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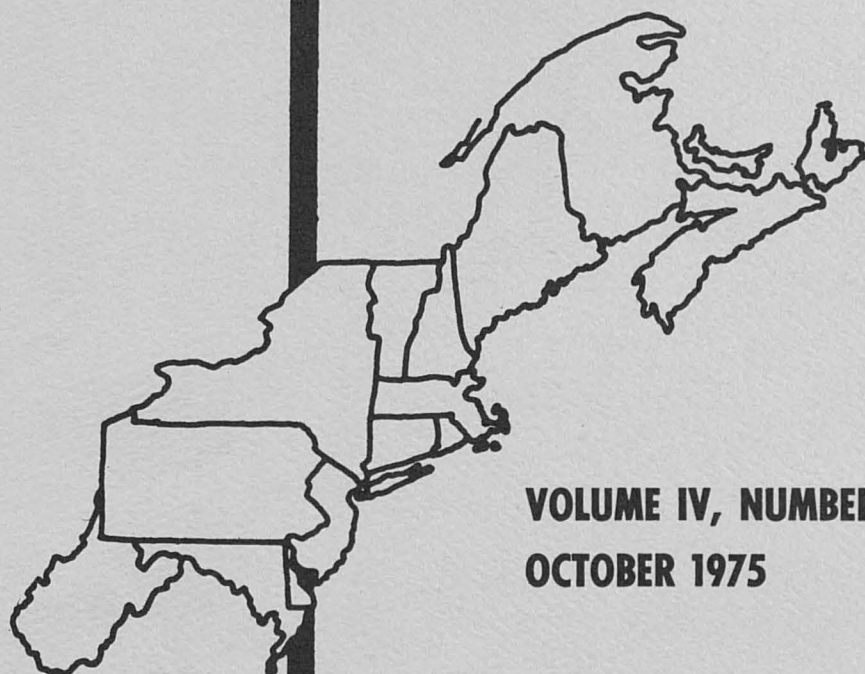
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COMMUNITY SERVICES: CONTRASTS BETWEEN RESIDENT  
AND NONRESIDENT LANDOWNERS IN THE  
ADIRONDACK REGION OF NEW YORK

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"There is more than enough evidence to show that the states and localities, far from being weak sisters, have actually been carrying the brunt of domestic governmental progress in the United States ever since the end of World War II. . . . Moreover, they have been largely responsible for undertaking the truly revolutionary change in the role of government in the United States that has occurred over the past decade."

-Daniel J. Elazar, The Public Interest

State and local governments are taking the lead role in the provision of local public goods and services, despite the popular myths of little local progress and federal usurpation of local control. Nevertheless, constituents are frustrated by the inability of units of local government to provide services and programs designed to satisfy the needs of the local community. Local government leaders find the situation paradoxical. They are responsible for improving both the quantity and quality of services, but are largely restricted to local revenue sources whose rate of growth has not been as rapid as costs of services.

To finance increased service demands, units of local government have had to escalate both property and non-property taxes. However, the "fiscal gap" between local annual income and expenses has increased. Expenditures for public services (police and fire protection, health, education, highways, etc.) have increased dramatically in the past decade. A 224 percent increase in these expenditures for the upstate counties of New York<sup>1/</sup> between 1959 and 1969 illustrates the point [1]. Only through increased state and federal aid has solvency been maintained.

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<sup>1/</sup> Sixty-two counties comprise the State of New York. Five consist of the New York City area, and the remaining fifty-seven are classified as "upstate" counties.



Furthermore, information regarding the service needs and desires of community residents is frequently limited, particularly in rural areas which have a large contingent of nonresident property owners. Nonresident landowners pay taxes, but seldom vote in local elections because they maintain a permanent residence elsewhere. As a result, governmental officials often are not fully aware of the types and quantities of services desired by taxpayers. Additional data is needed to aid public policy decision-making.

This is the context of the problem which confronted the authors when examining service needs in the Adirondack region in New York State. Geographically, the region is a somewhat isolated area at the fringe of the United States. It is blocked to the north by the artificial barrier of the Canadian border. To the south are the Adirondack Mountains which have presented a physical barrier to industry and settlement of the region. Thus, despite a rich treasury of natural resources, the region has had less social and economic growth over the past few decades than most other regions in the state. The thirteen county area is sparsely populated, with an average density of 72 persons per square mile [4]. Furthermore, the region is characterized by low average per capita income, high unemployment and a substantial number of nonresident property owners.

A unique yet integral part of the region is the Adirondack Park, a portion of which is contained within each of the counties in northern New York State. The Adirondack Park which was established in 1892 as a state park, consists of some six million acres of land. Although private and public lands are intermingled throughout the Park, more than 3,600,000 acres are private lands. In 1970, there were approximately 123,000 year-round residents living within the Adirondack boundary, which is historically called the "Blue Line."

There are approximately 36,000 nonresident private and corporate landowners in the towns wholly or partially within the Park. These non-residents hold more than two million acres or 60 percent of the total privately owned land [3]. A majority of them live in New York State, yet outside of the Adirondack Park. Nearly three-quarters of the non-residents hold property which is classified as seasonal residences. It is abundantly clear that nonresidents of the Adirondack area have and will continue to play an increasingly vital role in the future of the Adirondack region.

Additional attention has recently been focused on the Adirondack region due to the passage and implementation of a land use and development plan for the 3.6 million acres of privately owned land within the Adirondack Park.<sup>2/</sup> There is considerable concern among residents in the

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<sup>2/</sup> The state owned lands are protected from development by the "forever wild" clause of the New York State Constitution (Art. XIV § 1).

Adirondack Park over the potential impact of this plan on land prices and on the future development of the region. Local government officials are concerned that the plan will reduce the ability of units of local government to supply and finance the service needs of present and future residents. Inadequate public and private services often discourage potential residents from buying land in a particular community. In addition, local officials require additional information regarding the service needs of the resident and nonresident landowners in their jurisdiction.

The purpose of this study was to obtain information useful to local government officials regarding the characteristics and service needs of resident and nonresident landowners who purchased land in the Adirondack region during the 1968-73 period [2].

#### Methodology

During the summer of 1973, field enumerators reviewed records of transfers of real property in eight of the 12 counties containing property within the Adirondack Blue Line. The transfers were confined to rural property located in towns that are within, overlap, or are adjacent to the Blue Line. Over 5,600 valid transfers of rural property, during the 1968-73 period were identified.<sup>3/</sup> The study was limited to property types classified by local assessors in accordance with State standards as operating farm, rural residence or abandoned farm, rural land--vacant, seasonal residence, seasonal resort, or forestland.

From this population of 5,627 valid transfers, a stratified, random sample of 2,255 property owners (about 40 percent of the population) was drawn. In January 1974, after having pre-tested a questionnaire through personal interviews in Warren County and throughout the study area by mail, a nine-page questionnaire, accompanied by a cover letter explaining the purposes of the survey, was mailed to each of the 2,255 property owners. During February and March, three follow-up letters were mailed, the second of which contained another copy of the questionnaire, in an attempt to increase the overall response rate.

The mail questionnaire was completed and returned by 1,468 landowners, an overall response rate of 65 percent. Moreover, 72 percent of the landowners who received a questionnaire returned it.<sup>4/</sup> Of those returned, 1,442 were filled out in sufficient detail to be useable in tabulating replies. Despite the high response rate, a small sample of the nonrespondents were contacted by telephone in an attempt to resolve the question whether or not the nonrespondents were significantly different

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<sup>3/</sup> These data were collected during June, July and August, 1973. Thus, the data regarding transfers during 1973 are incomplete.

<sup>4/</sup> About 200 questionnaires were returned by the U.S. Postal Service because landowners had changed their mailing address without notifying postal officials.



from the respondents. The results indicated that there was no basis to conclude that the nonrespondents were substantially different from the respondents.

#### Location of Respondent's Property and Permanent Residence

What proportion of the persons purchasing rural property in the Adirondack region in recent years have been nonresidents? A summary of the distribution of respondents by location of rural property and location of permanent address is presented in Table 1. The eight counties involved in this study are on the left side, while permanent residences of the buyers are on top. Each category is mutually exclusive of the residual strata. About 17 percent of the rural land purchases were by persons residing inside the Adirondack Blue Line. The second permanent residence category is entitled, "Outside Blue Line, in Study Area." Approximately 12 percent of the rural property transfers occurred here. These two categories were combined to represent "resident" ownership for the purposes of this study. Only about 29 percent of the total purchases of private rural property were made by these "resident" landowners.

For the purpose of this study, landowners in the last five categories comprise the "nonresidents." Table 1 indicates the importance of nonresident activity in the real estate market. The single most striking feature of the nonresident sector is the proportion of the respondents who live outside the northern New York region, yet within New York State. New Yorkers are evidently very fond of the Adirondack Park and the natural endowments synonymous with its name. More than 42 percent of the land sales involved transactors from this group. Altogether, almost 71 percent of the total rural property transfers over the past five years entailed a nonresident buyer and 57 percent of transactions involve a buyer who lives outside the Adirondack region.

#### Public Service Use and Needs by Rural Landowners

The large proportion of recent landbuyers who are nonresidents has obvious potential economic implications for local officials. Many local officials are interested in attracting resident and nonresident landowners to their Adirondack community. Population growth and the accompanying multiplier effect represent economic development to the community.<sup>5/</sup> One technique frequently used to make the community attractive to prospective residents is to provide a high level of public services. Local officials are also interested in the types of services needed for their communities which are currently undergoing rapid development. However, if both resident and nonresident property owners demand more services, and they are interested in different services, local officials face a dilemma. A pertinent question becomes, to whom

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<sup>5/</sup> The general trend of rural land prices in the Adirondacks from 1968 to 1972 has been upward. The magnitude of this increase averages to be about 13 percent each year or 66 percent for the entire time period [2].

Table 1  
Distribution of Respondents by Location of Property  
and Permanent Residence

Lo- cation of prop- erty	Location of Permanent Residence															
	Inside Blue Line		Outside Blue Line, in Study Area		Outside Study Area, in Region		Outside Region, in New York		Outside New York, in Canada		Outside New York, in New England		Outside New York, Elsewhere		Total	
	No.	Pct.	No.	Pct.	No.	Pct.	No.	Pct.	No.	Pct.	No.	Pct.	No.	Pct.	No.	Pct.
Clinton	8	10.1	20	25.3	11	13.9	26	32.9	4	5.1	6	7.6	4	5.1	79	100.0
Essex	70	34.0	8	3.9	12	5.8	83	40.3	3	1.5	11	5.3	19	9.2	206	100.0
Franklin	41	17.1	38	15.8	23	9.6	89	37.1	9	3.7	11	4.6	29	12.1	240	100.0
Hamilton	17	18.5	1	1.1	6	6.5	53	57.6	1	1.1	2	2.2	12	13.0	92	100.0
Herkimer	7	7.4	15	16.0	7	7.4	55	58.5	0	0.0	1	1.1	9	9.6	94	100.0
Lewis	5	3.0	33	19.9	55	33.1	63	38.0	0	0.0	1	0.6	9	5.4	166	100.0
St. Lawrence	20	11.8	33	19.4	77	45.3	29	17.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	11	6.5	170	100.0
Warren	76	19.2	27	6.8	14	3.6	218	55.2	0	0.0	9	2.3	51	12.9	395	100.0
Total	244	16.9	175	12.1	205	14.2	616	42.7	17	1.2	41	2.9	144	10.0	1,442	100.0



should municipalities cater? Should it be the citizens who reside in the area year-round or the nonresident property owners who represent a major portion of the tax base? In order to serve their constituents, local officials need more information. With the rapidly growing demand for public goods and services, it seemed apropos as part of this study to inquire of landowners (1) the degree to which local services are utilized and (2) an indication of which services most need improvement.

#### Present use of Public Services

When attempting to obtain the level of use of a variety of services, many questions were asked. It is a two-pronged question--was the service utilized, and if so, what was the intensity of use. Table 2 contains information relevant to both questions. Perhaps the most striking contrast between residents and nonresidents is in the utilization of the local public school system. Fifty-four percent of the resident's families attended the local Adirondack schools, while only 6.6 percent of the nonresidents went to local schools. The average number of days attended by children of residents was between 150 and 180. This result was not unexpected, however it is interesting because nonresidents provide considerable support for local schools through property tax payments on their Adirondack property.

A majority of residents and nonresidents believed that police protection was provided by a unit of local government. However, only a third of the nonresidents and half of the residents had actually seen or had occasion to contact a local law official. Those who had summoned a local police official, had done so about three or four times on average. Well over 80 percent of all landowners specified that local governments supplied fire protection to their property. On average, fire departments were called upon only once by the small number of landowners who needed their aid.

When asked if either public water or public sewer services were made available to their property by a village, town or special district, only a small number of landowners responded positively. Approximately nine percent of the nonresident respondents had public water service while four percent of them had public sewer service. On the other hand, 15.6 percent of the residents had public water available and a small 5.3 percent of the resident properties were furnished with public sewer services.

Public roads have historically been one of the primary public goods which consumers demand and usually represent a major allocation in town, village and county budgets in New York. Respondents who reside within the study area drove a yearly average of 7,920 miles, while nonresidents drove 1,780 miles within the Park bounds. Highway maintenance and snow and ice removal were the two highway services usually requested by both groups.

Private and public health care services are heterogenously mixed in the study area. Thus, questions were not limited to public health care.



Table 2  
Summary Information on Utilization of Public Services  
in the Adirondack Region

Item	Residents	Nonresidents
Respondents	419	1,023
Days spent at property	214.0	73.5
Local public school system used		
Yes (percent)	54.0	6.6
No (percent)	46.0	93.4
If Yes, days per year	177	154
Local police protection provided		
Yes (percent)	62.1	57.3
No (percent)	37.9	42.7
If Yes, has seen or contacted		
Yes (percent)	48.1	32.8
No (percent)	51.9	67.2
If Yes, times (number)	3.9	3.6
Local fire protection provided		
Yes (percent)	88.9	83.1
No (percent)	11.1	16.9
If Yes, has contacted		
Yes (percent)	17.9	5.6
No (percent)	82.1	94.4
If Yes, times (number)	1.3	1.1
Public water supply provided		
Yes (percent)	15.6	9.0
No (percent)	84.4	91.0
Public sewer service provided		
Yes (percent)	5.3	4.0
No (percent)	94.7	96.0
Miles driven within Park	7,921	1,780
Health services used:		
Private doctor (times per year)	6.2	1.6
Dentist (times per year)	3.6	.8
Pharmacist (times per year)	12.6	4.0
Ambulance (times per year)	.1	.1
Hospital (times per year)	1.1	.4
Public health clinic (times per year)	1.0	.2

Most of the health services (dentist, ambulance, hospital, and public health clinics) listed in Table 2 were utilized less than once a year by nonresidents. A professional medical doctor was needed on the average between one and two times a year. Nonresidents claimed to patronize pharmacies in the local Adirondack area about four times a year. On the other hand, residents indicated that they and their families utilized the variety of health services much more intensively. For example, a private doctor was visited an average of six times per year, a dentist over three times, and a pharmacist almost thirteen times per year. Ambulances and a hospital were rarely needed. Public health clinics were visited on average about once a year.

Generally, there are sharp differences in the aggregate level of service utilization in a year between the two groups. Public schools, police and fire protection, highways, and health care are the five areas which seem to represent the greatest differences.

#### Improving Local Services

Landowners were asked, in terms of their interests as a property owner in the Adirondack region, to indicate the local services they would most like to see improved. To determine the relative strength of these preferences, landowners were then asked how they would allocate \$100 of their local property tax payment among the services they would most like to see improved. The answers to these two questions are summarized in Table 3.

Residents of the study area indicated that highway maintenance, police protection, and local public schools were the three services they would most like to see improved (see column 1, Table 3). Fire protection and health care were in fourth and fifth positions, respectively. In indicating how they would allocate \$100 of their local property tax payment among these services (see column 2), residents of the study area allocated the largest portion of the \$100 to public schools (\$19.69), followed closely by highway maintenance (\$18.69). Health care and police protection received much smaller allocations of \$13.55 and \$12.15, respectively. This allocation of tax dollars implies a slightly different ranking of services most needing improvement (see column 3). It suggests that residents of the study area would most like to see local public schools and highway maintenance improved. Considerably less important, in terms of resident's priorities, are improvements in public water and sewer services, police protection and fire protection.

The rankings of nonresident respondents were substantially different from those of the residents. Nonresidents indicated that improved fire protection was their number one concern (see column 4). Improvements in police protection and highway maintenance were second and third, respectively. In fourth place was health care, followed by highway snow and ice removal.

When asked how they would allocate \$100 of their local property tax payment among the services they would most like to see improved, non-



Table 3  
Ranking of Local Services Property Owners Would  
Most Like to See Improved

	Residents			Nonresidents			All Respondents		
	Rank <sup>a/</sup> (1)	Tax Dollars (2)	Implied Rank <sup>b/</sup> (3)	Rank <sup>a/</sup> (4)	Tax Dollars (5)	Implied Rank <sup>b/</sup> (6)	Rank <sup>a/</sup> (7)	Tax Dollars (8)	Implied Rank <sup>b/</sup> (9)
Highway maintenance	1	\$18.96	2	3	\$18.21	3	2	\$18.43	1
Police protection	2	12.15	4	2	18.47	2	3	16.62	3
Local public schools	3	19.69	1	8	7.68	6	6	11.17	5
Public water	8	5.76	8	7	6.45	8	8	6.25	8
Highway snow and ice removal	6	8.29	7	5	7.52	7	5	7.75	7
Fire protection	4	11.55	5	1	21.17	1	1	18.36	2
Health care	5	13.55	3	4	12.17	4	4	12.58	4
Public sewer services	7	10.05	6	6	8.33	5	7	8.84	6

<sup>a/</sup> Landowners were asked, in terms of their interests as a property owner in the Adirondack region, to indicate the services they would most like to see improved. This column summarizes those rankings, with the service most in need of improvement ranked 1.

<sup>b/</sup> To determine the strength of landowners preferences, they were asked how they would allocate \$100 of their local property tax payment among the services they would most like to see improved. This column presents the ranking implied by the allocation of tax dollars among services needing improvement, with the service most in need of improvement ranked 1.

residents allocated the greatest proportion (\$21.17) to improving fire protection (see column 5). Police protection and highway maintenance received \$18.47 and \$18.21, respectively. The ranking of the three services most in need of improvement implied by this allocation of tax dollars (see column 6) was the same as that presented in column 4. Health care, although substantially less important (\$12.17), remains in fourth place in both rankings by nonresidents.

The differences between residents' and nonresidents' priorities were striking. Residents appeared to be more interested in human services. Evidence of this interest was reflected in their selection of public schools and health care as two of the three services most in need of improvement. Nonresidents appeared to be most interested in those services which protect their property. Indication of this interest was reflected in their selection of fire protection and police protection as the two services they would most like to see improved. Both residents and nonresidents rated highway maintenance as one of the services they would most like to see improved.

#### Summary and Conclusions

This report summarizes the results of a survey of landowners who purchased rural property in the Adirondack region of New York State during the period 1968-73. Two purposes of the survey were to determine the extent of nonresident purchases of rural property in the region over the past five years, and to determine service utilization rates and future service needs of resident and nonresident landowners in the Adirondack region.

A total of 1,442 useable questionnaires were received from owners of Adirondack property, about 72 percent of those reaching the landowners. A total of 29 percent of the respondents had a permanent residence within the study area, with 17 percent of them residing inside the Blue Line; an additional 26 percent resided outside the Blue Line, but in northern New York; and, the remaining 57 percent resided outside the region. Thus, 29 percent of the respondents were classified as residents of the area while 71 percent were classified as nonresidents.

Residents were found to utilize local services more extensively than nonresidents do, especially public schools and Adirondack highways. In addition, residents of the study area were more interested in seeing improvements in human services, such as schools and health care than were nonresidents. Nonresident respondents indicated that they would like to see improvements in property-related services, such as fire protection and police protection. Both groups expressed an interest in improvements in the maintenance of local highways.

Local government officials should find these differences of interest and concern. Schools and highways have long occupied prominent positions in local budgets. Increased interests of area residents in health care and of nonresident taxpayers in improved year-round fire and police protection for their property, may signal new challenges for local officials



in the Adirondack region. This study suggests they will be called upon to provide a wider range of high quality public services than ever before. Additional research is needed to evaluate alternative means of providing and financing these services.

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