts and Merschrod, 2004, chapter 8). In 2000, almost 30,000 children were in poverty in the 44 rural New York counties, growing slowly from 1990 to 2000. About 60 percent of all children lived in Central Places and More Dense Suburban towns. This happened at the same time incomes were growing for individuals and families in these rural counties.
Since children in poverty is a subset of families in poverty, Figure 6.8 shows basically the same pattern among the town types as for families in poverty. The major difference is that averages for children in poverty are nearly double those of families in poverty. Since the Census defines a family as at least one adult and a child as well as a spouse and partner, some families include children while others do not. In 1990, overall poverty rates for children in poverty were 15.5 percent, while in 2000 they rose slightly to 16 percent, with many variations among town types and regions. Studies show that these increases have continued since 2000, but data for towns will not be available until after the 2010 Census.

Figure 6.8. Between 1990 and 2000, Percentages of Children in Poverty Showed Similar Patterns to Those for Families in Poverty but at Higher Levels.

Several variations were found in child-poverty rates among town types in the four regions in 2000. The two most disturbing were, first, that average rates rose to over 16 percent of all children between 1990 and 2000, and, second, that overall averages of children in poverty in the vast majority of town types in all four regions were either stable or increased between 1990 and 2000.

Central Places had the highest averages of children in poverty in every region, averaging 19.5 percent in 1990 increasing to 22 percent in 2000. More Dense Suburban towns, having outperformed other town types on education and income levels, had the lowest overall percentages of children in poverty, averaging 10 percent in 1990 and 12 percent in 2000. More Dense Rural towns at 13 percent in 2000 were almost unchanged from their 1990 levels. The two less-dense town types averaged 16.5 percent of children in poverty in 2000, about the same as their 17 percent level in 1990.
Although patterns of children’s poverty among the town types were similar in each region, levels of poverty varied from one region to another. At 14 percent, the Eastern region’s towns had lower average rates of children in poverty than other regions. The highest regional rates were in the Northern region, averaging 18 percent in 2000. The Northern region’s rates, then, were almost one-fourth higher than those in the Eastern region. Central New York’s rates averaged 17 percent, and Western New York’s averaged 16 percent. Still, actual rates of children’s poverty varied a great deal among the town types in every region, even among Eastern New York’s towns. More Dense Rural towns there averaged 8.5 percent for the lowest rates of all in 2000, while children in poverty in Less Dense Rural town types in the Eastern region were 15 percent, rivaling the rates of certain town types in other regions.

Although poverty has debilitating effects on children in many ways and especially in their educational attainment, with such stability in their numbers and percentages, public and private programs to move children out of poverty since 1990 did not work very well, and, for unknown reasons, since then only a few new programs even addressed this situation, the major one being “Child Health Plus” and the “No Child Left Behind” Act. Apparently the welfare reforms during the 1990s did save governments at all levels some money, but, intended or not, these reforms did not reduce poverty levels for either families or children. We will give some additional consideration to child-poverty issues in the next chapter on the family.

**Seniors and Elderly in Poverty.** At the other end of the age-spectrum, poverty among seniors and the elderly did decline, probably thanks to increased Social Security coverage for them. Figure 6.9 shows a pattern of relations among the town types for this age grouping in poverty that also differs somewhat from those found for families and children in poverty. The most striking difference is that percentages over all town types and regions declined for senior and elderly poverty between 1990 and 2000, from 11 percent average in 1990 to 8 percent in 2000.
The pattern of averages among the town types also differs. No longer do Central Places stand out in the graphs. The average of 9 percent in Central Places and Less Dense Rural towns across the regions is in contrast to the differing rates for families and children in poverty. Rates for seniors and elderly in poverty also decreased in every town type and region, and also, by 2000, had become much more similar to each other. Rather than the 6 percentage-point overall range among the town types of families in poverty, poverty among seniors and elderly ranged only 2 percentage points.

At an average of 7 percent of seniors and elderly in poverty in 2000, More Dense Suburban towns still experienced the lowest rates of all towns and regions. More Dense Rural towns’ overall average was 8 percent and Less Dense Suburban towns’ average was 8.5 percent. As seen in Figure 6.9, similar averages in this small range of differences among towns were also found in each region.

Still, the Northern region had higher poverty rates among seniors and the elderly than the others. The Eastern and Central regions averaged 8 percent of their seniors and elderly in poverty in 2000, and the Western 7.5 percent. The Northern region’s average rates stood at 10 percent, again much higher than the others.

Declines in poverty rates among seniors and the elderly are usually attributed to two factors, greater Social Security coverage for retirees and better pension benefits during people’s work years. Both of these have been under fire since 2000 in both the public and private sectors. If changes are made in these
two sources of benefits that the vast majority of seniors and elderly now enjoy, policymakers should give careful attention to both the extent of coverage and to levels of coverage to ensure that these older adults can continue to enjoy the downward trends in poverty rates due to their present benefits.

**Crowded Housing.** Another indicator related to poverty in towns is the extent to which people live in crowded housing. In general, the Census defines a crowded house as one which has more than one person per room. Very few households were considered crowded in either 1990 or 2000.

Figure 6.10 shows differences in average percentages of crowded-households in the town types and regions. In both 1990 and 2000, an extremely low average of 1.8 percent of households was considered crowded in the 760 towns, with the percentage varying among the town types. The two less-dense town types averaged 2.2 percent of households while the two more-dense town types averaged 1.7 percent. These four town types also generally saw their percentages decline during the 1990s in most regions. In contrast, Central Places averaged 1.2 percent in 1990 and 1.5 percent in 2000, in general lower than averages for outlying towns, but increasing, whereas outlying towns saw relatively uniform decreases in crowded housing.

**Figure 6.10. Between 1990 and 2000, Percentages of Crowded Households (with 1.01 Persons per Room or More) Generally Decreased In Outlying Town Types, but Increased in All Central Places.**

Overall, towns had very small proportions of crowded housing in them and these percentages declined in four of the five town types during the 1990s. The highest percentages in 2000 were found in Less Dense Suburban towns of the Northern region, which reached 2.7 percent, up slightly from 1990.
In 2000, these percentages represented a total number of 20,120 crowded households (one-third the numbers of children in poverty), up from 18,721 in 1990. A net growth in numbers of crowded households occurred in four of the five town types, the exception being in Less Dense Rural towns whose average numbers declined from a net total of 3,179 in 1990 to 2,958 in 2000. Differences in numbers increasing while percentages were declining was due to the overall growth in total numbers of households, which increased faster than the total numbers of crowded households.

The primary locations of the numbers of crowded households and growth in their numbers happened in Central Places and More Dense Suburban towns. Together they had the vast majority of a county’s crowded housing. Crowded houses in Central Places are often located in identifiable and clustered neighborhoods. Such clustered-crowded housing in Central Places may be one reason people think of them as less desirable locations for raising a family. In contrast, in More Dense Suburban towns, the clusters are often in more remote “mobile-home” locations, usually hidden from view by most of a town’s other residents. Thus, more-dense suburbs can still be considered desirable places to raise a family.

Issues raised directly by the crowded-housing indicator, and indirectly by the poverty indicators, imply that many towns, as well as the state as a whole, have not dealt effectively with the growing problems of families and children in poverty in these rural counties, or their consequences.

Conclusions

In all town types and regions from 1990 to 2000, trends showed increased education and income among adults age 25 and over. Certain trends, however, also raise some important issues. First, why, in light of such high and increasing education and income levels between 1990 and 2000 did education gaps among the regions continue to grow while income gaps narrowed? Percentages with more education increased faster in the 1990s in the better-off Eastern region than in the other regions and especially compared to the less well-off Northern region. The education gap among New York’s regions between 1990 and 2000, then, increased, which does not bode well, for the future of young people in the Northern region.

In light of this widening regional gap in education, a surprising trend was that the income gap among regions narrowed from 1990 to 2000. Both average per capita incomes and median family incomes in inflation-adjusted dollars in the less well-off Northern region grew faster than the same indicators in the other regions, especially the Eastern region.
Analyses not shown here indicated that incomes in the Northern region also increased faster in towns with very high levels of public administration (those above 10 percent, when the statewide average is 6.5 percent). Such a finding suggests that income differentials could be due to escalating income clauses in union contracts of certain public administration employees. In the Northern region, public administration employees disproportionately work in prisons. Faculty members in state universities also receive their incomes from state government, but they are disproportionately classified by the Census under education employees rather than public administration employees. In other regions, percentages working in public administration were not a factor in affecting income levels.

A second major issue is, with the comparatively large increases in education and income in these towns, why did childhood poverty rates not uniformly decrease? With more than one in five children living in poverty in Central Places in 2000, and one in six in the two less-dense town types (slightly increasing since 1990), there is a basis for looking into this discrepancy.

Poverty rates among seniors and the elderly declined in all town types and regions, with gaps narrowing. Poverty rates among families also generally declined, but not in Central Places or more-dense towns. Further, during the 1990s crowded housing generally declined in the four outlying town types while increasing in Central Places. Thus, gaps in average percentages of crowded housing also narrowed among both the towns and in the regions – less-dense towns still had the most, but not by much (about 2 percent of all households).

But, children’s poverty levels remained stable or slightly increased in all regions, even if an average of only 40 such families were found in each of the 760 towns in 2000, up from 35 in 1990 (possibly due to larger numbers of births to single mothers during the 1990s -- see Figure 7.10). These increasing numbers over time are troubling. Regional differences in poverty rates among children showed that rates were much higher in the better-off Eastern region than in the others, so that regional gaps in childhood poverty levels narrowed during the 1990s. These trends represent large problems for low-income families with children and, indirectly, for towns and communities where they lived.

A common explanation for this pattern has been that increases in immigration of low-income people may be a cause of increased child poverty, especially in the Eastern region. This explanation is accurate for Central Places in the rural counties (probably also in the region’s larger cities). However, in outlying rural towns of the Eastern region (in analyses not shown), no strong relationships were found between changes in child poverty with changes in
population sizes or with changes in percentages of Hispanics (another common explanation). A major cause in the Eastern region appears to be increases in proportions of young people age 18-30 in some towns. Young people are more likely to have lower incomes, higher rates of births to single mothers, and more often live in Central Places, the predominant location of child poverty.

In general, towns and school systems have been more affected by these socioeconomic-poverty trends and are not able to do much about them. For instance (in analyses not shown), fewer high school dropouts in the 1990s, a common occurrence in nearly all towns, showed only small overall relationships in reducing child poverty except in the Eastern region (and less so in the Central region). They had no such effects in the Northern or Western regions.

Lack of consistent trends among the various socioeconomic indicators demonstrates that education, income, and child poverty have slightly different trajectories from one another in the various town types and regions, and probably different causes as well. Although more education reduced child poverty, at least slightly, in two regions, nothing close to a one-to-one correlation between them was found.

In all but the Northern region, the main factor in reducing child poverty during the 1990s (also in analyses not shown) was growth in median family incomes, where growth in employment levels consistently increased income growth. Per capita incomes increased faster than median family incomes. Although growth in per capita incomes increased median family incomes, these relationships were also far below a one-to-one ratio.

During the 1990s, employment growth in towns in the Eastern, Central, and Western regions was very strongly interrelated with education growth and population growth. Of the 760 towns, about 135 had very high growth in employment, education levels, and population sizes, and another 120 towns had very low (or negative) growth in employment, education levels, and population sizes. Such relationships indicate that these three factors were consistently interrelated -- when change-levels on one factor were higher, change-levels on the other two tended to be higher as well; and, when change-levels on one were lower, change-levels on the other two were also lower.

Moreover, no one economic sector was more effective in relating to income growth in these towns. Different towns were driven by different industries in their employment growth. Some employment growth during the 1990s was connected to in-migration of people who commute outside a county for their employment, in effect, bringing their jobs (and educations and incomes) with them. But other sources of employment growth were generated in towns
through a variety of industries, everything from healthcare to colleges and universities to combinations of professional, technical, and communications services, to tourism. None of these relationships was one-to one by any means.

Larger increases in educational attainment, employment and incomes in the 1990s together in towns, where they happened, then, undoubtedly contributed to overall personal well-being and collective life-quality. They also helped to reduce childhood- as well as family-poverty levels, adding to personal well-being and collective life-quality in these towns due to the increases.

Since several studies link poverty reduction more closely with increases in median family incomes than with increases in per capita incomes, one small improvement in analyses and subsequent policies, could be to change policymakers’ orientations away from per capita income growth as a goal (which is generally how federal and state officials currently approach these issues) and replace it with median family income growth (or household income growth) as a goal. The shift in goals could probably also produce additional ideas about strategies for decreasing poverty rates of families and children.

Another local policy strategy that follows from such findings, at least in the Eastern, Central, and Western regions, would be for local policymakers to facilitate more education by enticing young people into college. Studies have shown that town leaders’ responses in cooperating with schools can be beneficial in increasing educational levels among young people. For example, one simple form of cooperation may be to provide better bus services to community colleges from various town locations. It is likely the majority of rural counties have no such bus services at all, and if they do have bus services, most probably travel to and from Central Places to community colleges rather than from outlying towns and villages directly to the colleges.

Town policymakers could also assist school administrators and teachers by providing facilities and agencies that help teenagers become better integrated into their communities. Schools exert powerful influences on teens’ behaviors. Drug, alcohol, and tobacco use, as well as teen sexuality and pregnancies, are issues teens and young people struggle with almost daily. They are both school and community issues.

Young people also seem quite sensitive to, and affected by, socioeconomic differences in their communities, and the strains, stresses, opportunities, and obstacles these resources imply. Such issues among young people are also community affairs. Perhaps communities could provide more places for at-risk teens to gather, and more adult presence (and perhaps supervision) wherever teens gather after school and in the evenings. Community-based after-school and
evening programs are often available for pre-teens, but are sparse for teens, young adults, and older people, especially in bringing a variety of adults and teens together in one or more places.

A final issue concerning these general policy suggestions is that certain towns do not enjoy increases (or very large increases) in education levels, employment, or population growth. Such towns are found in all regions, especially in the Northern region. What policy suggestions are there for such towns?

A productive response is for community leaders and public officials to aggressively, both separately and individually, look for opportunities to increase their socioeconomic and even political linkages with each other in these communities as well as with officials in other jurisdictions, including state agencies. Studies have shown that such inter-connecting linkages have been found to, over time, result in productive outcomes for increasing local well-being and life-quality by bringing new resources into these towns’ public arenas.

To increase such intra- and inter-community linkages, however, is an especially large and difficult road to slog along for towns having large fiscal stress on their budgets as well as little socioeconomic growth. But, studies show that increasing intra- and inter-community linkages can work. One such town for instance, learned about, and acted on, information that it could have a new sewer system as well as some affordable housing through state and federal agency programs. These outcomes may not have generated more (or much more) employment, but they improved some of their residents’ personal well-being and life-quality.

From a distance, we cannot prescribe “best practices” for local or state policymakers to use in these situations. Every town type and region is slightly different from another. Still, the above findings and policy suggestions can provide policymakers and community leaders with general guidelines in addressing their responsibilities forthrightly. These guidelines can undoubtedly be enhanced by providing more places where older adults, teens, and/or young people can meet, discuss, and perhaps also have “fun” together face-to-face. Such interactions generate more trust and intra-community connections that can be both satisfying to participants and productive for future community development. State and federal policymakers, with their greater access to resources, could also recognize local leaders’ struggles in dealing with such issues, and assist them through providing additional effective programs and other forms of resources.
CHAPTER 7
TRENDS IN FAMILY LIFE
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Over the past several decades, family sizes, compositions, and types have changed significantly. By putting trends about families together with information from a variety of studies about them, a picture has emerged that has many implications for family life in towns and cities in rural counties. Policymakers at all jurisdictional levels – federal, state, and municipal – are concerned with planning issues. These concerns can include enhancing “public health, safety, and general welfare.” The U.S. Census provides many data on changes in family compositions and structures. A chapter on trends about families in the 760 towns of New York’s 44 rural counties is, then, both possible and essential.

A major trend is that numbers and percentages of people living in the dominant form of family, namely, “traditional” families -- those composed of married two-parent couples and their young children -- have been in decline. In contemporary society, age at first marriage has been steadily increasing, and numbers of children per family have been steadily decreasing. By early in the 21st century, over fifty percent of first marriages nationwide were likely to end in divorce. Fewer people were having children, and more children were being raised by single mothers or single fathers. Many observers assume that these phenomena are largely confined to families in metropolitan areas or Central Places of rural counties. In this chapter, we report on findings that show similar dynamics have affected families in rural towns as well.

The purposes of this chapter, then, are to document:

1) how different types of families changed between 1990 and 2000 in the five town types (Central Places, the two more-dense town
types and the two less-dense town types) in 760 towns and four regions that are the basis of this report (more recent detailed Census data on towns, small cities, and counties are not available);

2) what effects these changes have probably had on people’s well-being, collective life-quality, and public health, safety, and general welfare; and

3) how local decision and policy makers might respond more effectively to these trends in order to increase people’s collective well-being.

The family is one of the most important social institutions affecting people’s lives. Families are usually primary sources of emotional, physical, social, and financial support for nearly all people for most of their lives, either in their early years or in their later years. Since most children spend at least their first 16 years in close contact with one type of family or another in being “socialized” into the ways of society, these formative years affect children directly and indirectly for the rest of their lives. Even in rural areas, large percentages of marriages end in separations or divorces, so that single-parent families are now reasonably common occurrences there. Families, while being sources of support, pleasure, and satisfaction for many, can also be sources of frustration, stress, and strain, all of which have lasting effects.

**Types of Families**

The U.S. Census Bureau distinguishes a “family” from a “household.” While the two terms are often used interchangeably in everyday language, the Census has two separate definitions. A *household* is defined as “…all the people who occupy a housing unit. A house, an apartment, or other group of rooms, or a single room is regarded as a housing unit when it is occupied or intended for occupancy as separate living quarters; that is, when the occupants do not live and eat with any other persons in the structure and there is direct access from the outside or through a common hall” (*U.S. Census Bureau, Population Division, Fertility & Family Statistics Branch, 2000, “Definitions”).

In contrast, a *family* is defined as “a group of two or more people (one of whom is the householder) related by birth, marriage, or adoption, and residing together; all such people (including related subfamily members) are considered as members of one family.” In these ways, a family can be thought of as a specific kind of household, one in which all those residing in the household are intentionally related to each other. The Census goes on to define a *family household* as “a household maintained by a householder who is in a family (as defined above), and includes any unrelated people (unrelated subfamily members and/or secondary individuals) who may be residing there. The number of family households is equal to the number of families” (*U.S. Census
In any case, from the Census’ perspective “family” is a subset of “households.”

The Census recognizes five major categories under the heading of “marital statuses.” Each has its own dynamics. They and their approximate sizes in the 44 rural counties in 2000 are:

1) Single Persons (not living in a family, which equals total numbers of households minus numbers of family households).

2) Childless Family Households (whether spouse is present or not), and/or families with no children and those with children age 18 or over.

3) Married Couples with Children under age 18 (the “traditional” family).

4) Single Mothers with Children under age 18.

5) Single Fathers with Children under age 18.

Other types of families also exist, of course. For example, two partners of the same sex who may have their biological or adopted children living with them. The numbers of these types of families, as measured in the Census, are still quite small, and we will not examine their dynamics here.

In the following sections we examine trends in each major family category in the five town types of the four regions.

Numbers of Families and Numbers of Families with Children (1)

As seen in figure 7.1, between 1980 and 1990, as well as from 1990 to 2000, most town types, except for Central Places, in all regions, experienced small increases in numbers of family households. However, overall growth was very low, even if a little higher in outlying towns. The graph shows losses in numbers of family households in Central Places, whose average numbers declined from 1980 to 1990 and again from 1990 to 2000. In the Northern region More Dense Suburban towns also declined in numbers of family households from 1990 to 2000.

Figure 7.1. Numbers of Family Households Generally Increased in Most Town Types from 1980 to 2000; In Central Places, Numbers Declined.

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1 We rounded numbers to the nearest whole, or half, a percentage point, because in a chapter with so many numbers we did not want to be overly distracted by numbers.
Many households in Central Places were disproportionately composed of people living alone (or in group quarters). For whatever reasons, people have been less likely to raise their children in Central Places than elsewhere in rural counties, undoubtedly contributing to increased numbers in the vast majority of outlying town types between 1980 and 2000. More Dense Suburban towns showed the largest average increases, but others were not far behind.

Figure 7.1 also shows that more family households lived in the four outlying town types than in Central Places, even though Central Places had larger total numbers of people living in them on a per town basis.

While these family-household trends may suggest that numbers of family households with children under age 18 would also have risen across town types, this assumption does not hold in the findings. Figure 7.2 shows that, from 1990 to 2000, the vast majority of town types saw numbers of family households with young children slowly decline by an average of 3 percentage-points (from 51 percent in 1990 to 48 percent in 2000). The two suburban town types in the Eastern region were the major exceptions. They increased in numbers of family households with children.
The other three regions showed declines in numbers of family households with children. Declines in these numbers are usually attributed to smaller numbers of younger families as well as more couples not having any children at all. Such declines could also be related to parents and grandparents living longer after their children have left home.

This explanation fits with findings in Chapter 4, where it was shown that average numbers of young people aged 0 to 17 decreased over time in all town types, while older population segments increased. One explanation for reduced numbers of family households is that fewer people were found in the child-bearing age categories (20-35 years of age) in rural counties and towns in 2000 than in 1990. Fewer people of child-bearing age affect total numbers of children that result in smaller numbers of family households with children.

Further, of the smaller numbers of people in their late teens, many went away to college and did not return, at least immediately. Others probably went elsewhere looking for work in a re-structured economy (seen in Chapter 5). Either way, smaller numbers of young adults lived in these counties in 2000 than in 1990. Thus, overall, there were also fewer young children in 2000 than in 1990 (whether there was a “brain drain” or not). One result was a decreasing number of family households with children age 17 and under (seen in Figure 7.2).

Another explanation for the decrease in numbers of family households with children is that fewer people in their child-bearing years were having children at all during the 1990s, especially in the predominantly White population, but among African-Americans as well.
Also found in Chapter 4 was that people in their late 30s with older children were migrating into the four outlying suburban and rural town types during the 1990s. If such migrations continue, then more school-age children will be raised in these rural counties (a sub-pattern seen in the population pyramids of Chapter 4). The influx of Hispanic Americans, who generally have larger family sizes, could also affect future numbers of family households with young children as well as school populations, in these towns and regions. What will happen with the economic downturn in the latter part of the first decade of the twenty-first century will not be known until at least the 2010 Census.

**Trends in Different Types of Families with Children under Age 18**

Our focus throughout the remainder of this chapter is on families with children under age 18. Families with younger children fall into three broad types:

a) *The “traditional” family*, that is, a married couple with younger children, which represents 72.5 percent of all families with children under age 18;

b) *Single female-headed families with young children*, which are 19.5 percent of all families with young children; and

c) *Single male-headed families with younger children* which are 8.0 percent of all families with young children (and which receive remarkably little attention in studies of families).

While numbers of family households with children under age 18 have decreased across nearly all town types in the rural counties and regions, analyses of trends among the three family types with small children shed light on several important issues, including increasing poverty rates among children as well as declines in numbers of children overall.

**“Traditional” Families with Children.** As seen in Figure 7.3, in 2000 “traditional” two-parent families with young children living in a single household accounted for nearly three-quarters of families with younger children (age 17 and under) in the towns and regions. Averages in outlying towns were higher than in Central Places. Still, over all towns and regions, these percentages dropped an average of 5.0 percentage-points from 1990 to 2000, from an average 77.5 percent in 1990 to 72.5 percent in 2000. In 2000, Central Places averaged 62 percent of all families with young children having two parents, all outlying town types together averaged 76 percent, and each region’s averages were within 2.5 percentage-points of this latter overall average. Despite the fact that nearly three-quarters of all families with young children were married couples, all town types and regions showed fewer traditional families in 2000 than in 1990.
Figure 7.3. “Traditional” Families (Married Couples and their Own Children Under Age 18) Were the Largest of the Family Types with Young Children, but their Average Percentages Declined from 1990 to 2000.

All town types experienced such declines, with Central Places having the highest percentage-point losses (-7.0) between 1990 and 2000, and the two more-dense towns the second largest losses (-5.5 percentage-points overall). At -3.5 percentage-points the two less-dense towns types had the smallest average percentage losses of traditional families. As we will see below, these declines have probably continued into the 21st Century.

**People Separated or Divorced.** Census data provide evidence that more married couples, with or without children, have been splitting apart, resulting in increased numbers of individuals who are separated or divorced. Figure 7.4 shows that percentages of individuals separated or divorced at the time of the Census increased an overall average of 3.0 percentage-points from 1990 to 2000. These percentages reflect only those ages 18 and over who were separated or divorced at the time of the Census, not those who were ever separated or divorced. The latter was over 50 percent in 2000, nation-wide, and by 2008, was even higher, reaching close to 55 percent. In these findings, then, if a person had been divorced in 1990 but was remarried by 2000, he or she would have been counted in the Censuses as divorced in 1990 but married in 2000. Further, this person could possibly be in the category of traditional families if he or she and/or a current spouse had young children who were living with them in 2000. The percentages in Figure 7.4, then, approximate the average increases in separations and divorces during the 1990s.
Figure 7.4. Percentages of Individuals Separated or Divorced Rose in all Town Types and Regions from 1990 to 2000.

About 1 in 10 individuals age 18 and over were separated or divorced at the time of the Census in 1990, rising to 1 in 8 adults in 2000. Most separations or divorces are among individuals who do not have children at home. At 1 in 7 adults in 2000, Central Places had the highest overall rates of separation or divorce in 2000, moving from 1 in 11 adults in 1990. Averaging about 1 in 9 adults, all outlying town types had relatively similar averages in 2000.

Economically speaking, separation and divorce usually impact women more negatively than men. Men usually find it easier to obtain work with higher compensation. Women are often more likely to be granted custody of children and thus become single mothers who struggle to find flexible employment along with adequate compensation. Divorced men also tend to re-marry more quickly than divorced women. Increasing rates of separation and divorce, then, may be a direct cause of increasing poverty rates for certain families and their children.

Since in 2000 separation and divorce were issues for over one in eight adults in the population in rural towns, family well-being issues may arise, which community leaders and policymakers might examine in looking for appropriate responses. Certain communities have responded to these issues by sponsoring “community-outreach” organizations such as “parents without partners” so that single parents of young children can have a place to meet and hold social events.

In the next two sections we consider the percentages of families with children headed by single-parent men or by single-parent women. As we saw
earlier in the chapter, single parents comprise 27.5 percent of all families with young children.

**Single Men Who Headed Families with Children under Age 18.** One result of increasing numbers of separations and divorces is the rising numbers of children being raised by a single parent as head of the family, whether a man or a woman. On average, about twice as many women as men are found in single-parenting circumstances.

Studies show that only a small minority of men have never been married but who have nevertheless fathered children living with them at the time of the Census. A vast majority of single fathers went through some kind of separation or divorce.

Figure 7.5 shows differences in the relative proportions of single men living with their own young children (as a percentage of all families with young children) in the five town types and four regions. Although their percentages are quite small, averaging 4.5 percent in 1990 and 8.0 percent in 2000, their increases were quite dramatic, almost *doubling* from 1990 to 2000.

**Figure 7.5.** Percentages of Families Consisting of Single Males with Young Children Almost Doubled between 1990 and 2000.

Central Places and outlying towns show average percentages of families with children headed by single males near the 8.0 percent overall average. Figure 7.5 also shows that the largest percentages of single men with young children in 2000 were in one of the two less-dense town types. At 7.0 percent in 1990, and 11 percent in 2000, the largest percentage-point increases were in Less
Dense Suburban towns in the Central region. At 4.0 percent in 1990 and 8.0 percent in 2000, More Dense Suburban towns in the Eastern region had the smallest percentages in both years. In other words, in less-dense rural towns especially, percentages of single fathers living with their young children were unexpectedly large and rapidly increasing in numbers.

We are not certain why single fathers with children, in contrast to single mothers with children (as seen below), are disproportionately located in less-dense town types. Possibly, since most men have transportation and higher incomes than women in similar circumstances, generally lower housing prices in less-dense towns make it attractive for single men with young children to live there. Or, possibly, women, who have fewer employment opportunities from such outlying locations, simply leave their male ex-spouses and children there, while they move to more-dense locations (as in the next graph). Thus, it may be that single fathers have simply stayed in the family residence when their now-absent spouses moved out.

**Single Women Who Headed Families with Children under Age 18.** While most single women heading families with young children have been separated or divorced, some never married. A few made conscious choices to have children with no spouse. Indeed, circumstances may differ for women who have chosen consciously to have a child and live by themselves -- they are usually better off financially than those who live alone due to separation or divorce. In addition, not all women living with young children are single mothers. Very small numbers are grandmothers or aunts who head families of their daughters or nieces and their children. In its published sources, the Census does not easily distinguish among these different types of female-headed households.

Figure 7.6 presents findings for families of young children headed by single women. In 2000, across all towns and regions almost one in five of all families with young children were single mothers. This figure grew by about one-third between 1990 and 2000. Even so, this high growth rate is less than one-half the rate for single-parent male-headed families.
In contrast to single-parent males, the largest percentages of single mothers with young children, about 30 percent, lived in Central Places in 2000, and the fewest in Less Dense Suburban towns, at less than half the rates of Central Places. Single-parent families living in Central Places (female-headed and male-headed together) averaged 39 percent, two in five of all families with young children.

Between 1990 and 2000 all town types in each region increased in percentages of single mothers. Figure 7.6 shows that the four outlying town types in each region increased their percentages of single mothers by an average of at least 4.0 percentage-points over the decade. Only Less Dense Suburban towns in each region experienced growth of less than 3.0 percentage-points. All regions had similar rates in the four outlying town types, though those in the Northern region were slightly higher.

Population growth rates in the town types differed somewhat in all regions. The highest growth rates were in More Dense Suburban towns. They were almost double those with the lowest growth rates, Less Dense Suburban towns.

Such high growth rates represent a dramatic shift in the presence of single parents of young children over the decade and contrast markedly with the decline in two-parent families with young children during the same period. Such a shift in family structure is unprecedented in rural counties and towns. If
these rates continue into 2010, for instance, then numbers of single-parent families in Central Places of rural counties could come close to equaling the numbers of traditional families. Still, the economic downturn of 2007 and beyond could change things dramatically, which we will not know until at least the 2010 Census.

Increasing concentrations of single female-headed families with young children in Central Places and More Dense Suburban locations is due to a number of factors, but the most important may be access to the variety of public and private services, including employment opportunities, in these two town types. Single mothers on welfare (such as TANF—Temporary Assistance to Needy Families) are required to find employment, and these two town types have more employment opportunities with lower transportation costs than the other three town types. Because lower-income mothers may not have enough money for reliable automobiles, closer distances to employment and childcare are important to them. For single-mothers, such access probably trumps lower housing costs in less-dense town types.

In any case, greater concentrations of access and support services in Central Places of counties, often due to the locations of Departments of Social Services as well as a number of community action and private agencies such as Planned Parenthood and other counseling services, may be additional factors drawing a greater concentration of single mothers to these areas. This may be important for elected officials, planners, and community leaders in outlying towns to consider as they plan access to various services, such as transportation, childcare, and healthcare.

**Births to Single Mothers**

While increasing numbers of separations and divorces likely explain some increases in single motherhood, numbers of births to single, unmarried women is another. As noted above, some single women choose to have a child and raise the child by themselves. Others are single mothers less by choice than by circumstance. Although pregnancy and birth rates to single mothers are not available for towns (hence cannot be shown for town types), county data are available from the New York State Department of Health website.

Figure 7.7 presents findings for the four county types in the four regions (the Northern region has no Urban Suburban or Rural Suburban counties). It shows that, overall, an average of 38.5 percent of all births in 2006 were to single mothers (up from 34 percent in 2000). Moreover, these rates have been increasing since 1950. Growth rates from 1990 to 2000 were one-third more births to single mothers in 2000 compared to the numbers in 1990. From 2000 to 2006, the overall annual growth rate was lower, but numbers and percentages
still increased and would produce one-fourth more births in 2010 compared to those in 2000.

**Figure 7.7.** Since 1980, Percentages of Births to Single Mothers Have Increased in All Rural County Types.

![Bar chart showing trends in percentages of births to single mothers by county type and region, 1980-2006.](chart.png)

At an average overall rate of 43 percent of all births being to single mothers in 2006, Rural Periphery counties had the highest average rates, and at 33 percent Rural-Urban-Suburban counties had the lowest overall averages. Across the regions, average rates ranged from a low of 25 percent in Rural-Urban-Suburban counties in the Eastern region to a high of 47 percent (near half of all births) in the Central Region’s two Rural Periphery counties (Chenango and Delaware).

These trends parallel quite closely trends in the 1990s in percentages of young children in families headed by single mothers in Central Places (seen in Figure 7.6 above), which tend to dominate counties’ total average rates. Because of data limitations, we do not know the exact patterns in the five town types.

At least one study has shown that males and females in more rural locations tend to “pair off” sooner than those in suburban and metropolitan locations. Suburban teens are more likely to run in “cliques” than to pair up sooner. Such pairing could be one source, at least, of tendencies for women in less-dense towns to become pregnant and deliver a child. Rural Periphery counties also tend not to have services available to help young people with pregnancy and pregnancy decisions.
Additional detailed analyses show that the pattern in Figure 7.7 is different for births to single teenagers (not shown here). Births to single teens declined in both numbers and percentages from 1990 to 2000, and again from 2000 to 2006. The major increase in births to single mothers was for women in their twenties (again, not shown here). While single women were delaying marriage until their later twenties, they were not necessarily delaying having children.

Another factor potentially contributing to the trends in Figures 7.6 and 7.7 is the change in welfare laws that came about in the 1990s. The Federal Welfare Reform Act (Temporary Assistance to Needy Families, TANF) of 1996 allows women to cohabit with a partner and still receive TANF for up to five years. This situation could have contributed to the increasing rates of births to single mothers in their twenties in that women who might otherwise have gotten married before this reform had other options once it became law. Although the Census provides no official numbers on such “non-traditional” couples, especially by town types, the numbers of co-habitng non-married couples (including same-sex couples) could be reasonably large and are also probably increasing.

Families with Young Children Living in Poverty

Single parenthood for mothers presents many challenges. One of them is the disproportional potential for them to live in poverty. Studies have shown that among other factors, children of single mothers living in poverty, in contrast to children of traditional two-parent families living in poverty, face a double jeopardy in terms of achieving satisfying personal relationships and better educations (as well as occupations and incomes). Not all such children are underachievers in these situations, but, disproportionately, they tend to find less satisfaction on these issues.

But, how big is the poverty issue in rural families? Figure 7.8 presents numbers of poverty-level married-couple families living with their own children in 1990 and in 2000. The trend is very clear. In nearly all town types and in all four regions, average numbers of traditional families in poverty declined from 1990 to 2000 to about 534 per town in 2000. Only in Less Dense Suburban towns in the Eastern region was there a very slight increase in numbers. But in 2000, 1,716 lived in Central Places and 841 in More Dense Suburban towns, even if only an average of 177 lived in the two less-dense town types. By 2007, the trend is that these numbers would be reduced even further.
Figure 7.8. Between 1990 and 2000, Numbers of Married-Couple Families with Young Children in Poverty generally Decreased.

Although total numbers of these two-parent “traditional” families in poverty declined from 1990 to 2000, figure 7.9 shows that such declines occurred also in percentages in rural towns. Three-fourths of the town types showed such declines. Overall in 2000, in percentage terms the two less-dense town types had the highest average percentages (9 percent) in poverty among married couples, Central Places the second highest (7 percent), and more-dense town types the lowest (5.5 percent). In 2000, the regions averaged only 7.4 percent overall, 6.3 percent in the Eastern region, 7.5 percent in the Central, 7.0 percent in the Western, and 8.0 percent in the Northern region.
In other words, percentages of married couples with young children that lived in poverty were relatively low, and, for the most part, declined from 1990 to 2000.

In contrast, numbers and percentages of families headed by single mothers with young children who lived in poverty in 1990 and 2000 showed a somewhat different picture. Whereas numbers of married-couple families with young children living in poverty declined in most town types between 1990 and 2000, numbers of single mothers with young children living in poverty increased in the vast majority of the town types. Average overall percentages growth between 1990 and 2000 was relatively low, about one more such family in 2000 for every 8 families that lived in poverty in 1990.
Still, between 1990 and 2000, the percentages of families headed by single mothers with young children in poverty declined a little in most town types, from an overall average of 37 percent in 1990 to 34.5 percent in 2000 (just over one-third of all single mothers with young children). In other words, the numbers of single mothers increased much faster than the numbers of single mothers with young children living in poverty. These percentages were nearly five times greater than the percentages of married-couple families living in poverty.
In 2000, percentages of single mothers with young children who were in poverty in the Eastern region averaged 30 percent, in the Central and Western regions 34 percent, and in the Northern region 40 percent, 10 percentage-points above those in the Eastern region. In 2000, Central Places’ overall averages, at 42 percent, exceeded those in the outlying towns, which averaged 32.5 percent.

In any case, among families with young children, when comparing numbers and proportions of single mothers in poverty (at an overall average of 34.5 percent) with those of two-parent families in poverty (overall average of 7.4 percent), being in a marriage in 2000 is a buffering factor for keeping couples and their children out of poverty.

Conclusions

Family compositions in rural towns have changed dramatically over time, especially recently, and will probably continue to change. These conclusions will review some of the more important trends for their impacts on policymaking regarding various family types in terms of increasing public health, safety, and general welfare. Some essential findings were:

1) Of the total 1,245,385 households in the 760 towns of the 44 rural counties in 2000, one-third (405,464) were single-person households, including those divorced, widowed, and separated, and two-thirds (839,921) were couple or family households with young children. About half (51.5 percent in 2000) of family households were composed of married couples who have not had children or were married couples with children age 18 and over (the Census does not distinguish these two sets of couples). Many single people, of all ages, will eventually get married and become families, and the younger of these family households may still become families with young children or have had children. In any case, “having, or having had, children” still represents the experiences of a large majority of all households in these towns and counties. But, they are now more likely than ever to be from less “traditional” two-parent families with children at home.

2) Families currently living with children age 17 and under headed by married couples, single men, and/or single women accounted for about half of all 839,921 family households in 2000, 51 percent in 1990 and 48 percent in 2000.

3) “Traditional” families, composed of a married couple with young children, accounted for almost three-quarters (73 percent) of all families with young children in 2000, but their numbers and percentages have decreased by about 10 percentage-points per decade between 1980 and 2000.
4) Single parents, whether single males or single females, accounted for 27 percent of all families with young children in 2000, and increased in numbers and percentages quite fast between 1990 and 2000.

5) As rural society re-structures overall, then, “non-traditional” families in contemporary generations have become much more prevalent. Proportions of traditional families (married couples who live together with their young children) will probably continue to decline, as, for instance, due to births to single mothers that continued to increase at least through 2006. Proportions of non-traditional families (of single parents, co-habiting but un-married parents, gay- and lesbian-headed families, aging families, those with older children not at home, and married couples who choose to have no children) will probably increase in the 2000s, as they have from 1990 to 2000. Nearly every town type in the four upstate rural regions showed these trends.

6) Non-traditional family types have been and now are found in increasing numbers and proportions in outlying rural town types (those adjacent to Central Places and beyond) as well as in Central Places. In the 1990s, along with increasing numbers of non-traditional families, Central Places experienced large decreases in numbers of families with young children and outlying towns, smaller decreases. Still, among families with young children, traditional two-parent families continue to represent a majority of families with children still at home both in Central Places and in outlying towns.

7) About five times more single mothers of young children in rural towns and Central Places lived in poverty in 2000 compared to married-couple families with young children living in poverty. Almost one in ten of all families with young children, one in five of all children, and one in three single mothers with young children lived in poverty in 2000. And, numbers of single mothers in poverty grew between 1990 and 2000, even as numbers fell among married couples with children in poverty in nearly all town types throughout the four regions. Since one in three single mothers of young children lived in poverty in 2000, more children were at higher risk in 2000 than previously. Such a trend has probably continued into the 2000s. Thus, they will find it more difficult than other children to make the life adjustments required to escape poverty as adults.

An important contemporary issue is whether these trends will continue with the economic downturn of 2007 and beyond. If what happened during the 1929 depression era is any guide, two additional trends may occur. Parents already married when the depression hit in the 1930s tended to stay together. But, for those people not married, marriages were further delayed into their late twenties and fewer people had children. For those who did not have children, marriages became more unstable, with many separations. Records for births to
single mothers are sparse for the 1930s, but births to single mothers were observed. Such outcomes are also possible for the current economic downturns, depending on its depth. We will know better after 2010 Census data become available, probably in the middle months of 2012.

What impacts do these trends have for policy making by towns’ elected officials and planners in enhancing “…public health, safety, and general welfare” (state legislative goals in comprehensive planning)? Three major impacts seem apparent from these trends.

1) With shifts in families from Central Places to outlying towns during the 1990s (probably continuing into the 2000s), one major impact is diminished access to services used by families, especially by those with lower incomes. Typically, such services are located in more densely populated Central Places. With movement of more families to outlying rural locations, shopping services have followed. But, these facilities seldom provide a full complement of services needed, for instance, by lower-income non-traditional families with young children (“thrift” stores, for example, tend not to locate there). Single mothers and families in poverty also often usually have to travel farther to reach grocery stores, better job opportunities, and other services such as health- and day-care facilities for themselves and their children.

Since outlying towns also typically lack public transportation systems, families have to rely on their own means to access needed services. Living in outlying towns usually requires having working automobiles available for family uses. Expenses for them can be financial strains on any family, but on poverty-level families especially. These families may also have difficulty finding decent housing in outlying towns, let alone keeping a vehicle up and running.

Towns’ officials and planners should examine services-access needs of the increasingly different kinds of families in their towns when reviewing and planning transportation routes, but also in planning for needed facilities such as housing, grocery stores, childcare, and medical facilities.

2) Demands of jobs and lack of access to after-school care for children may also result in parents, and single-parents especially in outlying towns, having more “latch-key” kids who spend comparatively more hours without adult supervision each school day, or only with siblings, or same-age peers. Such general welfare and family well-being issues are probably prevalent among increasingly large percentages of families in outlying rural towns.

Lack of adult supervision after-school, studies show, has been linked with children and adolescents engaging in risky behaviors. Such behaviors include
experimentation with drugs, alcohol, and sex. These circumstances also incline young people to solitary and sedentary forms of entertainment, such as watching television and advertising, playing video games, and using computers and the Internet to visit websites of which parents may not approve. These activities can potentially lead to an increased prevalence of obesity in children.

3) Closer proximity in more-dense Central-Place neighborhoods usually brings closer relationships. Greater low-density dispersion of families in counties’ outlying towns, studies show, results in a net loss of social interactions, and thus loss of a sense of community as well. Smaller proportions of people experiencing this sense of community also can be found among those families whose children have grown and left home, and among older people.

Being relatively isolated from one another in less-dense locations, families usually also form fewer “assistance ties” with people outside their immediate family. Extended families and neighbors can be important sources of support in times of stress, especially, by providing childcare, eldercare, in sharing transportation costs, or in joining organizations like “parents without partners.” Losses in such relationships can strain all families, but especially lower-income rural families which may not be able to afford or have access to such services. Overall, these losses can have negative impacts on the emotional and mental health of increasing numbers of more-isolated rural families.

Policymakers in most outlying rural towns, but in less-dense towns especially, could provide more accessible community-gathering places for bringing children, adolescents, families, friends, social organizations, and various services together, perhaps even with a public-transportation to and from such facilities. Such gathering-places could also be used for activities like HeadStart or after-school teenage hangouts.

In sum, trends in averages in all rural town types and regions show that they have been experiencing changing family compositions and locations, including shifts from living in Central Places to living in less densely-populated rural towns by more “non-traditional” types of families. These changes heighten the importance for policymakers to understand and respond to changing family needs that affect life-quality in rural communities.

The emerging prevalence of different types of families in rural towns potentially presents certain new risks to both children and adults. Reduced social interactions and sense of community-connectedness, especially among families with young children, and increasing proportions of families with inadequate food, shelter, and transportation, are particularly important to town,
city, county, and statewide leaders. Such needs are found among low-income and elderly residents in outlying towns as well.

Trends show that different rural town types have slightly different dynamics and needs. Although the trends do not provide clear paths for future planning and other programmatic responses for each, the descriptive information above offers a set of starting points for understanding how trends can affect growing numbers of challenges faced by today’s families. Policymakers at all government levels might beneficially examine these trends when addressing the various strains on public health, safety, and general welfare experienced by their increasingly differentiated families, populations, and constituents in rural New York.
RURAL TOWN AND CENTRAL PLACE BUDGETS I
Expenditures for Current Operations, Public Enterprises, & Debts

Paul R. Eberts and David L. Kay

Rural town and central place budgets are public-investment documents that designate what revenues have been (or will be) collected (mostly through property taxes) and how these monies will be expended. Two sometimes contradictory imperatives that all town and small-city officials work under are to: a) keep taxes as low as possible, and b) be responsive to constituents’ problems and needs. In planning their budgets, town and small-city officials engage in a balancing act to keep their operations efficient in using taxpayers’ monies for carrying out programs that effectively benefit their constituents.

One significant caveat about our analyses is that Central Places in rural counties include both small cities as well as towns with county-seat villages in them. Thus, the population in rural counties is accounted for fully. However, in our findings we do not include revenues and expenditures from villages in any town. If such data would have been included, revenues, as well as expenditures, in the county-seat towns would have been larger, while numbers of households would have been the same. Thus, our estimates of average revenues and expenditures in these towns would have been higher. We believe, however, that this would not substantially change the patterns in our overall findings. A future study is necessary to provide a more detailed examination of this assumption.

Data for expenditure and revenue analyses come from the Office of the New York State Comptroller. These are readily-available data from the Internet that make budgets comparable from one town and small city to another and thus permit trend analyses of town and small-city budgets. Although we might wish for a different set of budget categories to complement those provided by the Comptroller, the available data (accumulated by us over the years from the
Comptroller’s electronic files) provide the bases for relevant trend analyses in understanding differences among the town types.

All cities and towns examined in these data are located in New York’s 44 rural counties, even though the data were not available from the Comptroller’s office for three towns in 1990, for twenty-two towns in 2000, and for twenty-seven towns in 2005. Most reductions in the data base were from Less Dense Rural towns. We believe these omissions affected our overall findings very little.

Our findings below will examine averages in how expenditures in the five town types and four regions have promoted rural town and small-city health, safety, and general welfare between 1990 and 2005. Since expenditure choices represent the primary priorities of town and small-city officials, our analyses will first examine these trends, and in the following chapter look at revenue sources such towns and cities use in funding their priorities. The next chapter will also conclude by presenting suggestions based on these analyses for future policy considerations by local and state officials.

Budgets are both reactive and proactive documents. They are reactive in that past decisions by town and small-city officials, as well as the fulfillment of (sometimes unfunded or barely funded) state mandates, constrain present decisions. If previous town and small-city officials encumbered debts, current town and small-city officials must put dollars in their budgets to pay for them. Likewise, once roads are in place, and constituents begin to rely on them by putting their homes or businesses near them and/or use them for commuting purposes, they must be maintained for ease of traffic flow through all seasons. Environmental conditions, such as rainstorms, snow, and ice, often require responses by local officials in excess of their proposed budgets to preserve daily operations. To use them efficiently, facilities must also be maintained and upgraded. Thus, budget priorities include ways to pay for commitments that current town and small-city officials did not make as well, as those that they do create.

Budget requirements are often simply due to town and small-cities’ locations in their counties. As previously seen, towns’ locations affect and are affected by socioeconomic, demographic, and environmental trends that change the compositions of constituents, problems they face, and, therefore, problems public officials face. Central Places with their relatively large population sizes, for instance, have seen population declines in recent decades, while outlying rural towns’ population sizes have increased. Such changes require different responses in the various towns and small-cities in rural New York.
Extension of water and sewer systems in towns and small cities is also induced by such changes. Both suburban and rural outlying towns have engaged in providing them. These systems often result from, and result in attracting, new housing developments that bring in-migrations of various age groups, younger, middle-aged, and seniors, which impact existing communities.

Pressures often mount on town and small-city officials to provide for additional programs and facilities for families, children, or seniors. Responses often involve creating or expanding parks, recreation, and/or community centers, appropriate to different age-levels. As population densities increase, police and fire-fighting staffs often become necessary, codes enforced more rigorously, and new land-use regulations put in place. Town and small-city officials may also have to add more staff.

Alternatives may include requiring citizens to use their own resources to find or create services for themselves. Such alternatives run the risk of making a jurisdiction less attractive to people or businesses, which may then reduce (or at least not increase) its tax base if they locate elsewhere. Many town and small-city officials face such trade-offs. Such choices are difficult for public officials to analyze, decide upon, and implement.

Choosing whether to add services or facilities and staff to support them, requires a calculation (often a “best guess”) of “opportunity costs” that balance what is gained versus what is lost to individuals and communities by not funding services. Each choice has a different potential immediate and/or longer-term effect on budgets.

Such choices make town and small-city budgets proactive investment documents. Future outcomes are generally based on interactions between (a) what functions town and small-city officials are permitted to undertake according to state laws; (b) town and small-city officials’ priorities about benefits and costs of specific potential development choices; and (c) analyses of key trends’ impacts on their towns and constituents, especially where increased taxes could have depressing effects. This chapter presents findings on expenditures of the rural small city and town types and four upstate New York regions on such major budgetary issues.

**Context of Rural Town and Central Place Budget Decisions.** Most rural town and central place budgets are not based on formal analyses. For reasons ranging from lack of resources and expertise to lack of perceived need for anything more, budgets are sometimes supported largely by local officials’ assumptions, opinions, and hunches. Still, outcomes from such analyses affect the extent to
which town and small-city officials support services they believe are more likely to increase their constituents’ general welfare.

The increasing complexity of choices in town and central place officials’ decisions has contributed to an evolution in budgeting. Increasingly, budgets have gone beyond presenting only numbers in different accounts to also including statements of goals, objectives, principles, policies, standards, and/or consequences that justify changes in expenditures and revenues. Such statements convey to constituents, in ways that numbers alone do not, what rural town and central place officials want to achieve when they make budget decisions, and how entries in expenditures are tied to programs and services intended to accomplish certain goals.

The articulation of goals, objectives, and programs that expenditures support usually contributes to their justification. Comprehensive plans also provide such justification for spending on facilities and programs. In producing comprehensive plans, town and small-city officials can include, according to state enabling legislation, official analyses of and responses to demographic and socioeconomic trends, the location of roads and transportation facilities, public and private utilities, existing and future housing patterns, educational, cultural, emergency, fire, police, and health services, and locations for parks, recreation, industrial, and commercial facilities. Focused on the future of built and natural environments, actively used plans give concreteness to towns’ plans for their futures.

For towns and central places with no written comprehensive plans or statements of priorities in their budgets (which is the case in the majority of less-dense towns), concerned citizens (and analysts) have to infer municipal priorities from patterns among the expenditure categories. This chapter and the next will present such analyses and inferences. Changes in programs and services are usually made incrementally over time. Examining such expenditures provides the bases for inferences on town officials’ priorities.

Average expenditures among the rural town types and central places in the state’s four rural regions differ in rather consistent patterns as we will see below. We believe a major reason for such varied consistencies is due to the constraints imposed on town officials because of their towns’ locations. Central Places, for instance, require different expenditures than other town types. They are almost always county seats and centers of commerce. Consequently, public offices (courts and attorneys that routinely use public offices), along with various other business activities, cluster there. Likewise, More Dense Suburban towns with their increasingly-common shopping areas have also become centers of much business activity, whereas less-dense rural towns generally have only a
few businesses in their clusters (villages or hamlets). Such locations necessitate different amounts and kinds of private and public investment expenditures.

Data from the New York State Office of Real Property Services (ORPS) provide insights on numbers of householders, commercial services, industrial firms, and other public and private services in towns and counties. Although it is beyond our resources to do a complete study of these variables here, what we did find in ORPS were wide variations in numbers of commercial, recreational, entertainment, and industrial properties, as well as numbers of residential properties, in the different rural town types.

In a non-random sample of three rural town types, we analyzed 24 Central Places, More Dense Suburban towns, and less-dense towns respectively. We found about 13 percent of all properties in Central Places were businesses, More Dense Suburban towns had 10 percent, and less dense towns had 5 percent business properties. In other words, Central Places had two and a half times more business properties than less-dense towns, and More Dense Suburban towns had twice as many business properties as less-dense towns.

In these ways, different town types’ expenditures vary among each other primarily in accordance with their differing locations in rural counties. Only in a minority of cases did town and small-cities’ expenditures seem determined primarily by personal initiatives of elected public officials.

Central Places spread their expenditures more evenly over several budget categories. However, the biggest single expenditure for outlying towns is for roads and bridges. Compared to counties’ outlying rural towns, Central Places spent more dollars on a greater number of expenditure categories (usually called “funds” or “accounts”). Central Places with larger population sizes and densities, and not incidentally larger tax bases, often maintain police and fire departments, planning departments, larger numbers of community-facility operations, and larger legal, judicial, and financial staffs.

**Total Expenditures in the Five Town Types**

In general, rural town and central place (as noted initially, not including village) expenditures in the Comptroller’s data are composed of three separable but inter-related parts, with several sub-parts in each one. These are:

1) Current operations (for staff, benefits, contracts, and on-going equipment purchases, in the various specific town and small-city departments);
2) “Enterprise” budgets (mostly for water and sewer services), where fees-for-services tend to balance expenditures; and
3) Indebtedness and debt service (across all forms of debt, including for construction of water and sewer facilities – in the public Comptroller’s dataset these are not separated but lumped together).

Although sizes of specific expenditure accounts tell us more about town and central place priorities than their total expenditures, examining average total expenditures provides a convenient springboard for examining overall patterns among the five town types and four regions.

Figure 8.1 presents average total dollar expenditures, adjusted for inflation, among the cities and towns in the four regions. Bars in the graph are not for equal time intervals; inflation rates for the ten-year period from 1990 to 2000 averaged 3.4 percent per year (or 34 percent over the ten years), while inflation rates from 2000 to 2005 averaged just over 3.0 percent per year, or 15 percent over the five-year period. Hence, the average adjusted inflation calculator for 1990 to 2000 was 1.49, and 1.15 for 2000 to 2005.

**Figure 8.1. In 2005, among the Town Types, Central Places Clearly Had the Largest Overall Average Adjusted Total Dollar Expenditures, and Less-Dense Towns the Smallest.**

In all four regions, Figure 8.1 shows that Central Places (including small cities) in rural counties had by far the largest average total dollar expenditures (adjusted for inflation) among the five town types. By 2005 over all four regions, Central Places averaged $18.8 million in their total expenditures, More Dense Suburban towns about one-sixth this amount ($3.46 million), More Dense Rural towns an even smaller $2.05 million, and the two less-dense town types averaged
$1.08 million in their total expenditures. Clearly, Central Places had much larger total expenditures than outlying towns. Most towns in all regions showed increases in “real” dollar expenditures between 2000 and 2005.

Findings in Figure 8.1 clearly reflect population sizes and densities. In general, Central Places in rural counties have much larger populations than outlying towns, even those towns adjacent to Central Places, and they also have much larger expenditures than the other outlying towns.

In order to account for population-size differences among the town types, Figure 8.2 shows average total expenditures per household. Analyzing findings on a per household basis permits us to compare towns to each other on a more standardized basis. It also clarifies differences among the town types.

Figure 8.2. In All Three Time Periods, Central Places Had the Largest Overall Average Adjusted Total Expenditures per Household.

To use per household indicators diverges somewhat from conventional research analyses on budgets that present findings in per capita terms. Our decision to use per household indicators stemmed from four considerations: (a) In New York State, property taxes are primary sources of revenue for towns and small cities; (b) properties of householders are primary taxable units; (c) household property values are major components in town and small-cities’ tax bases; and (d) households are the units primarily affected by town and small-city planning, budgeting, and regulations. Land-use regulations, for example, are the prerogative of town and small-cities in New York and a major theme in these analyses.
In our judgment, then, a household rather than an individual person (that also includes children) can be justified as a significant unit when comparing local government expenditures and revenues. Households pay property taxes, while individuals as such pay primarily sales taxes. Even though property and sales taxes together are basic sources of revenues to towns and small cities, most town and small cities depend on property-tax revenues more than sales-tax revenues and “control” only property tax rates (as we will see in the next chapter).

To save space, remaining sections of this report will not provide findings and graphs on totals in average adjusted expenditures, but will focus on “per household” expenditures for the different budget accounts. They also vary significantly. Figure 8.2, on towns average total expenditures per household in the four regions, shows a pattern quite different from the one in Figure 8.1. Figure 8.2 shows expenditures per household in Central Places across the four regions, of nearly $3,500 (actually $3,464) in 2005, whether they had children or not. Such expenditures are also higher than in the other four town types.

At $1,969 per household in 2005, expenditures in Less Dense Rural towns were second highest. In contrast, expenditures per household in More Dense Rural towns, at $1,190, were the lowest by about one-third as much per household as those in Central Places. Expenditures per household in Less Dense Rural towns on average were about 80 percent more than those in More Dense Rural towns. And, at $1,440 per household, More Dense Suburban towns’ expenditures were lower than in Less Dense Suburban towns, which paid an average of $1,684 in 2005.

These differences are remarkable. What they mean is that, despite the best efforts of town officials in Less Dense Rural towns to keep taxes as low as possible (which is a singular goal of many officials in this town type), due to special circumstances they confront they find it extremely difficult to keep expenditures low and still respond appropriately to their constituencies’ public concerns.

In general, more-dense towns often had village shopping centers as well as small manufacturing operations in them that require more public services. Hence, businesses in these towns probably, as we saw above in the ORPS findings, account for much greater proportions of their towns’ overall expenditures than happens in less-dense towns.

A second observation on Figure 8.2 is that the vast majority of increases in average total expenditures per household in dollar terms were above inflation between 1990 and 2005 (inflation effects are incorporated into Figure 8.2). When adjusted for inflation at an annual rate of 3 percent per year between 2000 and
2005, overall budget averages increased *above* inflation at an average of *nine* percent rate during the 2000 to 2005 period.

The largest *dollar* increases from 2000 to 2005 were in Central Places at $249 per household (roughly $50 per year) in contrast to an overall average for all towns of $160 (about $35 per year) over this same five-year period. At an average of 12.5 percent, both more-dense town types averaged double-digit increases. At a percentage increase of only 6 percent (1.2 percent per year), Less Dense Suburban towns had the smallest increases among outlying towns. In general, even when average total expenditures in some town types declined between 1990 and 2000, the vast majority increased by 2005 slightly above their 1990 levels.

All four *regions* in Figure 8.2 reflected this same general pattern on their average adjusted total expenditures per household among the town types, but in different degrees. In all four regions in all three time periods, Central Places had the largest average total expenditures per household, less-dense towns the second largest, and more-dense towns the smallest. Similar patterns will be found repeatedly in the analyses that follow.

**Total Expenditures for “Current Operations.”**

As noted earlier, town expenditures are usually divided into three major accounts by state auditors, one for current operations (about 80 percent of total expenditures overall), another for debt service on longer-term capital projects (about 5 percent), and a third for water and sewer service expenditures (about 15 percent). As we shall see, actual percentages for these accounts vary considerably among the town types in rural counties.

Current expenditures are further divided into several sub-accounts. The ones showing the largest differences are those for roads and transportation, averaging about 48 percent of all current operating expenditures, but smaller in Central Places and larger in less-dense towns. About 26 percent of expenditures are for general government operations, 13 percent for fire-fighting services, and about 11 percent for police. These four sub-accounts make up about 98 percent of current expenditures, with the remaining 2 percent divided into three or four additional sub-accounts for recreation and culture, health, economic assistance, and “other” public safety. Central Places have much different percentages for these accounts from the other four town types, and Less-dense towns, especially, seldom fund all these sub-accounts.

In this section we consider the dynamics of total current expenditures in these four major sub-accounts. As noted previously, since the pattern for average adjusted total expenditures for current operations in dollars looks very
much like the one in Figure 8.1, the graph for total current-operation expenditures will not be shown.

Figure 8.3 shows average proportions of town budgets spent on current operations for 1990, 2000, and 2005 among the town types in the four regions. In all three time periods, Figure 8.3 shows a progressively upward expenditure pattern beginning with Central Places, which proportionately spent the least on current operations, to less-dense rural towns that spent the most on current operations (mostly for roadway budgets). More-dense town types spent mid-range percentages.

Figure 8.3. In 2005, Percentages of Town Budgets Spent on Current Operating Expenditures (Excluding Water and Sewer, and Debt) Varied Considerably among the Town Types.

Overall average current-operations expenditures in 2005 were 82 percent of total town and small-city expenditures, with town types varying a great deal above and below this average. In 2005, Central Places averaged 73 percent, while less-dense town types averaged 87 percent. Less Dense Suburban towns in three regions spent over 90 percent of their town budgets on current operations, the highest overall. But, in the Northern region Less Dense Suburban towns spent only 69 percent on current operations, which also was the second lowest overall percentage after the 67 percent spent by Central Places in the Western region. Current operating expenditures, then, drive most towns’ total budgets, and especially those of less-dense rural towns.

Figure 8.4 presents average current operating expenditures per household for the five town types in the four regions for 1990, 2000, and 2005. The pattern
there is what is called “j-shaped” for all three time periods. In 2005, Central Places in general showed the most current-operating expenditures per household, averaging $2,538 overall, the two less-dense rural town types had the second highest amounts, averaging $1,594, and the two more-dense town types again had the smallest, averaging $1,024 per household.

Figure 8.4. In 2005, Central Places Had the Largest Overall Average Adjusted per Household Total Current Operating Expenditures.

By region, the largest average per household expenditures for current operations were in Central Places in the Central region, averaging $2,803 in 2005. The smallest averages, at only $737, were in More Dense Suburban towns, also in the Central region. From 2000 to 2005, increases in inflation-adjusted current-operating expenditures were in the middle teens in Central Places, with the two more-dense town types averaging 12 percent, while less-dense towns’ average increases were roughly one-third of those in the three more-dense town types.

The majority of town types in Figure 8.4, then, showed only small increases, averaging just less than 10 percent. Towns in the Eastern region showed slightly higher increases, and More Dense Suburban towns in the Northern region saw the largest increases, a 33 percent increase from 2000 to 2005, significantly above inflation (which, as noted earlier, is built into the graphs). Less Dense Suburban towns in the Northern region actually experienced declines in average per household expenditures from 2000 to 2005. None of these changes distorted the general patterns found for 1990, even if inflation adjusted total spending in 1990 was generally lower than in 2005.
The “reverse” of this pattern implies, at least, that, in general, more-dense towns, including Central Places, spent more on Water and Sewer and/or debt service compared to less-dense towns. Apparently, increased population density means more and costlier town and small-city overall operations. Typically, of course, the added cost is associated with higher levels of service.

Current-Operating Expenditures for Roads, Bridges, and Transportation. Current operations include such accounts as those for Police and Fire Protection, Public Safety, Health, Housing and Community Development, Culture and Recreation, General Government (which includes the justice system), Roads and Transportation, and “Other.” Of these, Roads and Transportation expenditures represent the largest account, mostly going to roads and bridges, but also towards parking lots and/or buses, the latter two especially in Central Places.

Figure 8.5 shows that in all four regions Central Places spent the smallest proportions, averaging 20 percent. Less Dense Suburban towns had the highest proportions of expenditures for roads and transportation, reaching an overall average of 67 percent of total current operating expenditures. At 62 percent, Less Dense Rural towns were not far behind. In the Western and Central regions, the proportions reached over 70 percent, while averaging only about 60 percent in the Eastern and Northern regions. The two more-dense towns averaged 45 percent. Every region also showed this very large range of over 45 percentage-points among their town types.

**Figure 8.5. In 2005, Less-Dense Towns Had the Highest Proportions of Town Expenditures for Roads and Transportation.**
When looking at total average adjusted dollar expenditures per household in towns’ transportation accounts in Figure 8.6, the two less-dense rural town types clearly spent the most in all four regions in all three time periods. Although averages differed considerably from region to region, less-dense towns, with an overall average of $1,010 per household in 2005, spent almost twice as much per household as Central Places, and 2.2 times more than the average of the two more-dense town types that had an overall average of $462 per household. Central Places averaged $518 per household.

Figure 8.6. In 2005, Average Adjusted Total Expenditures per Household for Roads and Transportation Were Highest in Less-Dense Towns and Lowest in More-Dense Town Types.

Current Operating Expenditures for General Government Services. The above findings imply that Central Places and more-dense towns spent larger proportions of their budgets in accounts other than roads and transportation. The next largest account within current operating expenditures is for General Government, which in 2005 averaged about 25 percent for the towns overall. The next largest account after General Government is for Fire Protection services (mostly in Central Places) at 11 percent, and then Police and Public Safety services at 8 percent.

General government services expenditures include those for administration connected to the office of the supervisor, the town clerk’s office; including financial, taxation, and debt services; the town assessors’ office and staff; planning staff; code enforcement officers; and for town justice services and
records. Many towns do not have separate offices for each of these services, and, as in the case of the assessor’s office may share the costs with other governmental units, such as village government. But they all must provide at least part-time staff for these town functions, no matter how many there may be.

As with other functions, general government services also include town and central place officials’, and employees’ fringe benefits. These can amount to thousands of dollars, and usually include health and dental insurance plans, as well as life insurance and retirement benefits. Even part-time workers, such as court-appointed attorneys often receive such benefits. Central Places spent an average of 20 percent of their general government service budgets on fringes, but the other four town types spent averages closer to 15 percent. The differences may be due to larger numbers of unionized employees with greater bargaining powers in Central Places than in outlying towns.

Average proportions spent through general government service accounts are not shown here, but also vary among the town types. Overall, Central Places spent 21 percent on General Government, the two less-dense rural towns 23 percent, More Dense Rural towns 28 percent, and More Dense Suburban towns 35 percent.

Total dollars spent on general government services are also not shown in graphic form here due to their similarity to Figure 8.1 on total dollar amounts for town budgets. Overall, Central Places averaged $2.64 million dollars spent on General Government, More Dense Suburban towns $688 thousand, More Dense Rural towns $384 thousand, Less Dense Suburban towns $169 thousand, and Less Dense Rural towns $203 thousand. Central Places clearly spent the most due to their larger numbers of households and businesses, more-dense towns the second most, and less-dense towns the least. Most outlying towns’ total general government expenditures are lower in part because they use so many volunteers in fire and emergency-medical services. If they went to full-time professional fire and emergency-medical services workers, their expenditures would undoubtedly be higher.

Dollars per household devoted to general government services vary much less widely than those for transportation. Figure 8.7 shows the overall pattern of average dollar amounts per household spent on general government services. Central Places at $484 spent the most, Less Dense Rural towns the second most at $428 per household, and More Dense Rural towns the least at $244. These dollar amounts show relative similarities overall between higher expenditures in Central Places and those in less-dense towns, and lower levels in more-dense towns, especially in the Eastern and Northern regions.
Figure 8.7. In 2005, Average Adjusted Total Expenditures per Household for General Government Services Were Also Highest in Less-Dense Town Types.

Current Operating Expenditures for Fire Protection Services. At the onset, it should be cautioned that the large number of independent fire districts in New York State, including many that are located in more than one town, complicates interpretation of town expenditures in this category. With this important caveat in mind, the data show that average proportions spent by towns for Fire Protection Services also vary among the town types in the regions. Central Places tend to have at least some full-time professional firefighters, spending 23 percent on fire protection in 2005, whereas outlying towns rely much more heavily on volunteers, averaging 8 percent.

Dollars per household spent on these services also vary widely among the town types. Figure 8.8 shows that Central Places spent the most, averaging $595 per household, less-dense rural towns the second most, averaging $113 per household, and more-dense towns the least, averaging $81 per household overall.
Figure 8.8. In 2005, Average Adjusted Total Expenditures per Household for Fire-Fighting Services Were Highest in Central Places.

In multiples, Central Places spent about five times more per household than less-dense towns and seven times more than more-dense towns. Since costs for fire-equipment and facilities remain relatively constant, higher unit costs for less-dense towns are probably due to smaller populations (fewer people to share the costs). According to state laws, all towns must maintain certain levels of fire protection, which usually requires capital spending on fire-fighting equipment such as fire engines, fire stations, ambulances, and volunteer training in order to meet fire-fighting standards. Although dollars spent on these services in the vast majority of town types increased over the 15 years in the graph, they appear to have increased faster in towns and central places with professional departments.

Current Operating Expenditures for Police Services. Average proportions of small city and town budgets spent on Police Services vary even more widely. Central Places tend to have full-time professional police and in 2005 spent 28 percent of their current operating expenditures on police services. In contrast, less-dense outlying towns are much more likely to rely on sheriffs' departments (under county jurisdiction) and state police, and together averaged about 2.5 percent of their current operating expenditures for their police services. Some suburban towns, especially in the Eastern region, maintain their own police forces and averaged 5.5 percent on police services overall.
Average dollars *per household* spent on police services shown in Figure 8.9 reveal a progressively declining pattern. Central Places averaged $712 per household, spending the most on police services. The much-higher costs of their full-time professional staffs are shown clearly in this graph. Outlying town types in the Eastern region all spent more than in the other three regions combined. Thus, More-Dense Suburban towns spent the second most overall, averaging $68 per household, mostly due to more dollars spent in the Eastern region. More Dense Rural towns, the next most, averaging $31 per household, and the two less-dense towns averaged $17 per household. More Dense Rural towns in the Northern region spent only $7 per household on police services and Less Dense Suburban towns averaged less than a dollar.

**Figure 8.9.** In 2005, Average Adjusted Total Expenditures per Household for Police Services Were clearly the Highest in Central Places.

In multiples, Central Places spent 14 times more than more-dense towns on their police services and 55 times more than the low-dense towns. These are clearly the single largest differences between expenditures of Central Places and the town types in this chapter. Such differences certainly greatly increased Central Places’ total expenditures for current operations compared to outlying town types. Differential unit costs between less-dense and more-dense towns is probably due to some level of professional services in more-dense towns, while less-dense towns tend to rely on their counties’ sheriffs’ and state-police agencies to address the needs of their growing populations and businesses, with very few having more than a couple of policemen on their payrolls.
Expenditures for Water, Sewer, and Other Utilities.

Householders and public officials are generally interested in access to safe, reliable, and ample water supplies, and safe, reliable, and environmentally benign sewage disposal services. Businesses, developers, and apartment owners, especially in or near business districts, also need such basic infrastructure services. Many towns, especially Central Places and More Dense Suburban towns, and villages in More Dense Rural towns often experience citizen pressures to provide such services. In less-dense outlying towns, most costs for water and sewer services are borne by individual householders through drilled wells and septic systems.

Public “enterprise” budgets operate in ways similar to private utilities insofar as they provide fee-for-service. The fees pay for the current service with usually some measure being saved for future investments and/or maintenance.

Water and sewer expenditures are classified by the State Comptroller’s Office under current operating expenditures. But, since officials in most towns consider these services, including interest on capital expenditures for them, to be not-for-profit fee-for-services accounts, they are also separated out here.

In higher density places, especially Central Places and More Dense Suburban towns, water and sewer services are usually integral parts of their budgets. Natural gas and/or electric services are usually provided through private companies, even if a few towns, such as Groton in Tompkins County, own such systems and make them available to their businesses and residents in a not-for-profit enterprise department.

A main benefit of public water and sewer systems is better convenience and control over the supply and purity of the water and waste disposed for householders and other users. Towns providing the systems are also enabled, if capacity permits, to strategically influence their population densities and tax bases by extending these amenities beyond present service areas.

Expanding coverage in their public water and sewer systems often holds promises of stabilizing or reducing tax rates for taxpayers due to serving larger numbers of users through the same system. Indeed, extending water and sewer coverage is a primary strategy for increasing tax bases through the housing, commercial, industrial, and/or other forms of community and economic development expected to be attracted by the expansions.

Figure 8.10 shows percentages of towns in the three time periods that had at least $1,000 in total expenditures for staff, contracts, and/or capital equipment.
on town and small-city water and/or sewer accounts. By 2005, at least certain components of such systems were in place for 41 percent of all towns and small cities. In the Western region all Central Places had water and sewer, and in the Eastern region 94 percent had such systems. Over all regions, an average of 73 percent of More Dense Suburban towns had such systems. More Dense Rural towns averaged 55 percent, and the two less-dense town types averaged 34 percent.

Figure 8.10. In 2005, Central Places clearly Had the Largest Average Percentages of Water and Sewer Utilities.

Between 1990 and 2005, almost all town types increased their percentages of public water and or sewer services, in most cases rather substantially, but especially in the Northern region. Even outlying less-dense towns over all the regions increased their proportions by 2005. Only one outlying town, a More Dense Suburban town in the Western region, dropped a system, perhaps selling it to a private firm or county agency.

Between 2000 and 2005 public water and sewer services had became more widespread in outlying towns, probably because both residents and town officials recognized the values of having public water and sewer systems, and because of availability of funding. Those who have ever used older household facilities to draw water from wells and drain sewerage into older septic systems, know the possible problems well – reliability issues, untimely and expensive repairs to the wells, as well as environmental and contamination problems. On
the other hand, municipalities struggle with funding and infrastructure maintenance problems as well. The state’s environmental agency estimates, for example, that fewer than 40 percent of municipalities have a capital improvement plan for their wastewater collection systems.

Figure 8.11, shows average water and sewer expenditures per household, and indicates that Central Places consistently had higher costs, especially in the Northern and Western regions. Central Places are more likely to provide complete area coverage for both water and sewer services, with associated higher costs. Outlying towns are less likely to provide such services for everyone. Since the Comptroller’s data are aggregated, they do not distinguish whether towns had water or sewer or both systems.

**Figure 8.11. In 2005, Central Places Had the Largest Average Adjusted Expenditures per Household for Utilities.**

Despite the detail masked by aggregated data, higher per household expenditures in Figure 8.11 probably reflect the extent of coverage in having both water and sewer systems and the chronological age of a system. In the Eastern and much of the Central and Western regions, water and sewer systems were built much earlier than in the Northern region so that debts on initial capital expenditures have been retired or almost retired by 2005. Especially in large parts of the Northern region, less-dense towns, due to their sparse population densities and mountainous terrain, have undoubtedly found it more costly to build public water and sewer systems.
Expenditures for Debt Services.

In the course of its operations, most towns and small cities incur debts for capital-improvements. Many towns outgrow relatively cramped quarters from which they operate, or require enhanced facilities for highway equipment, youth and senior centers, parks and recreation, parking lots and garages, police and fire stations, water and sewer systems, improved roads and bridges, or other forms of capital improvements.

In order to spread capital investments for certain costly community benefits across future years rather than absorbing them all at once (which would increase tax rates dramatically), towns and small cities pay for such investments through borrowing, mostly through issuing bonds. Such debt instruments are called general-obligation bonds since towns and small cities are obliged to pay them or go into bankruptcy (which very few have done but which has happened). Depending on the type of capital improvement for which funds are obligated, certain of these debts (except for water and sewer systems) are under a state constitutional debt limit of 7 percent on the average of the previous five years of town and small-city assessments of “full-value taxable properties.” Serial bonds are used to fund equipment purchases where state statutes establish periods of probable usefulness for various categories of equipment or facilities.

Total debt expenditures include paying off the principal and interest on town loans. From available data, we cannot determine which capital projects were financed. We will examine, first, per household expenditures for debt service, and, then, proportions of total annual budgets that town and small cities spent on debt service.

Figure 8.12 presents per household expenditures on debt service for capital projects among town types in the regions. As with most other per household expenditures, Central Places have larger average per household debt loads than outlying town types because they have many more facilities which require capital expenditures. Overall in 2005, Central Places averaged $262 per household in servicing their debts while the four outlying town types averaged only $75.
Debt-service expenditures per household in the two suburban town types were higher than those in the two rural town types, probably due to the effects of infrastructure construction for newer housing and business developments. This pattern contrasts with general patterns of per household expenditures seen previously in the chapter. The smallest overall average amounts paid in debt services were in More Dense Rural towns, which paid an average of only $57 per household in debt services in 2005, followed by Less Dense Rural towns, which paid an overall average of $64. In contrast, More Dense Suburban towns paid an average of $95 over all four regions, and Less Dense Suburban towns paid an overall average of $82 per household.

Capital expenditures varied in town types and regions. Debt-service costs also varied widely among Central Places in the four regions. Central Places in the Northern region paid less than Central Places in the other three regions, while outlying towns paid more than those in the other regions. Central Places in the Central region in 2005 paid the highest average debt services, a little over twice as much as towns and small cities in the Northern region.

Debt service in Central Places in the Eastern and Central regions decreased, perhaps because they were paying off some older debts, while debt services in Central Places in the Western and Northern regions increased indicating they were undertaking newer capital projects since 2000 (like the water and sewer systems as we saw in the previous section, but other facilities...
and equipment as well) and consequently were paying more in debt service in 2005.

In general, the more densely populated rural areas of Eastern and Central New York usually had more extensive facilities (such as parking garages and more and larger government facilities) in their Central Places than those in less populated regions, such as in Western and Northern New York. Facilities may well be older in the Eastern and Central regions, with more needing replacing or re-modeling, which would increase indebtedness.

Average proportions of towns’ budgets devoted to debt services in Figure 8.13 stood at 5.5 percent, again varying among the four regions’ five town types. In 2005, paying an average over all regions of 7.5 percent of their budgets on debt service, Central Places averaged over twice as much as Less Dense Rural towns. More Dense Suburban towns averaged 6.5 percent, More Dense Rural and Less Dense Suburban towns averaged 5 percent.

Figure 8.13. In 2005, Central Places generally Had the Largest Average Proportions of Total Expenditures Going to Debt Services.

Regional variations among the four outlying town types were also noteworthy. Average debt service in the four outlying town types in the Northern and Western regions was 5.5 and 6 percent, respectively, whereas in the Eastern and Central regions it averaged about 4 percent. Still, such differences reflect both the size of overall total expenditures in these regions as well as sizes of their debt service – larger budgets tended to have smaller proportions in each category.
Summary and Conclusions.

Budgets are critical policy as well as fiscal documents for town and central place governments in rural areas. In general, they express major priorities established by the public officials who create them. Most such government budgets are constrained by past decisions, especially for expenditures on large-scale capital projects that generated debt. Rural town and small-city officials naturally tend to respond to service concerns raised by constituents, especially those issues experienced by large proportions of their constituents. Commitments by them to having or developing water and sewer systems are but one example.

Changes in rural town and central place expenditure accounts usually occur in annual incremental steps, so that they are sometimes difficult to track. For our purposes, data from the Office of the New York State Comptroller provided the capability to track expenditures through its published annual reports on finances in New York’s cities, towns, villages, and counties. These reports for 1990, 2000, and 2005 provided the data sources in this chapter. Analyzing longer-term trends in expenditures enables observers to see which trends had greater impacts and which budget priorities were prominent.

In our analyses we divided total town and central place expenditures in rural counties into three major accounts – those for:

1) Current operations, for general government, transportation (mostly roads’ and bridges’ construction and maintenance), police and fire protection, culture and recreation, and so forth;
2) Enterprise budgets, usually for water and/or sewer utilities whose accounts are often public fee-for-service, non-profit enterprises; and
3) Debt services, for past large-scale capital investments in various (but unspecified) facilities and equipment.

We examined these three general budget accounts in five town types and four upstate rural regions, usually on two key metrics -- levels of expenditures per household and proportions of total town and small-city expenditures.

A consistent finding was how much more Central Places – excluding village expenditures - pay in each expenditure account, on even a per household basis, than the four outlying town types. On seven of eight "per household" graphs in this chapter, Central Places’ overall expenditures were, by comparison, “off the charts.” Sometimes, it was difficult to even determine outlying town types expenditure levels in the graphs because they were so small.
Since most employment takes place in or adjacent to a rural county’s Central Place, they generally represent the bulk of rural county population and have a major impact on outlying towns as well. Compared to outlying towns in these rural counties, Central Places have much larger social and physical infrastructures due in part to county and town offices as well as also the bulk of commercial services located there. These facilities require higher maintenance and servicing costs. Cost burdens on taxpayers in Central Places exceeded other towns by multiple degrees in all three time periods.

A second important finding was that, for total per household expenditures in all three time periods, Less Dense Rural towns had the second highest levels and Less Dense Suburban towns the third highest. Of the five town types, the two more-dense outlying town types spent the least per household.

More-dense towns’ total expenditures averaged about twice that of less-dense towns. But, since the bulk of expenditures for less-dense towns are for current operating expenditures for roads, bridges, and other transportation-related facilities on small population bases, per household costs in less-dense towns were higher than in more-dense towns.

A third finding was the relative uniformity in the ratio of current-operating expenditures (not including water and sewer) to total expenditures that occur in outlying towns of three of the four regions (except the Northern). In the Eastern, Central, and Western regions in 2005, the two less-dense town types as well as More Dense Rural towns’ current-operating expenditures averaged above 80 percent of average total expenditures. Central Places and More Dense Suburban towns had average ranges between 67 percent and 79 percent. Since Central Places tended to have much higher expenditures for water and sewer services and for debt service for infrastructure, average current-operating ratios for three of the four Central Places in the four regions were lower.

A fourth finding was that most rural town types in the regions saw their expenditures for water and/or sewer services increase between 2000 and 2005, including in less-dense town types. Shopping areas, industrial parks, and concentrated housing developments located in outlying towns typically require public water and sewer systems in order for them to do business.

Finally, findings suggest that many expenditures arise simply because of towns’ locations, and coincident demographic, socioeconomic, and transportation trends. Patterns in the above findings show that Central Places consistently have larger expenditures per household than the others in every budget category except on roads and transportation, and, usually, less-dense
rural towns have the second highest due to high expenditures on roads and transportation. Expenditures per household in more-dense outlying towns are consistently the lowest. Such trends suggest that locational factors place town and small city governments in circumstances beyond their control, that constrain public officials’ options at least, and probably their priorities, in allocating scarce dollars among competing uses.

As populations grow and more workers commute to work, as rural roads are improved to accommodate larger trucks for milk haulers -- dairy farming still being important in most less-dense rural towns -- and as rural populations continue to focus their demands of government on a relatively narrow range of public services, less-dense town governments are constrained to spend larger proportions of their budgets on roads and bridges compared to other town types.

In response, improved roads probably stimulate further population growth in outlying towns. Population and household growth usually "automatically" translate into larger government expenditures, but denser, well-planned growth also reduces per household costs for services, as in the more-dense towns. In contrast, population losses in Central Places probably increased their budget pressures and per household expenditures. Especially in more-dense towns, local governments have been increasingly constrained to provide water and sewer services and other types of services for their residents, all of which require additional expenditures.

The majority of rural towns and central places surely experienced these trends over the past 15 or more years. Central Places spent more per household over the years, less-dense rural towns second most per household, and more-dense towns comparatively less than either of the others. Such findings certainly suggest that towns were caught in structural financial binds and that expenditure priorities were significantly determined by each town’s locational attributes.

In the next chapter we will examine the revenue structures that supported these expenditures, and then draw some general conclusions about town and central place budgets in rural counties and regions.
CHAPTER 9

RURAL TOWN AND CENTRAL PLACE BUDGETS II
Revenues, Tax Bases, and Impacts on Households

Paul R. Eberts

The previous chapter focused on expenditures by rural towns and central places in New York’s 44 rural counties for various local government activities, including providing water and sewer services, payments on debts, and funds for current operations (fire, police, public safety, and roads and transportation). These expenditures were presumably determined by city councils and town boards to be in their constituents’ best interests, given the circumstances they faced.

Budgets of rural towns and central places are usually smaller than those of counties and especially school districts, but are generally larger than those for villages and special districts. We again exclude the latter local-government entities from this chapter.

All local governments (counties, schools, villages, and special districts, as well as towns and cities) use and heavily depend on property taxes in funding their operations. Other revenues for towns and cities come from state and federal aid, from grants for special purposes, from sales tax distributions, from fees for water and sewer services, from borrowing (which must be paid back), from inter-governmental transfers of various kinds, and from a variety of smaller sources (e.g. “nuisance” taxes, largely for hotel and motel accommodations, or licenses, as locally designated).

A primary concern throughout this chapter is how the several rural town types and small cities differ in their total revenues and funding sources. We believe the findings show that consistent and often large differences in fiscal-stress among town types imply that their “causes” are, whatever the management skills of local officials, directly related to the spatial location and
population density of each local government. Some aspects of these factors can be influenced by local policy, but only within limits and over the long term. Towns’ particular locations in their counties have influenced a historical settlement pattern of different population densities that in some sense requires public officials to respond as they do in making specific expenditures and in generating certain amounts and kinds of revenues to pay for them.

Since newspapers and their readers often complain that too many local taxes put financial pressures, or fiscal stresses, on taxpayers within their jurisdictions, a particular concern will be to examine the extent to which this actually happened in 1990, 2000, and 2005. As in Chapter 8, emphasis will be placed on per household units of measure.

This particular emphasis is based on measuring fiscal burdens on households in their ability to pay for government services. Multiple indicators are usually used in determining such fiscal burdens, and we will use several here. Certainly one indicator is the proportion of property taxes paid per household, another is of taxes paid in relation to household incomes, still another is taxes paid based on towns’ and cities’ tax bases, and a fourth is the proportion of total revenues that comes from non-local sources. We will examine such indicators and at the end of the chapter provide a more complete assessment.

In comparing towns accurately, the use of revenues per household is not always possible, given available data. Central Places often are centers of business activities. More Dense Suburban towns with their malls have also become commercial centers. Along with households, these businesses also pay property along with other taxes. But in less-dense rural towns households, including farmers, pay almost all the taxes because the towns have few other taxpayers. Since data from the Office of the State Comptroller, our primary data source, do not separate taxes paid by businesses or farm operations from taxes paid by households, we could not examine these differences adequately.

Parcel data from the New York State Office of Real Property Services (ORPS) provide insights on numbers of householders, of commercial services, of industrial firms, and of other public and private land uses in each town and city. In a non-random sample of 24 towns in each of Central Places, More Dense Suburban towns, and less-dense towns, we calculated numbers of commercial, recreation and entertainment, and industrial properties, as well as numbers of residential properties. In general, 13 percent of all properties in Central Places were in business uses, as were 10 percent in More Dense Suburban towns, and 5 percent in less dense towns. Central Places, then, had two and a half times more business properties as less-dense rural towns, and More Dense Suburban towns had twice as many as less-dense towns.
Estimates of contributions to the property tax base of business versus household parcels in town and city full-valuations vary considerably. Although we have not undertaken a systematic analysis of the available data, examples are not hard to find of commercial contributions exceeding 20 percent of total assessed values in Central Places, especially if multifamily residential properties are such as apartments are moved from the household to business category. Uncertainty about the variability and importance of this split leads us to raise a caution and tentative correction factor we will call the “business” caveat.

Another is the “village” caveat. The Central-Place town type in this study has about an equal number of small cities and towns with a county-seat village in them. We did not include revenues and expenditures from these villages in our town analyses largely because town governments have no authority over them. If such data would have been included in our analyses, then revenues generated in the Central Places without cities would have been significantly larger, with proportionate increases in certain per household property taxes. Thus, our estimates of average revenues per household in Central-Place towns would have been higher. But, since we report aggregate numbers for the whole town, probably they would be only moderately higher. We suspect this effect would not be large enough to substantially change our overall findings. However, it will be left to a future study to examine detailed effects of this “village” caveat.

Total Revenues in the Five Rural Town Types of the Four Rural Regions

Rural town and Central Place budgets are usually difficult to understand quickly. Often they are thick documents showing details of expenditures program-by-program and of the various sources of revenues to pay for them. Revenues for certain programs, such as for water and sewer, come from fees-for-services. Other programs, such as for youth or recreation, usually combine fees and base funding. Others, like the clerk’s office, use general-purpose, base, and fee funding.

Without clear summaries, only with difficulty can average citizens figure out “the big picture” of how a town or city pays for the services it provides. The state Comptroller’s data provide such a summary. Still, presenting information on the more than fifteen basic accounts reported is cumbersome. One reason for the large number of accounts is because larger and fiscally more complex cities and smaller towns are all tracked with the same indicator categories.

Table 9.1 shows the fifteen general revenue sources for 2005 for Central-Places, the two more-dense town types taken together, and the two less-dense town types taken together. The four biggest sources of revenues in each are Property taxes (averaging 36 percent of the total, but 26 percent in Central
Places), “Unclassified and Other” fees of various sorts (15 percent overall, but 24 percent in Central Places), the three State Aid sources (about 13 percent overall), and Sales taxes (13 percent). No other source reached half of these percentages. Together, these four sources totaled over three-fourths (about 77 percent) of total revenues.

Table 9.1. In the State Comptroller’s Data for 2005, Percentages of Overall Total Revenues by Their Sources Consist of Fifteen Accounts Ranging from Property Taxes to Borrowing and “Other.”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Account</th>
<th>Central Places</th>
<th>More Dense Towns</th>
<th>Less Dense Towns</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Property Taxes</td>
<td>23.7</td>
<td>38.7</td>
<td>46.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Property Taxes – Other Assessments</td>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>1.2</td>
<td>0.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Sales Taxes</td>
<td>13.4</td>
<td>14.6</td>
<td>9.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. State Aid, General Purpose</td>
<td>7.6</td>
<td>5.4</td>
<td>3.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. State Aid, Roads &amp; Transportation</td>
<td>1.9</td>
<td>2.8</td>
<td>5.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. State Aid, Other</td>
<td>2.3</td>
<td>2.4</td>
<td>6.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Federal Aid</td>
<td>6.0</td>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>4.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Payments from Other Governments</td>
<td>1.9</td>
<td>2.7</td>
<td>5.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Interest Earnings</td>
<td>0.9</td>
<td>1.3</td>
<td>1.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Repayments for Services (e.g. Health)</td>
<td>0.9</td>
<td>0.9</td>
<td>0.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. Water &amp; Sewer</td>
<td>7.4</td>
<td>3.7</td>
<td>1.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. Transfers to Capital Projects</td>
<td>0.7</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>1.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. Borrowing</td>
<td>5.9</td>
<td>7.0</td>
<td>3.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14. Community Services Income</td>
<td>1.7</td>
<td>1.7</td>
<td>0.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15. Unclassified &amp; Other</td>
<td>23.6</td>
<td>12.9</td>
<td>9.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>100.0</strong></td>
<td><strong>100.0</strong></td>
<td><strong>100.0</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Revenues shown for towns and Central Places in Table 9.1 are within a few percentage points for all the towns for thirteen of the fifteen individual revenue sources. A main difference is that, compared to towns, Central Places rely on property taxes much less, and “other” revenue sources much more.
Most popular-media outlets, as well as taxpayer groups, focus on issues surrounding property-tax increases. Property taxes are the single largest town and city revenue source, are highly visible in contributing to monthly living and business costs, and are the largest tax over which town and central place officials have local control. This probably explains why so much emphasis is placed on them. But, in all revenue sources shown in Table 9.1, property taxes comprise less than half the revenues for a given type of local government entity.

As with total expenditures in the previous chapter, total revenues also differ considerably among the town types. Figure 9.1 presents average total revenues for 1990, 2000, and 2005 among the town types in the four regions, adjusted for inflation in 1990 and 2000 at an annual rate of 1.34 percent for the decade from 1990 to 2000, and 1.15 percent for the half-decade from 2000 to 2005 (3.0 percent for each of the five years). Even though the three bars for each town type in each region are at unequal intervals – 1990 to 2000 is 10 years, and 2000 to 2005 is only five years -- Figure 9.1 clearly shows that Central Places had much larger average revenues compared to outlying town types in each region, and one of the two less-dense town types collected the smallest total average amounts.

**Figure 9.1.** In 2005, Central Places Clearly Had the Largest Average Total Revenues (Adjusted for Inflation) among the Five Town Types, and Less-Dense Towns the Smallest.

The differences are staggering. Central Places collected about seven times more revenue than average in the two more-dense town types and about twelve times more than those in less-dense town types. Of course, as seen previously, compared to outlying rural town types, Central Places also had much bigger
populations and more overall expenditures. Further, almost all outlying town types saw their revenues increase from 2000 to 2005, while Central Places’ total revenues in two of the four rural regions decreased (the Central and Northern), perhaps reflecting their population losses (seen in Chapter 4).

To examine average total revenues per household is informative. We estimated numbers of households for 2005 by a “straight-line” projection from trends established in the 1990-2000 numbers of households; growing towns had proportionately more households, declining towns had fewer. Although not shown, these projections match rather well over all U.S. Census-based official household projections found for the four rural county types.

Figure 9.2 on average total revenues (from all sources) per household among town types, shows a picture very different from the previous figure. Central Places still collected the largest amounts per household in both 2000 and 2005 in all four regions. In all four regions in 2005 however, Less Dense Rural town types had the second highest per household averages, while more-dense town types had the smallest, even though they had the second-highest revenue totals. The previous chapter showed a very similar pattern for expenditures.

Figure 9.2. In 2005, Central Places Clearly Had the Largest Average Adjusted Total Revenues per Household among the Towns, Less-Dense Towns the Second Largest, and More-Dense Towns the Smallest.

Even with a 20 percent reduction in Central Place revenues per household (due to the business caveat), and a 5 percent reduction for water and sewer fees, householders in Central Places overall would still pay higher averages than households in less-dense towns. Their place in the overall pattern also holds
throughout this chapter, just as it did in the expenditures’ chapter. Further, on per household measures, averages rose between 2000 and 2005 in the majority of outlying towns as well as in Central Places in the Eastern and Western regions. Central Place revenues per household fell from 2000 to 2005 in the Central and Northern regions.

In 2005, average total revenue per household in Central Places (which includes state aid, transfer payments, and so forth, ignoring a “business caveat”) throughout the four regions was $3,192. This total exceeded revenues in Less Dense Rural towns (the second highest per household revenues) at $1,946 and those in Less Dense Suburban towns that averaged $1,605. Average revenues from households and businesses in Central Places, according to these findings, was 1.6 times more than for households in Less Dense Rural towns, nearly twice as much as those in Less Dense Suburban towns, and nearly three times as much as those in More Dense Rural towns.

If 20-25 percent business and fee-for-services caveats are applied, then households in Central Places paid just less than $2,400 in taxes, still almost $450 above amounts paid by households in Less Dense Rural Towns. Based on these assumptions, then, Central Place households still had greater tax burdens than those in outlying towns. Of course, the array of municipal services provided to households also differs.

Total revenues used in the previous two figures overestimate Central Place actual per household revenues (and thus their tax burden). Revenues in Central Places come from a larger variety of sources (not only business tax revenues) that are not normally available to outlying towns. As seen in Table 9.1 above, Central Places, on average, received much larger proportions of their total revenues in the “Unclassified and Other” category. These include revenues from selling properties, collecting fees for doing-business, fees and licenses for various other services, water and sewer revenues, hotel and motel taxes, repayments for health and social services, and so forth. Such revenues are often not available to outlying towns compared to Central Places. Further, not all “other” revenues in Central Places affect all households, even if they are included as part of total revenues. Thus, per household revenues for Central Places in Figure 9.2 in reality overestimate actual amounts.

Another way to adjust for the caveats due to non-comparability of revenue sources is to calculate revenues from four sources that seem most comparable from one town type to another, namely, property taxes, sales taxes, state aid for general purposes, and state aid for roads and transportation. These four sources of revenues make up about three-fourths of all revenues in towns and cities. The remaining eleven account types are either eclectic and broadly
defined, such as “other,” or dependent on circumstances established sometime in the past.

In short, we dropped from further analysis all accounts in Table 9.1 that contained the word “other” in its title, including federal aid. Likewise, we dropped all fee-for-service accounts, such as those for water and sewer, community services, repayments, payments from other governments, interest earnings, transfers, and even borrowing. All seemed hard to compare across town types. By doing this, we do not mean to infer that the programs or projects in these “other” accounts are unimportant. Indeed they may reflect some of the most innovative ways towns deal with their challenges.

As seen in Figure 9.3, totals for these four revenue accounts include significant proportions of total revenues from all sources. Although variations occurred among the five town types in the four regions, the four revenue sources average 49 percent of total revenues for Central Places; a much higher, 69 percent, for the two more-dense town types and Less Dense Rural towns; and 73 percent for Less Dense Suburban towns. Overall, total revenues in these four accounts capture over two-thirds of revenues of outlying towns, and just about half of all revenues in Central Places.

**Figure 9.3. In 2005, Average Percentages of Total Revenues Combined from Property Taxes, Sales Taxes, State Aid for General Purposes, and State Aid for Roads & Transportation Were Larger in Outlying Towns than in Central Places.**
Figure 9.4 has a different set of classifications in its horizontal axis. It shows relative proportions of the four revenue sources used by the five town types in 1990, 2000, and 2005. Although the measure on its horizontal axis differs significantly from previous (and subsequent) figures, the graph itself takes a shape similar to other figures in this chapter.

Figure 9.4. In 2005, of the Total Combined Revenues (from Property Taxes, Sales Taxes, State Aid for General Purposes, & State Aid for Roads & Transportation), All Towns Relied More on Property Taxes than on the Others.

A major finding from Figure 9.4 is that in all three time periods each rural town type relied significantly more on property taxes than any other single revenue source. The proportions tend to follow a progression upward from Central Places, with a 55 percent reliance on property taxes in 2005, to Less Dense Suburban towns at 77 percent reliance, dropping to 66 percent in Less Dense Rural towns. Compared to outlying town types, Central Places drew larger percentages of revenues from general purpose state aid as a revenue source.

Although each town type relied on state aid for roads & transportation the least of all among the four revenue sources, reliance on each of the four revenue sources shifted somewhat from 1990 to 2000 and 2005. Certainly some of the state aid for roads and transportation went for reimbursements to towns in caring for state roads through their towns (especially for snow plowing), which could vary somewhat from year to year and town to town. Other state aid in this account came from funds specified through the Consolidated Local Street and Highway Improvement Program (CHIPS). This program was designed to assist
localities in financing the construction, reconstruction, or improvement of local highways, bridges, highway-railroad crossings, and/or other local facilities. Its formula also favored large less-dense towns that had many highway miles but fewer people living on them.

Sales taxes are usually distributed by the county government (which collects them) to the various towns through a formula and procedures that differ from one county to another, with property values and population typically used as distributional weights. Moreover, about a third of the state’s cities exercise their right to pre-empt the county and levy a sales tax directly within their borders (i.e., rather than take a distribution from the county).

In 2005, at nearly 30 percent of the four revenue-source totals, Central Places and More Dense Suburban towns were the largest recipients because more business real estate and people are located in them. Surprisingly though, Less Dense Rural towns’ were also above 20 percent. Only Less Dense Suburban towns received below 20 percent of the total four revenues from sales taxes in 2005, receiving only a little over 10 percent.

State aid for general purposes was the larger of the two state aid revenue sources, averaging 11 percent of revenues from the four major revenue accounts in 2005. Their importance for town and city governments, then, is substantial, even if limited. State aid for roads and transportation averaged only 5 percent.

State aid for general purposes varied greatly among the town types. Central Places relied more than the others on it, averaging 16 percent of their totals. Trend lines for towns from 1990 to 2005 were relatively unpredictable, one going up a little, another down a little, with less-dense towns going up more than more-dense towns.

An important measure in examining total revenues in the four major accounts is by household. Figure 9.5 presents findings that show patterns in these four accounts among the town types were similar to those in Figure 9.2 (for all revenues). Central Places raised the most revenues per household, more-dense towns had the lowest with less-dense towns in-between. Still, the amounts were at much lower levels than in the comparable Figure 9.2 above, averaging $1,487 per household (or business) across the four regions in 2005.
Figure 9.5. In 1990, 2000, and 2005, Central Places and Less-Dense Towns Had the Highest Average Total Combined Revenues *per household* (from the Four Major Revenue Accounts).

At an overall per household average of $1,341, revenue amounts for Less Dense Rural towns were in much closer proximity to those of Central Places than is shown in Figure 9.2 for overall total revenues. Likewise, differences in amounts for the other outlying town types were also diminished. Less Dense Suburban towns averaged $1,181, and the two more-dense towns together averaged $808. If a high business caveat (of 23 percent) were applied, households in Less Dense Rural towns would actually have higher levels of tax burden ($1,341 per household) than those in Central Places ($1145 per household). Households in the two more-dense town types experienced lower levels of tax burden than either of these.

So far, this chapter has focused on tax burdens using two main ways of looking at total revenues, namely, total revenues from all sources and then total revenues from the four major comparable sources. In these analyses, households in the two more-dense town types clearly carried the least fiscal burden, while households in Central Places and Less Dense Rural towns were much more burdened than the others. To determine which were more burdened requires a series of assumptions about the roles played by businesses in relieving some of the fiscal stress on households in Central Places (our so-called business caveat).

The next section will focus on property taxes and their dynamics as well as how they are related to town and Central Place tax bases. The section after that will shift attention to consider how sales taxes were related to fiscal stressors. The chapter’s final section further examines the two state aid funds.
Property Taxes, Tax Bases, and Fiscal Stress

When newspapers report on local government revenues, they almost always focus on property taxes in contrast to other revenue sources. Property taxes represent the best controlled revenue source by towns or cities, and are typically set to meet budget goals after revenues from other sources have been anticipated. Property taxes have been the single largest source in different kinds of towns and Central Places in the state’s rural counties, both in terms of absolute dollars raised and the proportion relative to other revenue sources.

Amounts of property taxes raised in the five town types in the four regions (not shown here for space considerations) show a familiar pattern of downward progression from Central Places, with their bigger populations and more services, collecting the largest dollar amounts. They averaged, over all regions in 2005, almost $4.4 million. Less Dense Rural towns collected the smallest, averaging $534 thousand. The other three town types fell in-between. The Northern region breaks with this pattern where both rural town types collected more property taxes than the two suburban town types. Also, Eastern region towns collected more than towns in other regions. This pattern mirrors the one in Figure 9.1 but the amounts are smaller.

Figure 9.6 examines town and central place (not county or school district) property taxes per household (without the business caveat). It shows a pattern similar to the ones in Figures 9.2, 9.3, and 9.5, but less exaggerated. In 2005, the two less-dense towns experienced the largest average total property taxes collected per household, averaging $901. At $756 per household, Central Places averaged the next largest amount. Applying the business caveat to these findings reduces Central Place average property taxes even more to $576. At averages of $500 per household, both more-dense town types collected the smallest amounts per household. Amounts collected by the two less-dense towns were 1.8 times as much as in the two more-dense towns, and 1.2 times the amounts paid by average household in Central Places. This pattern puts households in less-dense towns under a greater property tax burden than householders in the other town types. This result held throughout these 15 years, but could change in the future if growth in property taxes continues at a double-digit pace every decade in Central Places, and if taxes paid by businesses fall much below 20 percent.
Figure 9.6. In 2005, Less Dense Rural Towns Had Larger Average Adjusted Total Property Taxes Paid per Household than the Others.

A further indicator of household fiscal stress is “ability to pay”, as measured by property taxes paid in relation to total household income. More property taxes raised as a percentage of household income indicates a greater probability of household fiscal stress.

Overall findings in Figure 9.7 on percentages of property taxes raised from household income parallel those in the previous figure. Households in the two less-dense town types paid more of their incomes in town and city property taxes than others. Households in the two more-dense town types again paid the least, and those in Central Places paid percentages between these two.
In 2005, Households in Less Dense Rural Towns also Had the Highest Average Percentages of Household Incomes per Household Going to Property Taxes.

On this indicator, over all regions households in the two less-dense town types paid over twice as much in the percentage of the average household income to property taxes as households in the two more-dense town types, and over 1.25 times those in Central Places. Although property-tax exemptions apply to many kinds of properties (e.g. churches) found in denser settlements, they may also play into these numbers for more rural areas. Farmers in agricultural districts, as well as the elderly, qualify for exemptions and are found disproportionately in less-dense towns, shifting tax burdens there to other households. By this measure, households in less-dense towns had greater tax burdens than those in the other town types.

Still, percentage-point differences among the town types were small even if magnitudes of differences were reasonably large. The range in percentages of property taxes raised in 2005 was from an average low of 0.63 percent of household incomes in More Dense Suburban towns in the Central region to a high of 2.3 percent for Less Dense Rural towns in the Northern region, with an average of 1.3 percent for all town types.

School and county government revenues are also raised from property taxes, and take much bigger bites from household incomes than town taxes. If the same proportions in the two sets of towns persist for school and county taxes (which probably happens in less-dense towns), then average households in less-dense towns also pay much larger percentages of their incomes to town, city, county, and school taxes combined compared to those in other towns.
Property Taxes, Tax Base, and Fiscal Stress. Many analysts believe that the relationship between total revenues collected through property taxes as percentages of total full-value assessments of real property (the tax base) in towns and cities is the fundamental indicator of local fiscal stress. The tax base is considered to be the capacity of a town or city and levels of property taxes are considered a “willingness to use own-source revenues.” Thus, somewhat in contrast to household tax burdens, the ratio of tax revenues collected from the tax base is a main indicator of town and Central Place fiscal stress. This section considers comparative tax-base sizes, along with whether property-tax revenues collected from this tax base are comparable among the towns.

Nominal assessments for towns in the four regions are often set at some fraction of their full market value, and are therefore equalized to 100% of full value by an “equalization rate” calculated by the New York State Office of Real Property Services. These rates are available through the Comptroller’s data sets for each town and city. The overall size of tax bases generally vary directly with town population. Central Places have by far the largest tax bases in all regions, more-dense towns middle levels, and less-dense towns the smallest. From 2000 to 2005, Central Place tax bases grew only in the Eastern region.

These numbers change when considering full-value assessments per household, as presented in Figure 9.8. On this indicator, Central Places had the smallest averages in all four regions, and Less Dense Rural Towns had the largest; in fact an average of 2.2 times more than those in Central Places. Findings for the regions, with some variations in each one, show a general overall upward gradient from Central Places through the other town types to Less Dense Rural towns. Since Less Dense Rural towns had the largest tax bases per household but the smallest household incomes, households there could be called “property rich, but income poor.”
Figure 9.8. In 2005, Less Dense Rural Towns Had the Largest Averages per Household of Total Full Valuation of Assessed Taxable Real Properties.

Among less-dense town types which had larger property values per household in 2005, we suspect that configurations of typical rural properties in them (held for farming, woodlots, recreation, second homes, and so forth) varied by town. In the Eastern region, less-dense towns were probably a combination of relatively highly-assessed farms, some timber operations, estates, and “second homes,” a few with extensive land holdings. In the Northern region, much land in less-dense towns is held publicly (and off the tax rolls) for the Adirondack Park, privately for larger timber operations, dairy farms, lots of second homes, and a few estates. Less-dense towns in the Central and Western regions were mostly characterized by larger farming tracts and some timbering compared to estate-holdings of wealthier people elsewhere, even if they also had some “second home” development.

Figure 9.9 shows that in all three time periods, except in the Northern region, residents and businesses in Central Places paid higher average percentages of property valuations in property taxes, 0.9 percent in 2005. Except for the business caveat, they could be considered under greater fiscal stress. With an average of 0.71 percent of their property tax base paid to taxes, Less Dense Suburban towns were second, and Less Dense Rural towns were third at 0.51. As usual, people in the two more-dense town types paid the smallest percentages, averaging about 0.39 percent.
Figure 9.9. In 2005, Central Places generally had the Highest Percentages in Property Taxes of Total Adjusted Tax Base.

Applying a business caveat of 23 percent would reduce the average percentage of Central Places to 0.69 percent, just below those of Less Dense Suburban towns (at 0.71 percent), but still more than Less Dense Rural towns that averaged 0.51 percent (with large regional variations, ranging from 0.38 in the Eastern region to 0.6 in the Northern). Again, more-dense town types averaged 0.38 and 0.41 percent in paying the smallest percentage of their tax base in property taxes, and thus their towns and cities had the lowest fiscal stress. Although percentage differences appear small, a total range of only 0.52 percentage points, the highest percentages were just less than twice those of the lowest. Again, if school and county taxes are added to the taxes paid for town government services, the fiscal-stress pattern would probably be more apparent in the graphs and more burdensome for households in Central Places, with less-dense towns close behind.

In all three time periods and in three of the four regions, people and businesses in Central Places, with their smaller per household tax bases, but without applying the business caveat, paid more of their tax bases in property taxes. The business caveat would reduce their tax effort to put them just below Less Dense Suburban towns. Both less-dense towns, with their larger tax bases per household, were also paying larger percentages of their tax bases to property taxes than more-dense towns, which had comparable tax base sizes. Clearly, towns under the least fiscal stress were households and businesses in the two more-dense town types, which had moderate size tax bases, yet their residents paid the lowest percentage of assessed value in property taxes.
Still, as seen previously, such property tax differentials hardly keep lower-income people from moving to less-dense rural locations from more-dense locations. In Chapter 7, housing-value averages in More Dense Rural towns were about $80,000 in 2000 on which they paid an average of $1,190 toward total expenditures versus paying $1,969 for an average house of about $70,000 in Less Dense Rural towns. The effective tax per thousand dollars of house value, then, is nearly double in Less Dense Rural towns compared to householders living in a similar house in More Dense Rural towns ($14.88 per $1000 of house value versus $28.13 per $1000 of house value, respectively). A slightly smaller difference is found between tax rates in More Dense Suburban towns and neighboring Less Dense Suburban towns ($16.64 per $1000 versus $24.79 per $1000, respectively). Again, these differences do not account for the greater amounts of property taxes paid by businesses in more-dense towns.

The tax differentials, even without the business payments, then, are substantial over a ten-year period. Householders who live in a $70,000 dwelling in Less Dense Rural towns would pay about $9,280 more in their town property taxes compared to households in More Dense Rural towns living in a similar dwelling. Households in a $70,000 house in Less Dense Suburban towns would pay about $5,700 more in town taxes over the same ten-year period compared to those living in a similar house in More Dense Suburban towns.

Sales Taxes and Fiscal Stress

Another main local source of town and city revenues comes from the sales tax on retail purchases. On average, 21 percent of town and city revenues are raised through sales taxes, often more than this in Central Places, and less in less-dense towns. Most often counties collect the taxes and share them with towns in their counties through a formula. The formulas vary widely, but in general, towns where sales are made receive larger proportions. Cities can collect and keep sales taxes, however they often make agreements with their counties on these matters.

Figure 9.10 presents findings on per household revenues from sales taxes. In 2005, in three of the four regions (all except the Northern), Central Places averaged $430 per household in sales-tax revenues to clearly receive the largest amounts of sales taxes per household. At $256 per household, More Dense Suburban towns received the second largest. These towns and cities usually have the largest number of businesses, so that, since the bulk of sales probably originated there, they received more sales-tax revenues in return.
Somewhat surprisingly, at an average of $238 per household, Less Dense Rural towns over all regions, even the Northern, received the third largest amounts. Less Dense Suburban towns received the smallest amount, $125 per household. Further, sales taxes per household as proportions of towns’ total revenues increased slowly in Central Places from 2000 to 2005, More Dense Rural towns a bit faster, and the fastest in Less Dense Rural towns. Growth rates elsewhere were stable overall, but fell substantially in Less Dense Suburban towns in the Eastern region.

Sales-tax revenues tend to reduce fiscal stress on households in Central Places the most, More Dense Suburban towns second most, but barely at all in Less Dense Rural towns. Possibly most formulas for distributing sales taxes from the county governments include a flat amount not dependent on sales, and with smaller population sizes in Less Dense Rural towns, this part of a formula translates into higher per household revenues.

Although trends vary considerably among towns throughout the regions, the effects of big-box stores do affect them. In counties where big-box retail stores dominate the retail scene, they also generate the bulk of sales taxes, often from suburban locations. Studies show that only in certain instances do Central Places have the large spaces required for mall parking lots. Such expansion of retail sales in More Dense Suburbs often forces smaller operations out of business, especially in Central Places. Since big-box stores are also their own wholesalers, wholesale operations suffer too. Each of these “developments”
probably reverberates differently throughout affected cities and towns, varying from one rural county to another.

In any case, on overall total revenues from all sources per household, Central Places had the highest averages, even with the business caveat, and thus greater fiscal stress. In terms of percentages of household incomes going to sales and property taxes, and taxes received per household, households in less-dense towns paid more. Householders in more-dense towns had the least fiscal stress on these latter indicators.

To base such generalizations on overall total revenues from all sources is a disparate indicator, and it is easy to conclude that, so far at least, households in less-dense towns compared to the others were under greater overall fiscal stress due to their tax burdens. Still, on specific indicators, Central Places generally came quite close in per household levels.

Let us now turn to state aid indicators. They may show different patterns in mitigating household fiscal stress.

**State Aid for Town and Central Place Budgets**

In general, towns and Central Places routinely receive state aid both for general purposes and for roads and transportation, totaling nearly 15 percent of their revenues in the four major accounts. General purpose state aid totaled 10.5 percent, and roads and transportation 5.5 percent. Of particular interest is whether state aid helped equalize fiscal-stress due to disparities in property and sales tax collections among the town types.

In 2005, total dollars from the two sources of state aid averaged $2.02 million for Central Places, $321 thousand for More Dense Suburban towns, $202 thousand for More Dense Rural towns, $122 thousand for Less Dense Suburban towns, and $123 thousand for Less Dense Rural towns. From 2000 to 2005, these dollars increased by 9 percent in the two more-dense town types, decreased by 9 percent in Less Dense Suburban towns, and were essentially unchanged in Central Places and Less Dense Rural towns. In average dollars in 2005, Central Places received 6.3 times more from state aid than More Dense Suburban towns, and 16.5 times more than the two less-dense towns. These comparisons show that Central Places received significantly disproportionate amounts of money from these two forms of state aid.

As elsewhere in these analyses, per household state aid in the two state-aid accounts are important in understanding overall effects on households. Figure 9.11 shows that Central Places, averaged $242 per household in general purposes state aid in 2005, clearly receiving the most state aid over all four
regions. Averages for outlying town types statewide were much smaller and relatively equal to one another. More Dense Suburban towns received $76 per household, More Dense Rural towns $61, Less Dense Suburban towns $70, and Less Dense Rural towns $76 per household. Central Places, then, received about three and a half times more state aid for general purposes on a per household basis than the other four town types.

Figure 9.11. In 2005, Central Places Clearly Received the Largest Amounts of State Aid per Household for General Purposes.

Central Places had high levels of fiscal stress that put pressure on their tax bases, but, in many ways they did not have much more fiscal stress than the two less-dense town types, especially on household-level measures. This pattern shows that, in 2005 as well as in trends from 2000 to 2005, state general purpose aid, or revenue sharing, driven by tax-base considerations, tended to exacerbate rather than ameliorate the extent of fiscal stress on households in less-dense town types and especially those in Less Dense Rural towns. This same pattern was also seen among the town types in 1990, even as state-aid funding in inflation-adjusted dollars dropped significantly from 1990 to 2005 in nearly all town types.

Also seen in Figure 9.11 and in a web-based Comptroller’s report for 2006, after having fallen from 1990 to 2000, state aid for general purposes grew from 2000 to 2005 in all town types in each region, and by larger percentages in the Eastern region than the others.

Differences among regions were relatively large, and reasons for them undetermined. The Eastern region increased by a per household average of $63
across the five town types. Towns in the Northern region grew by only $26, the Central region by only $14, and the Western by a meager $6. In general, this aid is directed to towns and Central Places whose tax base is inadequate (see www.Comptroller’s Report, 2006, p. 13). Why households in the towns and cities of the Western region experienced increase about 10 times less than those in the Eastern region eludes us, but the differences were substantial.

An explanation for regional variations could have been due to differences in allocations from the "fiscal distress" and "Aid and Incentives to Municipalities" (AIM) programs. They might have favored Eastern municipalities near the State capital because legislators were more familiar with their situations.

Towns and cities that receive less per capita aid than comparable peers are eligible to receive additional funds through an "equity adjustment formula" to correct "long-standing variations in aid." These are sizeable amounts. In the 2008-09 state budget, for example, AIM money was about $945 million, including $50 million targeted to "fiscally distressed" municipalities that exceeded their statutory debt limits, and not counting the $330 million that New York City receives. AIM money provided an additional $6 million to 26 cities, towns, and villages. Municipalities that receive between 5% and the maximum 9% increases are required to meet AIM fiscal accountability requirements, including independent financial audits.

In any case, state aid to town and Central Places for general purposes overall did virtually nothing to reduce the relatively greater fiscal stress on households in less-dense towns in 2005. The small and relatively unequal increases in dollar amounts of this form of state aid to the town types from 2000 to 2005 did very little to ameliorate the fiscal stresses seen in 2000, with the future seeming to hold little promise for relief on households in less-dense towns.

State Aid for Roads and Transportation. The remaining indicator for consideration is state aid to towns and cities for roads and transportation. Figure 9.12, on per-household findings on this indicator shows that in 2005, the two less-dense towns received much greater amounts of state aid for roads and transportation per household, averaging about $105. Central Places received the second largest amounts, averaging $59 per household. Because of larger numbers of households in Central Places, then, they received greater overall amounts even if fewer dollars per household. The two more-dense town types again received the smallest amounts, averaging $38 per household. In other words, probably intentionally, the pattern of amounts per household among town types on state aid for roads and transportation seen in Figure 9.12 actually tended to reduce the extent of fiscal stress in less-dense towns by about $45 per household (not counting the business caveat).
Figure 9.12. In 2005 Overall, Less-Dense Towns Received the Largest Amounts of State Aid per Household for Roadways and Transportation.

The formula for the CHIPS program, on which most state aid for roads and transportation is based, features “linear road miles” in a jurisdiction as a key component. Such a formulation for state aid tends to favor less-dense towns. If the major component of the formula would have been “linear road miles per household (or per capita),” then the formula would have favored more-dense towns and Central Places. Due to the linear-road miles component of the formula, some analysts have characterized this form of state aid as the state's "good conscience" equity aid for rural areas in lieu of general-purpose state aid that now goes disproportionately to urban areas.

However, the reduction in fiscal stress for households in Less Dense Rural towns from state aid for roads and transportation was insufficient to offset the pattern for state aid for general purposes seen earlier. Comparative sizes of differences in amounts in the last two graphs show that in 2005 Central Places received $242 per household from general purpose aid and $59 per household from roads and transportation (neither counting the business caveat). In contrast, the two less-dense towns received averages of $105 per household from state aid for general purposes and $73 from roads and transportation. Overall then, households in Central Places received a total of $301 from these two sources of state aid, while Less Dense Rural Towns received $173. The difference favored Central Places by 1.6 times over Less Dense Rural towns, and 1.7 times more than households in the two less-dense town types combined.
In other words, households in the two less-dense towns got some relief from state aid from their relative fiscal stress, but not as much as they might have expected, and certainly not as much as households in Central Places, who had the second highest levels of fiscal stress. Households in the two more-dense town types received the smallest amounts of state aid, but by our overall calculations, they also had the lowest levels of fiscal stress. Moreover, as noted earlier, these differences were growing from 2000 to 2005.

Summary, Conclusions, and Recommendations
The previous chapter examined town and Central Place expenditures in the five town types and four regions. This chapter examined the other side of the ledger -- town and Central Place revenues, their sources, and differences that were interpreted as putting households in certain towns in more fiscal stress, others in less.

Most town and Central Place revenues came from property taxes. In contrast to some other states, to help them meet their financial obligations New York has designated property taxes for use only by local governments (villages, towns, cities, counties, school boards, special districts). Other revenues come from sales taxes, state and federal aid, borrowing, fees, and “nuisance-taxes” (often on motel rooms), and inter-governmental transfers, for instance, for water, sewer, fire, or police services.

This chapter identified and examined eight major indicators of fiscal stresses on householders in towns and Central Place. Table 9.2 summarizes overall findings in 2005 across the five town types and four regions on these eight revenue sources (fiscal-stress indicators). The averages varied a little from region to region, but in general reflect basic patterns found when examining the Comptroller’s data (the basic data source in this chapter).
Table 9.2. Summary of Findings: In 2005, of the Eight Basic Indicators of Fiscal Stress, Households in Central Places Had Greater Fiscal Stresses on Three Indicators; Households in Less Dense Rural Towns Showed Greater Fiscal Stresses on Two; and Findings for Other Town Types Were Mixed.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Indicator Averages</th>
<th>Central Places</th>
<th>Mre-Dense Suburbs</th>
<th>Mre-Dense Rural</th>
<th>Lss-Dense Suburbs</th>
<th>Lss-Dense Rural</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(1) Total Revenues per Household</td>
<td>$3192</td>
<td>$1292</td>
<td>$1084</td>
<td>$1605</td>
<td>$1946</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(2) Total Revenues per Household on revenues in four major revenue accounts Four Comparable Revenue Sources</td>
<td>$1487</td>
<td>$862</td>
<td>$754</td>
<td>$1181</td>
<td>$1341</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(3) Property Taxes as Percent of Tax Base</td>
<td>0.90%</td>
<td>0.38%</td>
<td>0.41%</td>
<td>0.71%</td>
<td>0.50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(4) Property Taxes Paid per Household</td>
<td>$757</td>
<td>$494</td>
<td>$506</td>
<td>$886</td>
<td>$917</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(5) Percent of Average Household Incomes Going to Property Taxes</td>
<td>1.41%</td>
<td>0.81%</td>
<td>0.86%</td>
<td>1.65%</td>
<td>1.72%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(6) Sales Tax Revenues per Household</td>
<td>$430</td>
<td>$256</td>
<td>$146</td>
<td>$125</td>
<td>$238</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(7) State Aid for General Purposes per Household</td>
<td>$242</td>
<td>$76</td>
<td>$61</td>
<td>$70</td>
<td>$76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(8) State Aid for Roads and Transportation per Household</td>
<td>$59</td>
<td>$36</td>
<td>$41</td>
<td>$101</td>
<td>$110</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Presenting the findings in one place in Table 9.2 facilitates comparisons among the town types. Households in Central Places, not taking into account the business caveat, experienced greater fiscal stress on three of the eight indicators. They pay more per household on total revenues across all sources (row 1 in Table 9.2), total revenues on the four comparable revenue sources (row 2), and property taxes as percentages of tax base (row 3).
On two indicators, Less Dense Rural towns clearly showed greater fiscal stress, average property taxes paid per household (row 4) and percentage of average household incomes going to property taxes (row 5). More Dense Rural towns received the least in state aid for general purposes (row 7) and sales tax revenue (row 6), and More Dense Suburban towns received the least on state aid for roads and transportation (row 8). On five of the eight indicators, they showed the lowest fiscal stress.

These summary averages do not involve calculations based on the business caveat. The business caveat refers to the fact that businesses in Central Places and More Dense towns pay relatively large proportions of taxes (possibly as much as 25 percent) of all revenues from property taxes in Central Places and More Dense Suburban towns compared to those in other town types. Due to the way the Comptroller and most towns and cities report the data, we are uncertain of the exact proportions businesses pay in each town type in contrast to how much householders pay.

Our estimate of 20 – 25 percent for Central Places is probably high, due to our assumption that taxable assessments of businesses are higher than those of average households; based in part on re-constructing data provided by the State Office of Real Property Services. As such, estimates as low as 10 percent are also possible, although unlikely. If we are ever to have an accurate picture of fiscal stresses experienced by householders alone due to local taxes in the various town types and regions, these proportions should be clearly identified by future reporting and subsequent research.

In other words, businesses most likely helped relieve fiscal stresses on households more often in Central Places and more-dense towns than in less-dense town types. If we subtracted one-quarter (or even one-fifth) of the revenues from the three indicators where “households” in Central Places paid the most among the findings in Table 9.2, then only two indicators of higher fiscal stress would remain for Central Places (extent of total revenues per household, in row 1 and percentage of tax bases paid in property taxes, row 3). The other one would show greater fiscal stress among households in Less Dense Rural towns. Re-calculating this one fiscal-stress indicator would then show Less Dense Rural towns having greater fiscal stress on three indicators to two for Central Places.

Households in the two more-dense town types were clearly the least fiscally stressed in receiving the smallest amounts only on the two state aid indicators. These generalizations, however, do not take into consideration how village taxes within more-dense towns affect fiscal stress on householders living
there. Village residents in these towns probably experience more fiscal stress in a town than those living outside a village. To determine exact amounts requires more detailed analyses than those undertaken here.

Since the eight indicators show different results on fiscal-stress issues, to determine which householders and/or towns and cities had the most fiscal stress largely depends on which indicator is perceived to be most important.

**Conclusions.** What do the indicators tell us about household tax burdens and fiscal stress among the five town types? One thing they tell us is that choice of indicator makes a huge difference in determining which towns and Central Places placed higher levels of tax burden on households. On several key indicators in Table 9.2, households in Central Places clearly carried heavier burdens; on other indicators averages of households in Less Dense Rural towns carried more. And, on three indicators, households in one of the two more-dense towns carried the heaviest tax burden.

Is there any way to determine a rank ordering of importance on these indicators? We can begin to answer this question by reference to the definition of fiscal stress. Fiscal stress is a comparative concept. In general, its definition is “extent of own-source revenues compared to people’s capacity to pay.” Only one indicator actually meets this criterion, namely, “percent of average household incomes paid to property taxes” (row 5 of Table 9.2). On this indicator, households in Less Dense Rural towns showed the greatest fiscal stress in 2005, households in Less Dense Suburban towns the second greatest, those in Central Places the third most, and those in the two more-dense town types showed the least.

But, a second indicator cannot be ignored entirely as also compatible with the definition of fiscal stress, namely, percentage of overall tax base (average equalized total assessed valuations of real estate) paid by property taxes, in row 3 of Table 9.2. On this indicator, households (and businesses) in Central Places paid the highest percentage, those in less-dense towns the second highest, and those in more-dense towns the smallest. If this were the only fiscal-stress indicator, and many people believe it could be, then clearly households and businesses in Central Places had the most fiscal stress. They pay the largest percentage even when applying a high 25 percent of the business caveat.

Town really have short term control only over their property tax revenue. Sales tax revenues are determined as much by decisions made by county boards and city councils as by town boards. State aid is determined by the state Legislature. Thus, much depends on property-tax dynamics among town types in determining fiscal stress experienced in the towns. State-aid indicators are
much less direct measures of fiscal stress, even if they do reduce pressures on property taxes. Households and businesses in all town types would have to pay even greater amounts from property taxes to support governments and schools if they did not receive this aid, which makes these indicators fiscal-stress related.

Since county governments determine the distribution of sales-tax revenues (row 6), how this indicator relates to town and Central Place fiscal stress is a little problematic. This revenue source could be considered, in part, as compensation to towns for sales taxes paid by households in them, and, in part, to town and Central Places for giving infrastructural support to host county offices and business firms located there. Such sales-tax revenues certainly help to offset the higher debts that Central Places incur for their physical infrastructures. Such offsets mean that households did not have to pay for certain expenses through their property taxes. Thus, the distribution of sales taxes, or “county aid to towns and cities,” seemed to act in ways similar to state aid for their several purposes.

Still, average differences persist among town types even after sales taxes and state aid are considered. Our judgment is that public officials in counties, towns, or Central Places cannot be held entirely responsible for comparative fiscal stresses on their households. Somehow their very locations and the associated “structural” problems (or “structural binds”) town and Central Place officials face are largely responsible for their levels of fiscal stress. Since public officials in the five town types face different circumstances, they thereby make different decisions about balances in their expenditures and revenue sources.

Because of such structural differences, we rather supposed that state aid would offset, at least to some extent, fiscal stress on households in towns that suffer more. The two key state aid categories are for general purposes (largely administrative for meeting state mandates) and for transportation and roads. The dollars per household for the latter were only about one-half the amounts per household for general purposes. Results for 2005 showed that, compared to outlying town types, Central Places received roughly four times more dollars per household from state aid for general purposes, and, overall, general-purpose dollars did little to offset comparative fiscal stress on households in the two less-dense town types.

State aid for roads and transportation per household (but not total amounts) went disproportionately to less-dense town types, thereby tending to alleviate some fiscal stress on households there. Some alleviation is better than none, so that state aid for roads and transportation (and the CHIPS program) has become more important to Less Dense Rural towns in terms of fiscal-stress alleviation than state aid for general purposes.
State government is one possible resource to help alleviate fiscal stress among towns and Central Places in the 44 rural counties. State government has access to incomes in ways that towns, cities, counties, and school boards do not, for example in statewide income and business taxes, and they do act to re-distribute dollars intentionally through, for example, aid to education and aid for roads and transportation formulas. Since households in less-dense towns had more fiscal stress by at least several key indicators, it would seem that relatively small amounts of additional resources could be made available to alleviate relatively higher fiscal stress on households in, especially, less-dense towns.

**Recommendations.** Based on findings in this chapter, we have two basic recommendations. First, state officials and policymakers for their key indicators of town and Central Place fiscal stress should focus less on “property taxes as a percentage of tax base” (which seems now the case for revenue sharing for general purposes), and instead focus more on “property taxes per household income.” Property taxes as percentages of tax base are paid by both businesses and households, with greater percentages of property taxes paid by businesses in Central Places than in either of the two less-dense towns. We believe our findings show that householders are a more important focus than tax bases as such for understanding fiscal stress in rural towns and Central Places.

Our second recommendation is for state officials and policymakers to undertake regular comparative studies to determine actual levels of fiscal stress on *households* in the various rural towns and regions. This recommendation would require monitoring these household indicators over time, and then taking appropriate action.
CHAPTER 10

CONCLUSIONS: MAJOR TRENDS AND POLICY ISSUES

Paul R. Eberts

Our inquiry began with Abraham Lincoln’s admonition, “If we would first know where we are and whither we are tending, then we would better know what to do and how to do it.” The various substantive chapters dealt with trends documenting where towns in rural New York have been in the recent past. This chapter will summarize these trends, and inquire into what to do and how to do it.

“How to do things” in towns requires looking at major goals town officials wish to achieve and major means used for achieving the goals. The means are often called policy tools or policy levers. Municipally-determined budgets and land-use planning and regulation are the two major policy tools available to municipal officials. Municipal officials’ goals often deal with increasing numbers and quality of services and/or decreasing residents’ tax burdens. In short, municipal officials want to optimize services offered and their delivery.

Specific goals of these officials are probably similar to those identified in bipartisan agreements of the state Legislature on comprehensive planning. The Guide to Planning and Zoning Laws of New York State (www.dos.ny.us, May, 2007) quotes the legislation by using terms such as, “… enhancement, growth and development…, and public health, safety, and general welfare.” The state Legislature also enables municipal officials to use any or all of five major planning tools -- local planning boards, sub-division regulations, site-plan reviews, zoning, and comprehensive-plans. The Legislative Commission on Rural Resources in its New York Land Use Tools, 2008 identifies nearly 40 other less pervasive tools. Careful land-use planning, especially comprehensive planning, and budgeting decisions increase policymakers’ chances of reaching or enhancing their goals.
A dominant theme in this book is that socio-economic, demographic, employment, and family trends impact municipalities. Relatively rapid social changes starting with the “industrial revolution” facilitated by the Civil War accelerated after World War II. The 1980s ushered in the “services society.” The 1990s was among the most dramatic, featuring a full-scale computer revolution. These trends are emphasized in this document.

Some trends were quite beneficial, others quite disruptive, to the development of towns. Non-farm employment and income growth were beneficial to most individuals and towns. A second theme, usually explored in chapters’ conclusions, was that state, county, and local policymakers, through planning and budgeting, can make differences in blunting certain disruptive trends and in enhancing positive ones.

Trends often overlapped with one another. Five major themes seem to cut across chapters in providing key conceptual handles for understanding the trends’ main effects on municipalities. They also challenge town residents, leaders, and policymakers.

1. Commuting, Transportation, Population Growth, and Sprawl;
2. Employment, Income, and Poverty;
3. Diversity and Integration;
4. Dynamics in and around Central Places; and
5. Opportunities and Challenges in Performing Municipal Planning and Budgeting (the Major Policy Levers).

The remainder of this chapter summarizes the substance of trends in these major themes, and draws final conclusions about municipal and state policies as related to them.

**Commuting, Transportation, Population, and Sprawl.**

Between 1990 and 2000, increased commuting outside a county for employment, in-migration from other counties, and internal population movement among towns changed their population dynamics. Growth in total population sizes from 1990 to 2000 almost equaled growth in those commuting outside their counties of residence for employment. Overall, total populations grew by 64,229 and total numbers commuting grew by 60,709. In the Central and Western regions, over half of the 24 rural counties grew in total populations while all metropolitan counties, except Monroe County (Rochester City), lost population. In these regions, rural growth in large part accompanied metropolitan decreases in population. In the Eastern region, total populations grew in all metropolitan and two-thirds of the rural counties.
Over 85 percent of the 760 rural towns experienced at least some increased commuting. In high-commuting suburban counties adjacent to metropolitan counties commuting rates averaged 45 percent of their workforces. Only 103 towns (13.5 percent), some from each town type and region, showed no increases in numbers of people commuting outside a county for their jobs. On average in 2000, about 35 percent of those employed engaged in such commuting, up from about 30 percent in 1990. One town (Summerhill in Cayuga County) showed 85 percent commuting, and only one town (Clare, in St. Lawrence County) – both small in size and less-dense -- had no regular commuters among its employed population. More-dense outlying town types showed larger numbers of commuters, while less-dense outlying towns showed smaller numbers of commuters but higher percentages. More-dense towns also had more and better transportation to other towns and, often, other counties.

Between 1990 and 2000, some towns experienced more growth in commuting than others, just as some towns – not the same ones – experienced more population growth than others. Since population growth did not always match comparable increases in numbers of such commuters, not all population growth was due to new commuters migrating into these towns from other counties. Except in More Dense Rural towns which had better transportation linkages to other places, average commuting numbers increased in most town types at less than half of their population growth. In More Dense Rural towns, numbers of new commuters between 1990 and 2000 exceeded population growth. These towns probably grew due to growth in numbers commuting among residents since 1990 sometime during this decade.

During the 1990s, migrations of people from Central Places in rural counties to outlying towns, especially to More Dense Suburban towns, influenced much population growth there. From whatever sources, outlying towns in the 44 rural counties grew while Central Places, on average, declined. Only 11 of the 54 Central Places (20 percent) gained population, and five of these were by less than 1.7 percent. Still, two Central Places saw population gains over 10 percent (Carmel in the Eastern region’s Putnam County, and Malone in the Northern region’s Franklin County).

An impact of these trends is that population growth and commuter growth in outlying towns during the 1990s produced additional sprawl, which was enhanced by improved roadways. Municipalities, especially less-dense towns, spend much of their total budgets on maintaining and improving roadways. Town roadways link people, places, and products, including both public and private services. Towns with greater housing density, greater numbers of newer houses, higher median house values, and higher levels on planning scores usually have higher roadway-accessibility scores.
Overall relative success in transportation development in towns and counties facilitated sprawl into outlying towns. Lower housing values in rural and less-dense towns during the 1990s also addressed people’s desires to own their homes on larger lot sizes found in outlying rural and less-dense towns. Sprawl, then, continued during the 1990s with the trade-offs between perceived family well-being and energy inefficiencies during the 1990s tipped in the balance toward perceived family well-being and sprawl.

Although commuting increased town income levels, sprawl represents major challenges to town residents, leaders, and officials to alleviate its negative aspects. More energy-efficient alternatives could be available through “smart-growth” planning to encourage more-dense housing built in or close to existing Central Places or more-dense towns. A relevant finding was the increasing densities between 1990 and 2000 of newer housing units in more-dense suburban and rural towns. More-dense suburban and rural towns already have comparatively lower fiscal stresses on householders due to relatively lower infrastructure costs in their town budgets.

By using various planning tools, including comprehensive and incentive zoning, more-dense towns could cooperate with Central Places and others in stimulating creative “smart-growth.” Such smart-growth planning could also stimulate walking and/or bicycling from more-dense housing for basic amenities such as groceries, elementary-school education, recreation centers, health care, pharmacies, and so forth. More-dense housing also increases efficient water usage and reduces environmental degradation through building appropriate water and sewer infrastructures. Although building such facilities is expensive, larger population densities make such outcomes feasible.

At present, such smart growth is difficult to achieve. Towns do not find cooperating with one another easy to do, leaving them largely ill-equipped (and rather unmotivated) to engage in comprehensive, regional, and sub-regional planning. In such a volatile situation, businesses, too, are less likely to invest in these towns. Studies show that businesses now tend to see smart-growth principles as being good business, and lack of clear-cut local plans and regulations as potential disasters for investors. Since towns, villages, and cities are the only local governments with serious planning powers, their lack of cooperation in intergovernmental and interagency planning on regional and sub-regional levels impedes greater control over the levers that can mitigate sprawl and enhance life-quality.

Finding a “Sense of Community.” Increasing population sizes in outlying towns can have an additional effect, often not noticed by analysts, namely, “loss
of a sense of community.” Such loss refers to people being comparatively isolated from one another and not feeling “part of things.” These losses tend to occur in growing communities, where population turnover is high, and lot sizes for new houses are increasingly larger. Both trends result in greater spatial and psychological “distances” among neighbors.

Public officials might want to consider building facilities that can encourage a sense of community among the various population segments. These could include community and recreation centers for families, teens, and/or seniors, and higher-density “mixed housing” for seniors, the elderly, and younger people, especially where walking paths intersect with one another and the same center provides support for several population segments. Studies show that such facilities tend to enhance a “sense of community.”

**Employment, Income, and Poverty.**

An unsurprising but important finding among the trends is that employment growth is the key factor affecting income growth. Studies also show that both factors are important in overall personal well-being.

Most analysts recognize the causal connections among education, employment, and income. Changes in one of these factors affect changes in the other two. But, the relationships are not nearly as strong as observers might be led to believe from previous studies. These findings are important because increased median family incomes relates to decreasing poverty, especially child poverty. But, the strongest factor in reducing child poverty was lowered high-school dropout levels, not other aspects of education, such as attending college.

Three trends were especially notable (see Chapter 6).

1) Education gaps widened among regions during the 1990s, but income gaps decreased;
2) Average poverty rates were largely unchanged during the 1990s; and
3) “Losses” of young adults during the 1990s affected all counties and regions.

**Among Regions, Education Gaps Increased, Income Gaps Decreased.**

Although all rural towns and regions experienced increased educational attainment by their residents, among *town* types educational gaps narrowed slightly while among *regions* gaps widened. Percentages of people with some college increased faster in the 1990s in the better-off Eastern region than in the others, especially in the less well-off Northern region (which has fewer colleges spread out over wider geographic distances compared to other regions). Thus,

Yet, another notable trend was that income gaps among regions, surprisingly, narrowed somewhat between 1990 and 2000. In inflation-adjusted dollars, both average per capita and median family incomes in the less-well-off Northern region grew faster than the same income indicators in the other three regions, and especially in the Eastern region. Even so, by 2000 average incomes in the Northern region remained below those seen elsewhere.

Part of the reason for strong income growth in the Northern region was probably related to disproportionate numbers of public-administration employees there, probably due to the region’s disproportionately larger numbers of prison employees. These employees saw greater income increases during the 1990s than those employed in other industries. In the Eastern region, numbers of health-service employees were disproportionately high, but these employees had lower incomes. Still, greater per capita incomes in the four regions did not filter strongly into median family incomes as a whole, or contribute strongly to reduced poverty rates.

*Poverty Rates Remained Largely Unchanged.* Another notable trend showed that, in spite of average increases in educational attainment and incomes in towns and regions, average poverty rates for families and children in nearly all town types, along with crowded housing in Central Places, did not decline during the 1990s. Instead, average poverty rates either stabilized or increased. No town experienced declining poverty rates in both family and child poverty.

In 2000, an average of one in fifteen married couples with children lived in poverty, one in twelve families, one in five young children, and one in three single mothers with young children lived in poverty. Nearly five times more single mothers of young children lived in poverty in 2000 compared to married-couple families with young children. Average numbers of single mothers in poverty grew by 13.0 percent between 1990 and 2000 with some growth in all town types and regions. Number of single mothers also increased, while numbers of married couples with children who lived in poverty fell.

Overall, family poverty was reasonably stable, increasing in Central Places and More Dense Suburban towns, showing stability in More Dense Rural towns, and decreasing in each of the two less-dense towns. In contrast, a majority of all rural town types showed increases in child poverty rates, and, as noted above, no town showed decreases in both family poverty and child poverty.
Rates of increase in families and children living in poverty were higher in the better-off Eastern region than in the others, so that regional gaps in poverty levels narrowed over all towns during the 1990s. Such trends represent large problems for low-income families and children and, thus, the communities and towns in which they lived. Children growing up in poverty have comparatively greater risks for not making necessary life adjustments to escape poverty once they become adults.

Growth in per capita and median family incomes helped reduce poverty levels, but their influences, both separately and together, were quite modest. Since towns in which school dropout rates were lower also had fewer single-mothers in poverty, a good way to address the single-mother-poverty issue might be for state and town officials to assist school systems in addressing issues of school dropouts, especially among teenage women.

The main reason these findings are important is that many state and local policymakers, as well as community leaders and the media, seem to rely heavily on employment growth as key to increasing incomes, which in turn are expected to reduce poverty as well as increase well-being of people. These things do happen, but, the causations are not automatic, do not happen in all towns, and are more complex and less effective, especially in outlying towns, than is generally assumed by many observers and policymakers.

During the 1990s, most development occurred around, not in, rural Central Places. Outlying towns in the vast majority of rural counties typically lacked public transportation so that families relied on their own means to access jobs and needed services. Having one or more automobiles available to a family, then, is essential and generally a financial strain, especially on families in poverty or near poverty, such as female single-parent families. Some families often have difficulty supplying even basic housing and food needs, let alone keeping a reliable vehicle running. These strains are a main reason why such families tend to move to more-dense locations.

“Loss” of Young Adults as “Brain Drain”? Another factor facing towns, related to employment as well as to educational achievement, was “loss” of young adults. The 20-29 age group in the 760 rural towns in 2000 averaged 24.5 percent below the 1990 level. Further analyses showed that the “losses” were probably due to a complex set of issues and not to lack of jobs alone (the most common explanation).

Four major factors might complicate any direct comparison of these age categories in 1990 and 2000 – the college attendance factor; the ten years earlier
factor; the 25 years later (parents) factor; and the lack of employment opportunities factor. Most analysts have focused on the last factor as central.

First is the college attendance factor. Analyses in Chapter 6 showed that more young adults in their early twenties were in college in 2000 compared to 1990. Percentages of adults over age 25 who attended college increased overall from a 30.3 percent in 1990 to 45.5 in 2000, for a growth rate of 50 percent. That is, for every 2 adults over 21 who attended college in 1990, three attended college in 2000. What percent attended college outside the 44 counties is not known, but could account for a large part of the differences in the sizes of the 1990 and 2000 age 20-24 cohorts.

Second is the ten years earlier factor. Comparison of teenagers to young adults – numbers in an earlier age category in 1990 to numbers 10 years later (2000) showed that, in the 760 rural towns as a whole, the age 10-14 cohort in 1990 was only slightly larger (by 4.1 percent) than the age 20-24 cohort in 2000. The “missing” 4.1 percent of young adults in the age 20-24 cohort in 2000 could easily be explained by some being away at college outside the 44 rural counties. Also, “brain drain” might really be in the age 10-14 cohort, and not the age 20-24 group.

The age 25-29 cohort, where nearly everyone has completed college, was 28.4 percent smaller in these rural towns in 2000 than the age 15-19 cohort in 1990. This significant drop could reflect the geographic mobility of young college-educated adults, who have not yet married or, if married, had no or only small children. Many such young people migrate to places where job opportunities are greater. Since they did not return to these New York rural towns for their employment, this age 25-29 cohort in 2000 could be considered at least a temporary loss, or brain drain, to the rural towns. Often the “best” high school graduates in the rural areas are the ones who leave for college or other job opportunities and do not return by age 30.

Further, the age 30-34 cohort contained 16.6 percent fewer people in 2000 compared to those in their early twenties (age 20-24) in 1990. These too could be considered part of a brain drain. Young unmarried adults have always swollen the ranks of metropolitan core cities, either in New York or other states.

A third factor in the smaller numbers in the age 20-29 cohort between 1990 and 2000 is whether their parents, those in the age 45-54 category, still lived in these rural towns. Such family ties could entice the younger cohort to return at a later date, possibly when their children are reaching their teen years.
In examining the population pyramid for all 760 rural towns (in Chapter 4), it turns out that residents 25 years older in 2000 were more numerous by an average of 16 percent than in the age 20-29 cohort. Such a finding strongly indicates that those in the age 20-29 cohort who were in these rural towns in 2000 were there in part because they had family and/or relatives living there. In contrast, the parents of the age 30-34 cohort, those aged 55 to 59, was smaller by 23.2 percent. But, attrition from this cohort due to early retirement, death, or other mobility factors may have occurred.

In light of the above findings, a “brain drain” independent of these factors due to lack of job opportunities in these rural towns (the usual interpretation and fourth factor) is hard to accept as the only explanation, especially when, overall, percentages of adults with jobs were growing during the 1990s. Further, all cohorts after age 35 are larger in 2000 than in 1990, which indicates both increased in-migration, some due to commuting, as well as attachment to their places of residence as children or young adults. In other words, younger adults “lost” were “replaced and more” by older adults (often with children). Some of these older adults probably returned after migrating as young adults to metropolitan areas. “Brain drain” among young adults was replaced by “brain gain” among older adults resulting in overall population increases.

**Policies to Stimulate Employment.** Policies to induce employment growth are strongly affected by the re-structuring of work during the 1990s and early 2000s. The issue is relevant because employment growth consistently stimulates income growth, which in turn can reduce poverty levels at least a little and make communities more attractive. Yet, connections among these factors in the 760 rural towns are not as strong as studies based entirely on counties might suggest (as in Eberts and Merschrod, 2004).

Although manufacturing and retail sales were first and third in workforce sizes in 2000, both were re-structured during the 1990s, accounting for the vast majority of job losses in rural towns. Only health-care and about half of the 15 “other” small-sector services (each totaling less than 5 percent of the workforce) consistently experienced employment increases. Healthcare jobs are severely divided into income categories, some quite high paying, others very low paying, with fewer in the middle than in other industries. Small service sector job categories did not cover significant numbers or percentages of workers, except when summed. When summed, these 15 smaller industries represented 35.3 percent of the workforce in 2000, up from 30 percent in 1990. During the 1990s these smaller sectors, including high-tech as well as food and accommodations industries, were faster growing than all the larger sectors except for healthcare.
Effective policies for increasing employment are usually not singular, but depend on several disparate and fast-shifting industrial sectors. Differences in technology usage, for instance, increasingly require multi-pronged policies in most communities. Most better-paying jobs require more education and computer literacy. Certain computer-related jobs were not location-specific, except for Internet connections, which many outlying towns lacked. Not having Internet connections could jeopardize attracting people to higher-tech industries with their higher incomes. A crucial state and local policy, then, is to make Internet access broadly available.

To respond to opportunities in lower-tech industries, a favorite policy is to generate well-organized yet selective advertising campaigns. These often-imaginative efforts are frequently funded through some form of subsidization for the arts. Municipal sponsorship of art fairs is one form, another is providing enclosed spaces for artists to showcase their skills and products. County, town, and city policymakers might be well-served by giving such models serious attention for “growing” their “other” services.

Since higher high-school completion levels tends to reduce poverty, a local policy strategy could be for local leaders to cooperate with school officials and other municipal officials in facilitating more educational attainment for young people, especially at high school and probably also at community-college levels. Studies have shown that town leaders’ responses in cooperating with schools can be beneficial in increasing educational attainment levels among young people.

Cooperation could include providing better bus service throughout a county, for instance, from high schools after school, to various other district locations to apprentice with crafts-persons, or to community colleges for courses. The majority of rural counties are unlikely to have such bus services at present. Bus services are expensive and usually require state and federal aid to operate. Even in counties with bus services, most buses probably travel to and from villages to Central Places and then to community colleges rather than from counties’ outlying villages directly to the colleges. Better bus services into outlying towns could also benefit seniors and the elderly who are increasing their numbers there. State policymakers could certainly assist in these efforts.

Such cooperation among various officials and planners could also respond to services-access needs of increasingly different kinds of families, people, and occupations. Greater coordination in reviewing and planning transportation routes and needed facilities could generate more energy efficiencies in accessing childcare, medical facilities, after-school activities, and even grocery stores and housing.
Town policymakers could assist school administrators and teachers by providing facilities and agencies that help teenagers become better integrated into their communities. Schools exert powerful influences on teens’ behaviors, but teens also seek activity in their communities and are influenced by the receptivity of adult responses to them. Drug, alcohol, and tobacco use, teen sexuality, and pregnancies are issues teens and young people face almost daily in and out of school.

Handling and resolving such issues can be expensive, especially for towns with budgetary troubles. But, these issues affect both schools and communities. In reality, school boards have much larger budgets than town officials, so that community leaders, even those with other concerns, could address the various challenges teens encounter and together help to resolve them.

Another small improvement in analyses and state policies could be to change analysts’ orientations away from per capita income growth as a goal (which is how federal and state governments currently approach the issues) and replace it with increased median family (or median household) income growth as a goal. The shift in goals may also produce additional ideas about strategies for decreasing teen stresses and poverty rates among families and children.

**Diversity and Integration.**

Diversification in all major institutions within and among rural town types is probably a main contemporary trend, starting before World War II and continuing since then. This diversity brought unprecedented increases in wealth, well-being, and opportunities to people and municipalities, yet also produced “centrifugal-type” forces that threaten overall general welfare. Jobs are highly diverse, with no one industry dominating any other in contemporary rural society. Services by governments are also increasingly diverse. People living longer puts pressure on elder-care and other parts of the healthcare system. Poverty, especially among children, with its various negative consequences, is also increasing slowly and requires effective responses by local officials.

Diversity is a theme that appears in one form or another in every chapter of this study. The integration of services thus gains in importance, as a means to address diverse needs. Social scientists tell us that diversification tends to act like a centrifugal force on society, making things fly apart, while integration tends to be a centripetal force, holding things together. Both happen even in small jurisdictions like rural towns and small cities. Many municipal settings contribute to diversification. Some municipalities show higher levels in integrating the diversity among sectors while others show lower levels, the latter often with less satisfying outcomes for their residents.


**Diversification in All Institutions and Towns.** Diversification was both between towns and internal to them. Although Central Places in rural counties had the highest densities, and greatest diversity, between 1990 and 2000 Central places lost people and households, while outlying towns nearly all gained. Population density (numbers of people per square mile) increased in outlying towns, while stagnating or declining in Central Places (where it is still the highest). In housing and transportation, divisions among renters and homeowners widened among the town types, and some towns had much higher roadway-accessibility scores than others. Such trends increased diversity within and among towns.

About twice as many elderly people (age 85 and over) in 2000 lived in outlying towns than in Central Places, and increased an average of 30 percent during the 1990s. Although percentages of those over age 65 were substantial (about 15 percent of the entire population), percentages of elderly over age 85 were quite small (1.6 percent) but growing more rapidly. Two-thirds of the elderly (age 85 and over) lived in outlying towns, and over two-thirds of them were women. African-American elderly lived disproportionately in Central Places. All these groupings increased in numbers.

Most rural town types between 1990 and 2000 had fewer young people and experienced greater income and ethnic diversity. In all town types and regions, averages for the two major minority populations, African-Americans and Hispanics, grew in numbers and percentages and were the only groupings to increase in Central Places. In small numbers and overall percentages, minorities increased at higher rates than Whites. The White population declined in Central Places. Outlying towns also generated more commuters in the 1990s.

Town workforces grew and have certainly become more diverse and complex. People employed in the various industries tended to become more equal in their numbers. Unlike even 50 years ago in the economic history of New York’s rural counties, in 2000 a few job categories did not dominate the others. Instead, the overall structure of employment in different parts of local economies tended toward a complex system of interrelated job categories that are, somewhat paradoxically, decentralized yet linked with national trends. Nationally-linked local economic structures are not immutable. But, usually only concerted efforts at national, state, and local policy levels, which happen infrequently, can affect employment structures by much at all.

Educational attainment showed substantial increases during the 1990s in numbers and percentages. By 2000, those who had “some college” education averaged 45 percent of all adults, to become the dominant educational minority. Those with four-years of college or more increased only modestly. Numbers of
high school dropouts declined substantially while those with only a high school diploma very slowly increased in their average percentages. These trends also increased educational diversity in town populations.

Trends in income levels showed increasing gaps among and within rural towns. Per capita incomes grew in the 1990s, but median family incomes stagnated. Overall, poverty rates for adults declined, but poverty rates among children slowly increased, accelerating in the latter part of the current decade. Differences in incomes among town residents increased. Incomes in Central Places stagnated or declined, while in outlying towns they increased. Income growth in the Eastern and Northern regions outpaced the Central and Western regions. Such differences appear to have continued into the 2000s.

Diversification was also found among families. Numbers of families with children under 18 declined in all town types and regions. Central Places showed larger decreases than the others. Only More Dense Suburban towns increased in family numbers. Family compositions changed and continue to change. In all town types between 1990 and 2000, “traditional” families consisting of a couple and their children still at home decreased in numbers, to be replaced by increasing numbers of different types of families. Non-traditional family types (of single parents, co-habiting but unmarried parents, gay- and lesbian-headed families, aging families, those with older children not at home, and married couples who chose to have no children) were found in increasing numbers and percentages in outlying town types as well as in Central Places.

In 2000, about 30 percent of all families with young children age 17 or under lived with a single parent (twice as many with single females as single males). About a third of single-mother families with young children lived in poverty, with their numbers growing between 1990 and 2000. Such trends again represent increased diversity during the 1990s.

Even in municipal budgeting, increased differences were found among town types. Central Places and less-dense towns became more fiscally stressed between 2000 and 2005, while the two more-dense outlying rural town types became comparatively less fiscally stressed. Again, these trends document increased diversification among budgeting outcomes in the five rural town types.

Integration through “Voluntary” Associations and Political Institutions. Integration, bringing diverse people together, is the major centripetal force that has to occur in society, or the diversification (and inequalities that diversity usually brings with it) could eventually pull municipalities apart and seriously threaten their life quality. The power of democratic systems, committed to liberty, equality, caring, and justice (the primary values written into the U.S.
Constitution), is that they bring people together to forge their own futures. If things go seriously wrong, democratic institutions, when “working well” also at the local level, usually take corrective actions to make things better. People working together, being integrated democratically throughout the various levels of society – federal, state, and local – in resolving their most pressing community problems is a major task of democratic jurisdictions.

In general, people work together under two major auspices, through private “voluntary-associations” and the networks they make in communities, and through political institutions, with the formal and informal networks they generate. These two sets of networks may or may not overlap.

**Integration through Political Institutions.** Actual numbers of people holding elective offices in municipalities are usually small – supervisors, mayors, four or six people on town boards and usually slightly larger numbers on city councils. These officials in general are aware of their mandate to “represent all the people” as part of their responsibilities. In working on major issues, in general they also recognize local diversification as they resolve competing interests into policy responses. Meetings and deliberations of elected public officials are mostly open to the public, their actions are part of the public record (many on the Internet), and their decisions are usually outcomes of at least informal “debate” among officials and the public. Their actions can be interpreted as generating both general strategies and specific programs toward achieving the goals of optimizing “public health, safety, and general welfare” with available resources.

Staffs of municipalities also play important integrative roles. They implement ordinances passed by legislators (as well as certain state mandates, such as fire safety in apartment and public buildings). Town justices and city courts adjudicate on local laws. Appointed planning boards – over 90 percent of more-dense and 68 percent of less-dense town types have them – also provide means toward achieving community goals.

Residents influence municipal political institutions through various channels, including speaking up at meetings, letters to newspapers, telephone calls, and, most importantly, voting. Such channels keep public officials directly or indirectly accountable to people from various social segments. In these senses, people can be integrated to work together on salient problems that towns face.

Elections are the major channel for people’s participation in politics. Although voting rates for municipal elections stand far below those for state and federal elections, averaging in the 20 percent range depending on issue salience in particular years, voting in elections is only the tip of an iceberg of,
increasingly, local multi-party politics. Even if studies show that only about 4 percent of people in the U.S. Northeast claim to be members of formal political-party organizations, clubs, or campaign committees, much participation in political parties or other “interest groups” underlies the voting. At election time, the largest political parties, one of which wins in nearly every election, usually contact people from all municipal geographic districts and social segments.

The organization of local political parties, even at municipal levels, can and sometimes does approximate the pluralism found in municipalities. Political party members are usually linked with a variety of organizations in a municipality. Although any organization can become, in effect, an informal lobby group, members of political parties usually have a major goal of electing their candidates to office. In doing this they also debate current municipal issues, usually informally, hear diverse opinions in these debates, learn to respect differences among their colleagues, and learn to work together in reaching out to others as they seek to elect their candidates. In these ways, political parties usually represent supra-networks of organizations in their localities. Where communities are more vibrant, the parties are more vibrant (and vice versa), making local politics more vibrant.

Although official municipal agencies have become more complex and diverse, studies show that it is possible to keep diverse people and institutions working together for community life-quality. Democratic governmental systems provide opportunities for people from different social segments to participate. Often, planning, budgeting, and legislating by municipal officials is reliant on advisory committees for studying issues in detail. Despite the wrangling in politics, people in general recognize that dissent happens in democratic political institutions, and can ultimately enhance their health, safety, general welfare, life-quality, and well-being in the face of great complexity and diversity.

**Integration through Voluntary Associations.** Non-party voluntary associations are another major way that people are brought together beyond ethnic, social class, or education boundaries in municipalities. They are found in nearly all communities, with some communities having larger numbers than others. These associations are called “voluntary” because people can join them or not, and they seldom produce a direct monetary gain for their members (except for their paid staff). People join them for what the association can do for or with them in non-monetary ways.

These associations usually have two fundamental concerns – ways for people to get together for “having fun” and for people to “get things done.” Voluntary associations vary in their relative emphasis on these two basic factors. For some groups, such as recreational or hobby groups, to have fun is primary,
while for others such as service or political groups, to get things done is primary. Some groups seek both results.

Such associations are important because, as Alexis de Tocqueville maintained in his *Democracy in America* (originally published in 1835) and social scientists since then have demonstrated, by being members of associations people can relate to each other comfortably, obtain a “sense of community” by being part of them, and “get things done” in communities through them. In voluntary associations, people learn from each other about how to work together in dealing with a wide variety of issues, and in formulating strategies for addressing them. People who participate in such associations also generally learn to trust one another and find personal satisfaction through them. Even if the exact causal connections are unclear, communities that have more such associations and more participation in them generally have better collective life-quality on objective indicators (such as those used in this document).

Voluntary associations are so important in communities that some social scientists have dubbed their presence by the slightly exaggerated term, “social capital.” Presence of and widespread participation in voluntary associations indicates that communities have greater “social capital.” Communities with fewer numbers of organizations and less widespread participation are said to have less social capital than communities with more-extensive amounts.

Social capital usually influences community economic, environmental, and political capital (and vice versa). Studies show statistical relationships between governmental outcomes and social associations (social capital). In localities with greater participation in different types of associations, people are more likely to attend and participate in government legislative meetings, their elected officials entertain more alternatives in their deliberations (thus contributing to political capital), and outcomes of these deliberations are more likely to make their communities “better off.” In such communities, collective life-quality on objective indicators tends to be higher.

To our knowledge no data specifically for the 760 rural towns in this study are available regarding memberships in a broad array of such associations. A study using General Social Survey data in 2004 though, gave us some reasonable estimates. This survey showed that average membership in churches was the most prevalent. Yet, more people were members in other associations when taken together, especially in more-dense suburban locations. Many people are members of more than one association. People from more-dense suburban locations demonstrated higher averages on joining voluntary associations (except for unions). People from rural locations were slightly less likely to join them
(except for churches). People in core metropolitan cities had the lowest averages in membership in such organizations, but were more likely to be union members.

An average of 27 percent of people who lived in the U.S. Northeast claimed church membership, with higher percentages in less-dense (and smaller) places. About 17 percent claimed membership in professional associations, school-related associations, and/or in sports associations. Another 11 percent claimed membership in hobby organizations, literary clubs, youth organizations, and/or service organizations. Union membership averaged 13.5 percent. Membership in formal political associations averaged only 4 percent.

About 45 percent of respondents had memberships in two or more different types of associations (again with metropolitan-core cities showing lower percentages). This percentage is especially important because such people represent “linkages” among organizations in communities, making “organization networks” (and social capital) in such communities more extensive. An overall average of 37 percent belonged to no organization, and they were relatively evenly distributed among the various town types. Central Places tended to have more non-joiners. Since people with more education tend to be “joiners,” localities with lower educational levels tended to lag in their participation levels. But, the relationship is not one to one; some localities with lower educational levels also had quite high participation levels. Inconsistencies between educational levels and participation levels provide evidence that social capital has “independent” effects on communities.

Social organizations and associations, and participation in them, then, clearly represent another major way to bring people together and integrate them in their communities in ways they find satisfying in contributing to their personal well-being and municipal life-quality.

Challenges of Diversity on Integration. Increased diversity in the pluralism of “voices” in communities represents a challenge to local legislative, administrative, and judicial officials. Diversity is widespread in all municipalities, and does not refer only to ethnic diversity (which is also growing). No one group among the diverse social segments is large enough to dominate any more (if it ever did).

Such huge and growing diversity often makes some population segments feel “unrepresented,” especially in outlying town governments where most often only four legislators are elected in “at-large” elections. At-large elections usually generate town councils where most legislators probably come from the same political party or outlook. Since town boards appoint zoning and planning board
members, these boards also tend to have similar political viewpoints. In such towns some people can easily feel unrepresented on official municipal bodies.

Further, in most cases, “ordinary voters” seldom meet candidates face to face in municipal elections. The “political party faithful,” who dominate county and town party committees, usually come from various election districts rather than being elected at-large. In passing petitions for candidates and in soliciting votes in their districts, they are also likely to be better known to voters than the candidates themselves. Trust in party members who nominate candidates, then, becomes a primary way for voters to “relate” to municipal governments.

Similarly, plans from town planning boards sometimes irk certain constituents even as they pacify others. Zoning and comprehensive plans are usually the most controversial. There is an increased demand for detached single-family dwelling units with enough acreage to have privacy from neighbors and to preserve homes’ monetary worth. Relative “newcomers” to outlying towns, especially, tend to support zoning to protect their investments while many “old-timers” want the liberty to deal with their properties as they see fit. Ultimately, elected officials mediate such conflicts. This kind of situation again stems from increasing diversity, and becomes another challenge to elected rural town officials.

“Representation” issues are the kinds that future town boards will be examining when and if they become the major glue holding systems with so much diversity together. By 2008 the vast majority (85.9 percent) of outlying towns, and 73.1 percent of even Less Dense Rural towns, had planning boards, demonstrating some recognition of such issues. Much remains to be done by town officials, especially in less-dense towns, in setting goals, providing general strategies, and generating specific programs to deal with increasing pluralism through their comprehensive plans, within available resources.

**Dynamics in and around Central Places.**

Central Places differ in many respects from outlying towns in rural counties. They are the densest in population of all county municipalities, averaging a little over twice the size and (except in the Northern region) over four times the density of More Dense Suburban towns, the most dense of outlying towns. Over half of the Central Places in the 44 rural counties in this study have the status of small cities, which, compared to outlying towns, gives them a slightly different relationship to state and federal governments in aid formulas.

A second obvious difference between Central Places and outlying towns is in numbers and types of services. Central Places are centers of county and
municipal governments with the myriad activities associated with them. Services offered include social and welfare agencies, health care and hospitals, parks and recreation, public safety (fire and police protection), court systems and attorneys, facilities for seniors and the elderly, education (including Cooperative Extension), planning and budgeting, and so forth. Offices are usually established for each of these services, often in separate buildings.

Central Places have a large range of private and commercial services. These include government-generated services, such as by lawyers who routinely use the court system, real-estate agents and financial enterprises (banks, investment firms, and so forth) that routinely use tax records provided by governments, food, lodging, and other commercial services. Central Places also have more rental properties and more single adults than outlying towns.

Central Places are the “cores” from which most planning activities in a county take place. The two largest planning staffs are usually those for counties and for the larger Central Places. About half of all Central Places are surrounded by a More Dense Suburban town, offices for planning staffs of these towns where they exist (usually the third largest planning staff in a county) are also found in Central Places. Planning activities include appointed planning boards for each county and municipality. Each of these governments almost always includes some form of comprehensive planning, with their complex relationships to the dynamics of social trends such as those examined in this study.

Even while similar to one another in many general respects, each Central Place also has its own particular character. This character usually depends on their largest public or private employment bases that produce products for export. They can be private enterprises or state or federal government services. For example, the City of Ithaca has higher education as its largest employer and fundamental economic base, but a number of “spin-off firms” have derived from this base. The cities of Oneonta and Plattsburgh have similar economic bases due to state colleges located there, but without the same ratios of spin-off firms. The economic base of Malone is the prison industry, with five state prisons there. Elmira and Auburn have economic bases similar to Malone with one large and at least one smaller prison in or nearby. Prisons provide very few spin-off establishments, even if both Elmira and Auburn also have other viable manufacturing or service activities either in them or nearby. Corning has few government activities, but large glass manufacturing and research facilities.

In any case, where Central Places have vibrant economic activities in them, surrounding towns usually are vibrant as well. For instance, More Dense Suburban towns in the 12 counties adjacent to upstate metropolitan counties have experienced greater socio-economic benefits than the others.
Three major social trends have affected Central Places to a much larger extent than outlying towns, which make Central Places in rural counties parallel metropolitan counties in their dynamics. The first is loss of people, which occurred over the last several decades for nearly 80 percent of Central Places, but for only 30 percent of More Dense Suburban towns adjacent to Central Places.

A second major trend affecting Central Places is “income flight.” This trend has several sources, including population losses. A third trend is relatively severe municipal fiscal stress, again due in part to population losses, income flight, and resultant reductions in inflation-adjusted tax bases. These dynamics are so important to municipalities affected by them that they deserve further examination here. Our concerns will focus on trends from 1990 to 2000, but they were also happening before the most recent decade.

Between 1990 and 2000 Central Places in all four regions lost an average of 4.4 percent of their populations, while More Dense Suburban towns gained an average of 4.7 percent, and other outlying towns gained 5.0 percent. Losses in Central Places were found in all three major age groupings, with the largest losses (averaging 5.5 percent between 1990 and 2000) among those over age 65 and under age 18. Losses in these population groups during the 1990s were about three times larger than losses in the age 18-64 cohort. We estimate that most population losses among seniors and elderly were due to moving to outlying towns (but probably many to other states as well). The only gains among young people were in More Dense Suburban towns, which gained 2.0 percent between 1990 and 2000. The other three outlying town types lost an average of 1.6 percent of their populations under age 18.

Although during the 1990s numbers of school-age children declined overall in Central Places, numbers of school-age ethnic-minority young people increased there. Findings also show that suburban school-age young people had increasing numbers and more ethnic diversity.

As a result of such changes, Central Place and town officials often find themselves at odds with school boards and counties over local property-tax revenues. Annually, households in municipalities face three major local property taxes -- the largest generally from school systems, the second largest from counties, and the smallest from cities, towns, and villages. Each also makes budget decisions without coordinating with the others, and taxpayers take the brunt of the outcomes as they continually see their property taxes increase.

More coordination seems appropriate in making these entities work efficiently and effectively in addressing many contemporary local trends. State
help may be essential in making such coordination happen. At present, very little cooperation on revenues among these legislative bodies occurs in rural counties. Yet, all local governments face many common issues, such as maintaining physical infrastructures and facilities, dealing with potential school dropouts, drug-abuse, and risky sexual activities, and effectively meeting various constituents’ training, re-training, and other life-quality educational needs.

“Income Flight” from Central Places – A Vicious Cycle. Growth of minorities in Central Places and losses of Whites there during the 1990s raised the large set of issues associated with so-called “White flight” from Central Places to outlying towns in even these rural counties. Such situations parallel similar trends in core cities and outer suburbs of metropolitan counties.

Commercial development in Central Places was also dicey. Big-box stores tended to locate in suburban malls, often forcing smaller establishments in “downtowns” out of business. In order to compete, at least minimally, many Central Places built expensive parking garages, adding to their tax burdens. Commercial development, then, was also unreliable as a way to decrease fiscal stresses on Central Places.

Such “vicious cycles” for most Central Places resulted in declining populations and greater fiscal stresses for them (see Chapter 9). But, closer analyses revealed that the issues were related more to “income flight” than to “White flight.” Some analysts mistakenly emphasize the ethnic factor, when, at least in these rural counties, the income factor is more accurate.

Fiscal Stresses of Central Places, Less-Dense towns, and State Aid. In outlying towns, with their population growth, more workers commuting to work, and higher percentages of adults being employed, governments were constrained to spend larger proportions of their budgets on roads and bridges compared to those governments experiencing less growth. Many less-dense municipalities experienced these trends. Still, more-dense towns were constrained during the 1990s to provide water and sewer and other types of facilities for their residents. These outcomes cost cities and towns additional dollars, but fiscal problems in less-dense towns were actually more severe.

In general, less-dense outlying towns had fewer overall resources to deal with issues related to their population-growth compared to more-dense towns adjacent to Central Places, and even Central Places. Consequently, their expenditures per household were higher than those of more-dense outlying towns. To generate greater resources and capacities, for example through sharing services or consolidation with adjacent towns, would require resolutions of various political issues, including political representation, loss of control over
local assessments, re-assigning top agency administrators, responsiveness of administrative staff in delivering services, and tax differentials that favored more-dense towns, making them less likely to support mergers should they be considered.

Despite these political issues, less-dense towns should probably seriously consider consolidating with other outlying towns, whether larger or smaller. A major gain could be more staff capacity for planning and enforcing essential land-use regulations such as site-plan and sub-division review. Without engineering and enforcement capacities to review water, sewer, and roads in developments, less-dense towns could ultimately be stuck with these costs. Most less-dense towns at present lack these capacities, even as trends show that such issues are increasingly important in these towns.

Analyses of fiscal stresses earlier showed that, indeed, Central Places and towns in the two less-dense town types had greater fiscal stresses in all time periods than those in the two more-dense town types. These stresses were largely due to towns’ comparative locations and resulting necessary expenditures that, in effect, forced public officials to make certain decisions, for example on roadway infrastructure maintenance. Central Places also had water and sewer infrastructures, more facilities for handling traffic, and police and fire protection staffs and facilities to maintain.

Such differences represent structural differences rather than differences in individual motivations of public officials. Overall, whether they are public officials in Central Places or in Less Dense Rural towns, they were caught in their own specific “structural binds.” Such binds happened when public officials faced different structural circumstances over which they had very little or no control. Such situations, then, require public officials to make decisions for increasing both their expenditures and their revenues.

Average differences persisted in all regions on fiscal-stress issues even after state aid was taken into account. That counties produced these municipal fiscal-stresses is unlikely. Public officials in neither counties nor municipalities should be held solely responsible for the comparative fiscal stresses on their householders. The very locations and “structural binds” city and town officials face due to their locations are the more likely culprits for the fiscal stresses.

Because of such structural differences, we expected that state aid would offset, at least in part, fiscal stresses on householders in Central Places and less-dense towns. Two major state aid programs affecting municipalities are state aid for general purposes (revenue sharing) and state aid for roads and transportation.
Results for 2005 showed that, compared to the two less-dense outlying town types, Central Places received roughly four times more dollars per household from State Aid for General Purposes. Even if this aid helped alleviate fiscal stresses on Central Places, in general the dollars did not alleviate comparative fiscal stresses on their householder. Such state aid also did little to alleviate comparative fiscal stresses for less-dense town types.

State aid for roads and transportation per household (but not total amounts) did go disproportionately to the two less-dense town types, thereby tending to alleviate some fiscal stresses on householders there. Some alleviation is better than none, but we were surprised that it came through state aid for roads and transportation rather than state aid for general purposes, and was not that much greater for households in less-dense towns than in other towns. State legislators are aware of the situation, and have moved, through the STAR and CHIPS programs, to alleviate some inequities for certain householders. The CHIPS program that provides state aid for transportation and roads, for instance, is based on road mileage, which tends to favor householders in less-dense towns rather than being based on population density which would favor more-dense towns. Even with these programs, serious differences in state assistance among town types persist.

The extent of differences among town property taxes paid per household is raised almost annually during their budget times. In response, some local movements to consolidate towns have been undertaken, especially where More Dense Suburban towns might merge with Central Places. Some of these municipalities already share as many services as possible, including fire protection and parks. Per household tax differences usually make mergers less feasible. People in More Dense Suburban towns pay the lowest averages per household property taxes, while those in Central Places pay the most. Similar difficulties face potential mergers between less-dense and more-dense towns. Whenever attempted, consolidation proposals tend to get vetoed early on by people in More Dense Suburban towns.

An analysis in Tompkins County found that differences in tax rates on householders between its Central Place (Ithaca) and its adjacent suburb (Town of Ithaca) were largely due to higher indebtedness for capital expenditures in the Central Place. For example, because suburban shopping malls usually provide free parking, Central Places generally build expensive parking garages subsidizing fees for users to help their businesses as they compete with mall businesses. Therefore, building parking facilities produces much greater indebtedness in Central Places. Again, Central Places are stuck in a structural bind. Not providing parking causes their businesses to fail, which takes them off
tax rolls entirely, while providing parking spaces raises debt and subsequent tax rates on their residents, which makes consolidation less feasible.

Differences in property taxes per household represent a major problem that municipalities on their own cannot resolve. Additional state programs are one way to break the structural impasses. This is a major issue challenging state policymakers during times (as in 2008-2009) when they themselves feel their own “never-ending” budgetary stresses.

**Opportunities and Challenges Due to Dynamics in Municipal Planning and Fiscally-Stressed Budgets.**

Many trends impact rural towns and regions – trends in anything from transportation and housing to family life and municipal budgeting. A promising trend during the 1990s and 2000s has been increases in passing local land-use planning regulations. Even if tight budgets constrain future plans, appropriate land-use regulations provide a basis for town officials to deal more adequately with certain trends impacting towns and small cities in these rural counties.

**Increasing Planning Capacity.** About 85 percent of municipalities had a planning board in 2008, up from 80 percent in 1992, and 76 percent in 1982. Also, increased usages occurred for three of the four major municipal planning tools (zoning, subdivision, and site-plan regulations). The fourth land-use tool is comprehensive planning that showed only modest additional usage in the 2000s.

Written comprehensive plans are important to towns because, when one is adopted, courts have ruled that they provide increased legitimacy for local zoning and the other two regulations. Legitimacy also extends to such land-use decisions as business-improvement districts, local right-to-farm ordinances, landmark preservation, water and sewer ordinances, watershed protections, adult-entertainment restrictions, wind-farm ordinances, open-space regulations, and so forth. In general, business men and women have also found that written comprehensive plans assist investors in finding locations for investments. Towns that have comprehensive plans, along with State Environmental Quality Review Act analyses, can be reasonably assured of defensible land-use decisions.

In 1991 the State Legislature provided for an important new policy tool called “incentive zoning.” Incentive zoning permits subsidies to private entities of one sort or another to achieve specific outcomes in comprehensive plans. The use of such new tools is complex and some town boards may be intimidated when considering adopting them, especially those that have little or no readily-accessible professional help.
Incentive zoning provides flexibility for towns in stimulating desired community outcomes. For instance, an aging, elderly population may find it desirable to have housing options with nearby health-care accommodations such as clinics, nursing homes, rehabilitation centers, emergency services, and so forth. In the past, most such facilities were located in counties’ Central Places or More Dense Suburbs. Trends during the 1990s showed seniors increasingly living in less-dense rural towns. As they age, they also tend not to have vehicles for readily accessing health-care facilities outside their towns of residence. Yet, they may be reluctant to move from their current housing locations.

Increases in numbers of municipalities having written comprehensive plans, from 2004 to 2008, also gave impetus to municipalities for adding several additional land-use tools available to them. Those with all five land use tools in place grew to 41 percent in 2008. Most such tools were added in More Dense Suburban towns but also in the two less-dense town types. Although only a minority of towns had all five tools in place, it was definitely increasing.

In general, by 2008 most municipalities were much better positioned in their planning capacities. Towns also had more experience in using planning tools to their advantages for dealing with the challenges of major socioeconomic-demographic trends. Some changes happen fast and by 2008 increased numbers of towns used multiple planning tools to face these challenges.

Effective planning requires goal clarification, complex analyses, and the matching of effective programs and resources to goals. To achieve productive outcomes from such complexity often requires professional assistance. More-dense towns can likely afford such help. Training is also useful. In 2006, legislation passed by the state requires planning and zoning board members to receive at least four hours of training each year in order to serve on the boards. Such training gives board members greater capacity to fulfill their responsibilities.

In less-dense towns, householders are under greater financial pressures, and providing such help strains their budgets for both a plan and for programs arising from a plan. Less-dense towns already have, on average, among the highest per-household fiscal stresses so that, without outside help, many of them lack professional capacity to assist them in their planning efforts and are unlikely to obtain such services in the future on their own. They are unlikely to undertake comprehensive planning efforts without assistance.

Such situations put pressures on rural counties and/or the state as primary entities for help in building less-dense towns’ land use planning and regulatory capacities. Counties have often provided assistance in the past, but
usually not systematically. Both counties and the state are also currently under considerable fiscal stresses of their own.

**Final Conclusions: Planning, Projections, Property Taxes, Policies, and Programs.**

Throughout this document we have explored how municipalities are buffeted by trends, over which they often have very little or no control. These trends leave municipalities in “structural binds,” so that the vast majority of alternatives for responding to them are less than satisfactory. In response to the trends, cities’ and towns’ main alternatives are to devise programs that facilitate the few trends that have positive effects and mitigate those with large negative effects. In making decisions on these issues, municipal officials routinely have available only the two major policy levers of using planning tools and/or modifying their budgets.

In applying these two policy levers, local policymakers face huge challenges. Budgets of less-dense towns and Central Places in rural counties, as frequently noted above, are structurally constrained, affecting deeply their planning capacities. Municipal budgets, based heavily on property taxes, continue to add fiscal stresses on taxpayers in their jurisdictions.

These challenges are so important that, in closing, we will examine them in a little more detail. They have two major foci – first, planning for dealing with socioeconomic and demographic trends and, second, pressures on property taxes.

**Projections in Planning.** Socioeconomic and other trends are both incremental and inexorable. Planning is about “the future” in dealing with the trends, so that most planning can be deemed proactive planning. Even reactive planning, where officials respond to previous or present land-use conflicts, is proactive. After one or more instances, for example, when “developers” have left defective roadways or sewers in areas of new housing for which towns then become responsible, local boards pass more stringent site-plan or sub-division regulations to avoid future repetitions. Regulations put in place “today,” then, are for the future.

Although certain municipal officials may not find the results from such planning satisfying, planning in municipalities remains essential. Without it, municipalities are left at the mercy of external forces they cannot control without understanding their full effects, and, secondly, they reduce their overall likelihood of achieving better “health, safety, or general welfare” for their constituents.
Planning keeps municipalities on a more even keel in achieving positive outcomes. Recent experiences, for instance, show that more business investments become possible when investors can rely on stability in land-use regulations through written comprehensive plans. Further, planning reduces conflicts over land-uses in municipalities, and, as noted previously, planning is also essential in integrating the various social segments with one another as they exchange information, resources, and ideas over land-use issues, and in knowing that their governments are working on key problems that affect them.

**Property Taxes.** Issues about property taxes have arisen repeatedly throughout this document. For homeowners, current total real estate taxes often equal or exceed their state income taxes. Locally, most property taxes go to public school systems, second to counties, and, except in Central Places, much smaller amounts to town taxes. Although these numbers vary widely among individual taxpayers as well as among municipalities, state and local taxes together currently average about half those paid on federal income taxes.

Further, property taxes vary widely on “abilities of householders to pay.” More-dense towns have both more average wealth among their householders and lower taxes per household than less-dense towns and Central Places. In short, households with smaller total incomes, and lower “abilities to pay,” tend to pay more of their total incomes in property taxes. Thus, overall property taxes in less-dense towns and Central Places are actually “regressive” in that those with “less ability to pay” pay more of their income in percentage terms than those with greater “ability to pay,” especially in less-dense rural towns. Municipalities left to their own devices are unlikely to be able to change their situations of fiscal stress.

In contrast, state income tax levies are, on average, at least a little more “progressive.” Even if with many exceptions, people with higher incomes pay more in state taxes and those with less ability to pay actually pay less.

**Policies of State, Small City, and Town Governments.** Under these conditions, certain state intervention programs could alleviate the hardships currently facing the more fiscally-stressed municipalities. Certain municipal budgets are overburdened due to their financial structural binds. They often believe they cannot spare resources to increase their planning capacities for dealing more adequately with their social, economic, and financial futures.

A first direction for state policymakers, then, would be to deal with municipalities’ current fiscal situations. Current state programs for addressing this issue focus largely on helping municipalities reduce their department and management costs by encouraging them to share more services or to consolidate
with each other. Studies on numbers and types of municipalities engaging in consolidation are underway, but consolidation appears to be small relative to the size of the problems. Meanwhile, departments among certain municipalities on their own engage in sharing services on informal, but also contracted, bases. For instance, snow plowing is widely shared, as are trucks and other equipment needed in road construction and maintenance. Fire protection is often contracted among towns, even if sharing planning staffs happens less often.

The STAR program was another program aimed at reducing the effects of school-system property taxes by reducing taxes on certain types of households. Its effects, however, appear rather minimal in reducing households’ fiscal stresses.

The state has also contributed more dollars to school systems through school-aid formulas and to municipalities through their state aid for general purposes (revenue sharing) and/or for roads and transportation. Still, school and municipal taxes continue to rise faster than dollar amounts coming from the state, with the result of added financial pressures on households from local property taxes.

In other words, even though state aid in one form or another has increased, the funds provided appear less than necessary to reduce fiscal stresses on local jurisdictions that tap property taxes for major portions of their budgets. Further, local jurisdictions in their highly decentralized situations and in relying on regressive property taxes for major parts of their revenues appear incapable of resolving their local financial stresses on their own.

It behooves the state, then, to be more aggressive in resolving local property-tax pressures. How to undertake such cost-reduction or revenue-enhancement programs is not clear. With so many local jurisdictions involved in accessing property taxes, only studies more inclusive than this one will be able to show viable directions. Health-care costs to counties, especially through increasing Medicaid enrollments in the current and recent past, are major county components of increasing local expenses, and the county, too, taps local property taxes to pay for them.

Again, the exact nature of programs to assist less-dense towns is unclear at this point. Training and technical assistance programs would probably cover the fundamentals of planning, using Geographic Information Systems (GIS) to map population movements more precisely, and generating and using social, demographic, economic, and poverty projection tools.
The present situation may not be dire, but the trends bringing the situations about, and local legislators’ efforts to respond to them, have left certain less-dense towns and Central Places, especially, in dire straits both in budget terms and in planning capacities for dealing with the various issues they face. They are caught in tight structural binds. State policymakers could recognize such structural binds more directly by examining the issues more precisely (many of which were enumerated in this document), and then respond with effective programs to alleviate the comparative hardships.