

3. WEBB TODAY

3.1 Introduction

The Town of Webb is located in the northernmost portion of Herkimer County, in the west-central Adirondack region of New York State. The Town is wholly within the boundaries of the Adirondack Park. It is the largest township in New York State, with a total area of approximately 466 square miles. The town averages 14 miles in width (east to west) and is about 35 miles in length (north to south). Elevations range from approximately 1500 to 2500 feet above sea level. (See Map 1 - Location Map)

Virtually all developable land in Webb lies along the primary travel corridor, New York State Route 28 and the Fulton Chain of Lakes. The highway transects the central portion of the town from southwest to northeast and parallels the Middle Branch of the Moose River and Fulton Chain of Lakes. Road travel times range from 1 hour south and west to Utica, 2 hours north and east to Lake Placid, and 2½ hours east to Albany.

No incorporated villages are located within the township. Three of the town's hamlets, (Old Forge, Eagle Bay and Thendara), along the Route 28 corridor, are the areas of concentrated population and development. These hamlets are typical of the more than one hundred hamlets in the Adirondack Park containing retail establishments, a clustering of homes and, in most cases, a post office. They help define the unique landscape of the Adirondacks.

Smaller population and development areas (similar to village neighborhoods) include Big Moose Station, McKeever, Okara Lakes, Fulton Chain of Lakes, Rondaxe Lake, Big Moose Lake, Stillwater, and Beaver River.

Location Map

Town of Webb in New York State
(line shows Adirondack Park)



in Herkimer County



3.2 Population

Webb has shown growth as a town in its region and county. The 1990 US Census indicated a year-round population of 1,637, a modest decline from the 1980 count of 1,701 resident population. The 2000 US Census² records a growth from 1990 of some 16.8 percent to 1,912 population. Given Webb's enormous land mass and relatively modest population, non-summer population density is one of the lowest in New York State at around 4.2 persons per square mile. Subtracting State lands from the density calculation yields about 17 persons per square mile, very close to an Adirondack region average of 19 persons per square mile.

Summer peak population counts can only be estimated, but are commonly cited at 25,000 to 30,000, at least on weekends. This seasonal influx can swell population density to nearly 55 persons per square mile on a peak summer weekend, although most of the population density is concentrated along the Route 28 corridor, in Old Forge and the other small hamlets of the Town, and along lake shorelines, notably the Fulton Chain of Lakes.

Putting this population density in perspective, the Adirondack Park is 5.8 million acres, making the Park similar in size to each of six northeastern states. However, its population is approximately 150,000 people, or less than a fourth of Vermont's and considerably less than the other states. The Adirondack Park covers 9,375 square miles or about 100 by 100 miles in area. Adirondack regional population density of 19 people per square mile is comparable to the rural states of the Great Plains and West – as compared to the average population density in upstate New York (at around 227 people per square mile.)³

² Data acquired February 2002 from www.esdc.state.ny.us

³ "Upstate" is defined as New York State outside of the New York City metropolitan statistical area.

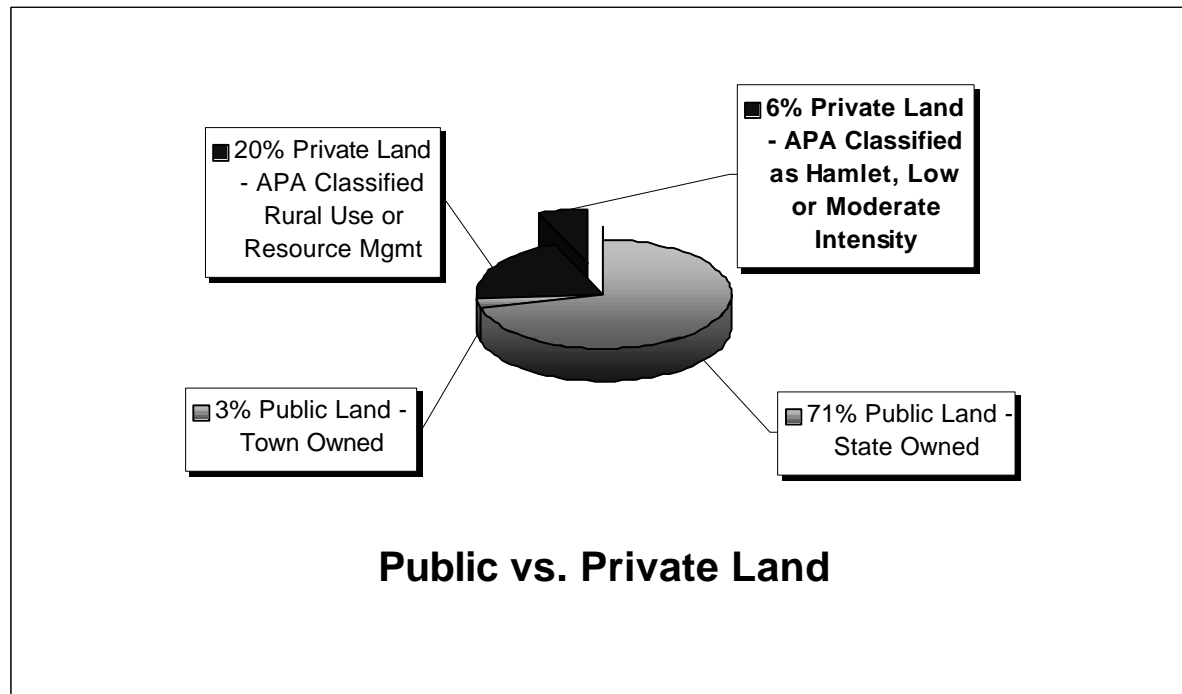
Total Population Change for Select Areas - 1990 to 2000

	1990 Population	2000 Population	Percent Change 1990-2000
Town of Webb	1,637	1,912	16.8%
Town of Inlet	343	406	18.4%
Town of Lake George	3,211	3,578	11.4%
Town of North Elba (Lake Placid area)	7,870	8,661	10.1%
Town of Indian Lake	1,481	1,471	-0.7%
Town of Long Lake	930	852	-8.4%
Town of Ohio	880	922	4.8%
Herkimer County	65,809	64,427	-2.1%
Hamilton County	5,279	5,379	1.9%
Essex County	37,152	38,851	4.6%

Voter registration was 1,483 in 1990 from the two voting districts in the town, yet in 2000 this registration exceeded the US Census population by more than 200 voters. One suggested theory is that more people are voting in Webb but report to the Census that they live outside the township. If this is true, then Webb, based on Census figures, is being shortchanged regarding both revenues and distribution of services.

3.3 Land Development

Three quarters of the land within the township is publicly owned, one quarter is privately owned. Three quarters of the privately owned lands are in Adirondack Park Agency (APA) land use classifications considered “back country” (Rural and Resource Management Land), where restrictions on land use preclude any large scale residential or commercial development.



Approximately one quarter of the privately held lands (less than six percent of the total land area of the town) is in APA land use classifications where development will likely occur as illustrated in the chart above. The APA classifications for private development are lands designated Hamlet, Moderate Intensity or Low Intensity.

LAND OWNERSHIP: TOWN OF WEBB CLASSIFICATION OF DEVELOPABLE PRIVATE LANDS⁴			
APA Land Use Classifications	Area (in acres)	Percent of total private land area	Percent of developable private lands
Resource Management	47,000	15.7%	68.0%
Rural	4,500	1.5%	6.6%
Low Intensity	4,200	1.4%	6.0%
Moderate Intensity	12,150	4.0%	17.5%
Hamlet	1,300	0.4%	0.9%
Total Developable Acreage	69,150	23.0%	100.0%

An important aspect to understanding future land development in the Town is the dominance of State land ownership, the management of those lands as wilderness or wild forest, and the limits on private land available or suitable for development.

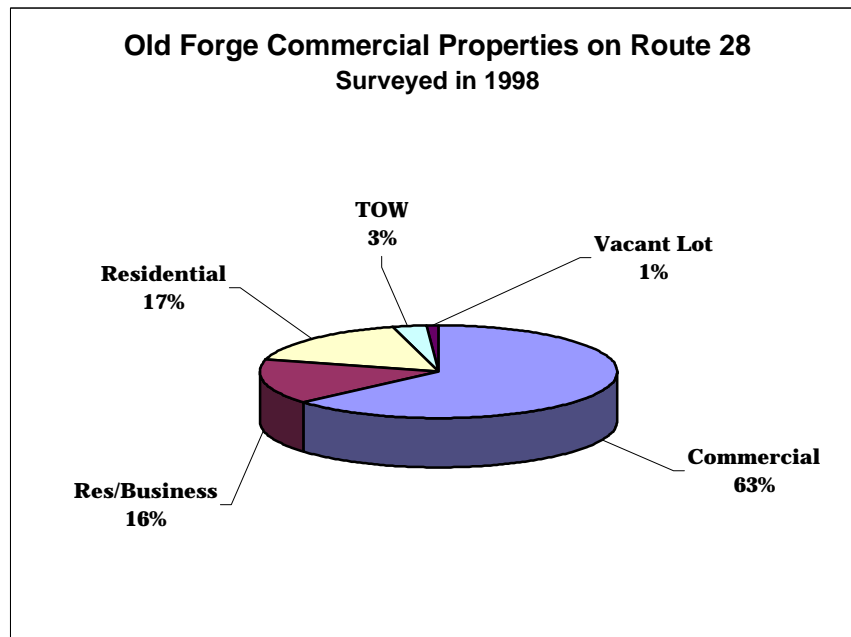
The table above illustrates that less than 18,000 acres of privately held land in Webb is classified by the Adirondack Park Agency (APA) as Low Intensity, Moderate Intensity or Hamlet and thus available for potential development.

Development over the past two decades has consisted chiefly of in-fill residential development along the Route 28 and Fulton Chain of Lakes corridor, where the majority of private lands are located. Ninety percent (90%) of the residential development since 1980 has occurred in Hamlet (17%), Moderate Intensity (61%), and Low Intensity (12%) use areas. Given existing local and APA land use regulations, these trends are expected to continue.

⁴ From Development Patterns in the Town of Webb, prepared by Don Kelly, MPAC member and former Webb Code Enforcement Officer and revised April 2000 and January, 2002.

Old Forge, centrally located within the town along New York State Route 28, continues to provide the location for the majority of commercial activity within Webb. The commercially zoned areas in the town are located in a narrow band along Route 28, averaging less than two village blocks in width. This fact and the lack of alternative commercial areas have resulted in a concentration of activity within this corridor, leading to conflicts among commercial uses and between residential and commercial uses.

Two recent surveys indicate trends in the conversion of existing residential properties to commercial uses (Old Forge-Thendara Commercial District Study, 1990; C2000 Sub-committee on Architecture, 1998). Both surveys indicate that the residential nature of portions of this corridor is changing due to the growth of commercial activity. The chart below, based upon the 1998 survey, shows the frequency of various uses.⁴



⁴ Chart of data prepared by C2000 Subcommittee on Architecture. Survey conducted from the Bridge on Rt. 28 at the Old Mill Restaurant to the Bridge on Rt. 28 at the dam next to the Old Forge Pond.

Conversion from residential to commercial uses has followed two basic patterns: adaptive reuse of existing residential structures for commercial uses or for combination residential/commercial uses (chiefly small gift shops and offices), and removal of residences and their replacement by larger commercial structures. Given the location and limited extent of commercial properties and the continuation of demand for new commercial uses, it is likely that these patterns will continue.

3.4 Education

Accessibility to a quality education is seen throughout the world as a strong indicator of quality of life. Except for a small and remote portion of the Town in the southernmost portion of Webb, the Town of Webb Union Free School District serves the Town. This district also serves portions of the Towns of Inlet in Hamilton County and Forestport in Oneida County, with consolidated K-12 facilities on Route 28 in Old Forge. As reported in the February 2001 Overview of Academic Performance, published by the University of the State of New York and the State Department of Education⁵, a number of indicators show that Webb children have access to quality educational experience. Students at all levels also consistently scored better than peers statewide in performance on various standardized tests.

⁵ also known as the School District Report Card, dated February 2001 and available on line at www.emsc.nysed.gov.

	District in 1999-2000	District in 1997	Herkimer County In 1997	New York State public In 1997
Enrollment	439	414	12,480	2,808,395
Annual Attendance Rate	94.4%	95.2%	94.8%	91.6%
“Youth at Risk”				
Census Poverty Index	n/a	13.0%	16.0%	18.0%
Free-Reduced Lunch	17.8%	22.8%	45.2%	
Dropout Rate	0.7%	0.0%	2.5%	3.4%
Post Secondary Plans to College	86.3%	85.6%	78.8%	83%
Expenditures per Pupil	\$11,660	\$11,128	\$7,845	\$9,321
Average Class Size				
Grades 1-6	16	16	21	24
Grade 8 Social Studies	17	17	21	24
Grade 10 Social Studies	19	16	21	25
Regents Diploma	63%	58%	43%	43%
Students to Teacher Ratio	11.5%	10.6	14.3	13.7
Teacher Annual Turnover	9%	12%	9%	10%
Teacher Median Salary	\$49,498	\$47,494	\$40,642	\$48,712

3.5 Housing

Housing, particularly for the local workforce, is a critical issue in the Town of Webb. While New York State law does not require a housing element as part of a Town comprehensive plan, several court cases in New York State have successfully challenged municipal policies or land use regulations as “exclusionary”.⁶ Therefore, any quality Town comprehensive plan should address how the community is going to identify and provide its “fair share” of affordable housing. Towns are encouraged to consider how they will meet their share of both local housing needs and the needs of the larger region in which the Town is situated.

⁶ See *Asian Americans for Equality v. Koch*, 72 N.Y.2d 121 (1988) and *Berenson v. Town of New Castle*, 38 N.Y.2d 102 (1975).

New housing construction and remodeling remains strong, yet this relates primarily to the construction of recreation and seasonal homes at relatively high prices. Local realtors report that in Webb recent average values for waterfront homes are \$200,000 or greater, while “off water” homes recently averaged around \$85,000.⁷ Compare these values to those reported as average sales prices by the Herkimer County Chamber of Commerce for other communities, ranging from a low of \$46,375 in Herkimer to a high of \$82,610 in Frankfort.⁸ Similarly, a recent search of housing listings from a four-town area, including Forestport, Remsen and the Boonville area just west of Webb, showed only 6 listings for homes below \$80,000 (see Greater Utica – Rome Board of Realtors www.uticaromerealtor.com). Homes are being built, yet consistently, year round residents, employees and employers cite a lack of available moderate or affordable homes as a growing problem in Webb.

Affordability is typically seen as annual family housing costs that do not generally exceed 30% of the local median family income. For example, using Town employee pay scales as a sample, and 30% of pay as a measure of housing *affordability*, Town employees can currently afford to spend:

	Monthly Income for Housing @ 30% of total income - in dollars	Yearly Income for Housing @ 30% of total income - in dollars
Town Employee at lowest pay scale	268	3,216
Town Employee at highest pay scale	880	10,560

Any genuinely affordable housing is rare and briefly on the market. Even the Town’s one mobile home park has seen increased occupancy by winter recreation enthusiasts. Also, property that appears affordable is often only suitable for warm weather occupancy, given the predominance of seasonal residences in many neighborhoods of Webb.

⁷ Research based on interviews by David Church and Richard Knight.

⁸ Winter 1998-99 data as reported on www.herkimer.org. Herkimer County does not have a real estate multiple listing or Board of Realtors.

3.6 Economy

Webb has been a prosperous community, thanks in large part to the entrepreneurial nature of many of its residents, along with a combination of rising real estate demand, modest to low demand on school services from much of that housing, and efficient local government operations. Indeed, the effective tax rate - total property taxes paid against total assessed value of taxable property - is currently 1.51% and is consistently at or below 2%, as compared to the more common New York State municipal rates of 3% or more. This means Webb has relatively low taxes, high real estate values, or a combination of both.

Neighborhood	Average Assessed Value	Average Total Property Taxes	Effective Tax Rate = taxes per \$100 in value
Old Forge hamlet	\$88,000	\$1,540	1.8
Fulton Chain	\$250,000	\$3,785	1.5
Beaver River	\$30,000	\$441	1.4
Eagle Bay	\$60,000	\$908	1.5
Big Moose	\$220,000	\$3,355	1.5
McKeever	\$45,000	\$686	1.5
Town of Webb	\$150,000	\$2,287	1.5
Herkimer County ⁹	\$55,000		
Franklin County	\$54,090		
Oneida County	\$64,000		
Essex County	\$78,000		
NY State	\$145,159		

Town of Webb - 2001 Residential Values and Taxes¹⁰

Webb is also the property and sales tax engine of Herkimer County. Town of Webb share of the 2001-2002 County property tax was 28%.¹¹ Using estimates from the Herkimer County Administrator¹², the Town of Webb is also easily the

⁹ County data for all counties and for state is medium residential sales price for 2000 from NYS Office of Real Property Services (see www.orps.state.ny.us, March 14, 2002).

¹⁰ research provided by the Town of Webb Assessor's office. Effective tax rates is the ratio of taxes charged / full assessed value. Since Town of Webb assesses property at close to 100% the assessed value equals the full value.

leading generator of total annual sales tax revenue in the County. Yet in 2001 the Town received a total of about \$815,000 in revenue or only 5.625% of the total revenue distributed by the County.

A majority of government services are provided by the Town of Webb and by Herkimer County. Tourism, local government, construction, and service industries provide major employment in the area. The single largest year round full-time employer is the Town of Webb Union Free School, with consolidated facilities in the hamlet of Old Forge and approximately 70 employees, including about 45 teaching staff. The single largest private sector seasonal employer is Enchanted Forest/Water Safari.

Webb's unique concentration of tourism facilities, increasing residential housing values, and state land taxation policy in the Adirondack Park, where the State pays property taxes on significant holdings, creates a special circumstance that is not reflected in regional or county statistics. Also, very little Town specific data is either available or effective in characterizing the economy of Webb. However, in an attempt to define the wealth or character of the Town's economy, an important regional study is summarized here.

Northern Forest Wealth Index (Concord, NH: Northern Forest Center, 2000) does provide a series of regional measures or indicators of "wealth" for the Northern Forest of New York, Vermont, New Hampshire and Maine. These indicators rely primarily on county level data, including Herkimer and the neighboring Hamilton and Oneida counties, and were presented in five primary categories (Community, Culture, Economy, Education, and Environment) and more than 24 secondary categories. The "economy" indicators show a slow but steady growth in jobs and businesses in the Adirondack region, as favorably compared to many parts of New York State "...due, in part, to the attractiveness of the region's clean air, clean water, thickly forested mountains, abundant public land, low crime rates and other amenities" often found lacking in other parts of the country.

As such, Webb is in a position to build on its wealth. As stated earlier in Town of Webb Planning Principles, every effort should be made to maintain and enhance environmental health. The region's environmental health is second to none, with notably clean air and water, and the fewest hazardous waste sites or landfills found in the State. Low pollution, a low percentage of power production from fossil fuels, and a wide assortment of recreation and parkland also contribute.

¹¹ As reported by the Herkimer County Treasurer, March 14, 2002.

¹² Based on interviews with former Town Supervisor George Hildebrandt, November 26, 2001 and March 14, 2002. While sales tax payments to the Town from the County are reported here, actual values for sales tax collected by all businesses in the Town are not currently available.

With social health, the Adirondack region also does well. Crime rates are some of the lowest in the State compared to all other regions, the regional divorce rates are the second lowest, and percentage of live births is highest. Webb, like neighboring towns, enjoys a low student to teacher ratio, but unlike the many parts of its region, has a relatively high percentage of individuals who have gone on to some level of post high school education. Webb does share the Adirondack pattern of a low number of physicians per capita.¹³

3.7 Tourism

Tourism plays an important role in the economy of Webb. This is due to the variety and quality of opportunities in the Webb region, given the wealth of water and land based recreation, strong summer and winter seasons – nearness to population centers in the Northeast, and a concentration of services in the Old Forge hamlet, as well as in Thendara and Eagle Bay. Webb is also in the Adirondack Park, one of the country's major parks - the third largest in the US and the largest in the lower 48 states.

The economic strength of tourism is reflected in the steady rise of annual sales tax revenues since 1998. Total revenues averaged 5% growth in the mid-1990s yet rose to a high of nearly 13% annual growth from 1999 to 2001. In spite of the economic difficulties of 2001, sales taxes held steady and exceeded 2000 revenues by a modest 0.5%.¹⁴

Unfortunately, up-to-date research and information on regional tourism, and certainly on tourism in the Town of Webb, is sparse. However, a study entitled "NY STATE'S ADIRONDACK PARK SUMMER PHASE", noted some of the following information.¹⁵ Providing what may be the first consumer research conducted for this region, this report included a random telephone survey of two populations - within one day's drive, and within two day's drive of Park region. Four hundred and eighty-five persons were surveyed, and one-on-one interviews were held with contacts or owners of businesses in the region including the KOA in Old Forge, the Old Forge Hardware and the Old Barn Restaurant in Inlet.

While a similar visitor survey is needed for the Town of Webb, some insight can be gained by responses for the Adirondack Region in general. The vast majority of those who had visited the Adirondacks stated that their experience

¹³ See Northern Forest Wealth Index. Information also from "2001 New York State Statistical Yearbook" (Albany, NY: Nelson A Rockefeller Institute of Government, 2001).

¹⁴ Figures reported by the Town of Webb Supervisors office based on actual sales tax payments received.

¹⁵ Study completed by Lieberman Research Suburban (White Plains, NY) for Adirondack Tourism Council, September 1992.

was excellent or very good. Outdoor environment was the primary reason for favorable ratings - notably scenery and outdoor activities. Other leading comments included:

Accommodations were rated particularly high.

There is a notable high record of repeat visitation.

Many had trouble identifying the region – after it was described, an additional 20% claimed to have visited.

Lack of awareness of specific attractions is high - no single attraction was mentioned by more than 60%, with Whiteface Ski Area and Adirondack Museum the strongest mentioned.

Shopping was the most popular activity, followed by outdoor activities and visiting historic sites/museums. 55% of visitors view shopping as their primary activity.

Use of automobiles is significantly the primary method of travel – creating inherent limits in attraction.

Word of mouth is still the main source of tourist information.

Two-thirds of visitors live less than six hours, or one day's drive from the park.

The region is meeting current visitor's expectations, therefore, any future growth would come from marketing and advertising as a focus - notably on the Park identity and on attractions. Two Town of Webb properties were particularly referenced.

Old Forge Lake Cruises was one of several regional attractions identified as "high opportunity", while "mainstays" included Enchanted Forest/Water Safari.

For those who had never visited - 10% cited the region being too expensive and 9% simply preferred other areas. 17% cited lack of awareness and 17% were aware of the region but just had not gotten to travel there yet. 67% of non-visitors expressed interest in visiting in the future.

Further perspective on regional tourism is found in the recent study *Tourism Business, Community and Environment in the Adirondack Park: The Perspectives of Business Owners and Managers in the Central and Western Adirondack Park*.¹⁶ The study is a review of existing tourism data, along with an analysis of a 1997 mail survey of businesses and business professionals in study region. 258 surveys were returned, or 28% of those mailed. 218 were mailed to Old Forge – Eagle Bay - Thendara area with 27%, or 54 returned. Respondents said that profitability in 1997, as compared to the prior

¹⁶ Holmes, Timothy and Bryan Higgins, Saranac Lake, NY: Holmes & Associates and the Wildlife Conservation Society. See www.adirondackresearch.com for more information.

three years on a scale of 1 to 7 (best) was 4.7 in the Old Forge area, exceeded only by the North Creek area. Same relative responses to questions on the importance of tourism and changing quality of life - Old Forge respondents gave a 5.8 to importance of tourism to local economy and 4.7 to changing quality of life, again only behind North Creek in positive perspective.

Old Forge area respondents made Spring and Fall recreation the number one priority, followed by better parking and improved promotion. Also noted was the need to improve the quality of attractions and develop new ones. Snowmobiling was reported as having the greatest economic potential region-wide, with cross-country skiing, bicycling, and downhill skiing cited as offering the greatest economic potential for respondents in the Old Forge sub-region. Easily the leading obstacle to business growth was “qualified labor”.

Other leading issues raised in this study included:

Labor market issues are described as the biggest problem for business operators.

Local individuals or families - motivated entrepreneurs, typically run regional businesses are active and interested in improving their businesses.

The high quality of the natural environment is the major tourism strength of the region. However, *carrying capacity* (the limit of a place up to which it can support certain activities before becoming degraded) and recreational user conflicts, especially on lakes and rivers, is seen as the emerging problem.

Respondents see high potential in focusing on winter recreation and gaining or maintaining high quality in service and products. There is also a substantial demand for improved “intermodal” transportation projects – bicycle trails, public transportation, shuttle buses for employees and visitors, and links to train stations.

There is an acknowledged need for tourism planning which should be based upon coordinated efforts of systematic data collection and analysis and use of data that has already been collected. Such planning would also take advantage of the opportunities for “shoulder season” tourism development.

3.8 Infrastructure

The road system is comprised of 21 miles of State Route 28 that pass from southwest to northeast, the Town of Webb contains 25 miles of county roads and 69 miles of town roads. According to New York State Department of Transportation statistics, Webb has a total of about 115 miles of road serving its 466 square miles. In New York State it is common for a Town half this size to have comparable road mileage.

Air access to Webb is currently limited to seaplanes on the lakes and medical evacuation from selected sites via helicopters. A private landing strip facility was closed down in mid 1980s. The need for such a facility is often cited as integral to the future economic, quality of life, and emergency services vitality of the Town.

Electricity for the Town of Webb and all surrounding towns is supplied by Niagara Mohawk, Power is provided by a single 15,000 volt primary volt feed from the south. There is no alternative primary service. Telephone service along the Route 28 corridor is provided by Citizen's (Frontier) Communications.

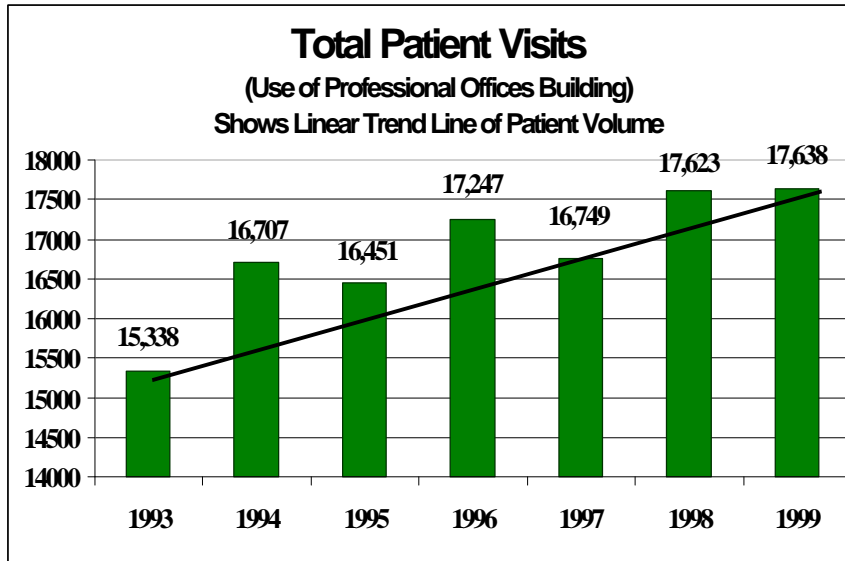
Internet service is provided by a dialup Internet service provider Logical Net (Capital Net – Telenet) with 56k bps (bits per second) capability. Limited cable television service is provided by Adelphia Communications. Marginal on-air service is available from Utica, or Syracuse, or Watertown. Cable internet service is under development. Several neighborhoods still lack of coverage of cable television service. Townwide lack of broadband Internet connection remains commonly cited as a priority infrastructure need.

Much of the hamlets of Old Forge and Thendara are served by the Old Forge Water and Sewer Districts. The remaining hamlets and outlying portions of the Town remain on individual septic systems and wells, except for a limited number of community water systems under Department of Health regulations, such as Eagle Bay Park.

3.9 Health and Emergency Services

The Town of Webb Professional Offices (TWPO), commonly referred to as the Health Center, provides a variety of health related services: family practice physicians, dental, physical therapy, dermatology, well-child clinics, school immunizations, laboratory technicians. The operating expenses of the Professional Offices are primarily funded by the Webb taxpayers (95%), who provide for the rent, maintenance, insurance and some ancillary staff members. In 2000, TWPO operating expenses were \$322,000 and budget plans generally increase by 4% annually.¹⁷ A small portion of funding comes from the Towns of Inlet, Forestport, and Long Lake.

¹⁷ See interview September 3, 2001 with Laura Cooper, Town of Webb Professional Offices RN, Administrator, p. 1



The Town of Webb Health Center Fund, Inc., a non-profit, volunteer, private sector partner with the Town government, was organized in the mid-1960's in order to provide a local source of capital for medical equipment and other related needs of the Town of Webb Professional Offices. According to a chart prepared for their annual report in 2000, patient visits have risen from 15,000 to nearly 18,000 per year from 1993 to 1999. Recent data indicates that patient visits have remained at approximately 17,600 per year, though some patients have been turned away, particularly those who require an acute care facility.¹⁸

¹⁸ Ibid, p. 2

Law enforcement is provided by Town of Webb Police, New York State Police (who share the Town office in Old Forge), the Herkimer County Sheriff's Department (water patrol only), and the Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC). The Police Station was opened in 1988 with a portion leased to New York State Police. A Chief of Police and four full-time officers staff the Town of Webb Police Department.

The Town of Webb depends upon a variety of public, private and non-profit services to provide for the health and safety of its citizens. These include the Town of Webb Professional Health Center (see above), The Town of Webb and State Police and County Sheriff's Department, the fire and ambulance services in the Town of Webb Fire District and Inlet, the Department of Conservation (DEC), Public Health Nurses, The Red Cross, Home Aide Services of the Central Adirondacks (HASCA), and Community Transportation Service (CTS).

Volunteer Fire Departments in Old Forge, Eagle Bay, and Big Moose cover the Town and participate in a mutual aid arrangement with the nearby Inlet, Otter Lake, Woodgate, and Raquette Lake Fire Departments. The fire departments also provide local ambulance service, with most patients being transported to hospitals in Utica.