

Report and Recommendations of the Swan Lake Sub-Committee for the Town of Liberty
Comprehensive Plan

Membership and process.

The members of the sub-committee were David Weiss, Michael Barton, Marilyn Wood, Abe Rutner, Nancy Levine, Tim Eronymous and Mike Edwards. Mike acted as note-taker and converted those notes into a draft of this report, which was then edited and approved by the rest of the sub-committee. We met three times face-to-face and carried on a regular email exchange between meetings.

To facilitate our work we divided responsibility among the members to lead on particular topics as follows:

Marilyn - economic development, agritourism and recreation.

Abe - traffic management and retail development.

Nancy - visual character of the hamlet and its surroundings

Michael B. - infrastructure, water and sewer

Mike E. - natural resources and environmental conservation

David and Tim – out of the box thinking on other topics

Introduction to Swan Lake.

Swan Lake is a hamlet of less than five hundred full-time residents but part of a much larger Swan Lake postcode which sits mostly in the Town of Bethel. This sub-committee and its report focuses only on that part of Swan Lake that sits within the Town of Liberty, but obviously the Town line is an artificial division because what happens on each side of that line affects the welfare and development of those who live on the other side (the Town line is the orange line marked on the map on page 2).

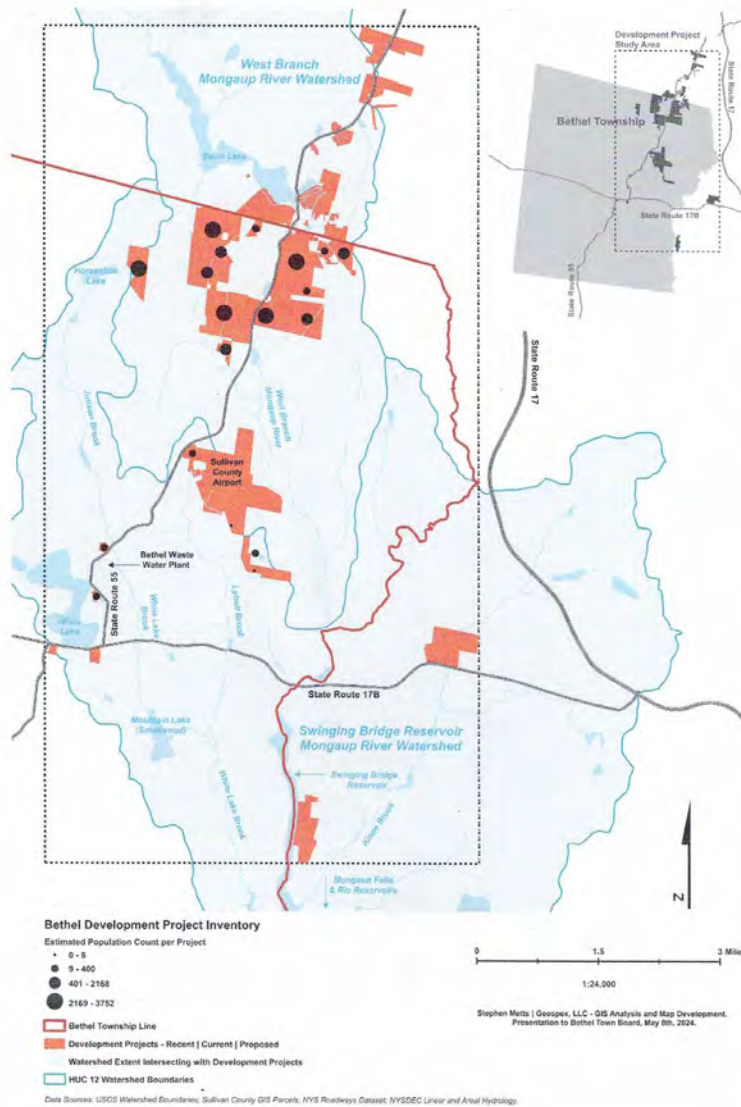
This is particularly important for Swan Lake because a substantial amount of high-density residential development has been approved on the Bethel side of the Town line. According to a study undertaken by Professor Steven Metts of Geospace LLC¹, the full build-out of these developments and of others in the pipeline will add many thousands of additional residents to the Bethel side of Swan Lake.

The impact of this increase on water, wastewater disposal, roads, traffic, public safety and the environment would obviously be huge, and must be taken account of by the Town Boards and Planning Boards on both sides of the Town line, as well as the Comprehensive Plans of both

¹ <https://www.bethelroundtable.com/mapping-project>

Towns. To date however, there has been no coordinated planning or joint impact analysis of such a large and rapid population increase.

We therefore recommend that at a minimum, a joint meeting of the Liberty and Bethel Town Boards be held with full public participation as part of the ongoing Comprehensive Plan process to understand the implications and plan ahead for Swan Lake's unprecedented short and long-term population expansion.



The *hamlet* of Swan Lake lies mostly within the Town of Liberty and is bisected by State Route 55 and Stanton Corners and Briscoe Rds. Swan Lake itself lies entirely within the Town of Liberty and is the Town's largest waterbody, as well as being one of the last remaining large,

pristine lakes in Sullivan County. The hamlet shares the history of the Town as a whole in terms of the rapid expansion of hotels and tourism and the prosperity they brought from the 1940s to the 1970s, followed by the large-scale decline of this industry and its associated economy in the 30 years that followed.

In the last ten years there have been signs of economic revival with a number of new businesses being started along Stanton Corners Rd, Route 55 and Kelly Bridge Rd and at least five sizable residential developments in the same areas, though many of these are seasonal. There has also been a new trend to build large, high-end homes along the lakeshore on Shore Rd and at both ends of Kelly Bridge Rd which presumably bring in large amounts of property tax revenue.

These new businesses include sustainable recreation enterprises like The Domes at Catskills and Beaverwood Farm which offer excellent examples of how the lake, forests and dark skies that surround it can be utilized in the future to promote economic development without harming the environment, natural resources, rural character or beauty and quiet that have attracted people to come to Swan Lake in the past, present and future.

We strongly believe that these natural resources must be preserved at all costs because they provide the only viable anchor for further sustainable economic development which will be truly beneficial for Swan Lake and the wider Town of Liberty.

Swan Lake is also fortunate in having a number of strong community organizations managed by dedicated volunteers which have enhanced the natural beauty, environmental health and public resources of the hamlet. These include the Swan Lake Fire Department and Ladies Auxiliary, Beautify Swan Lake (which sits under the Community Foundation for Orange, Sullivan and Rockland Counties and focuses on maintaining community gardens with valuable assistance from local firm TJE Landscaping), and the Catskill Clean Water Fund, which is directed by local resident Paul Edelstein and is managing a successful 15-year effort to remove invasive chestnut weed from the lake and to ensure that the lake is properly managed in terms of public access and the regulation of boat traffic.

It is important to remember that although the lake is privately owned, it is used for public benefit by those who have fished here for generations or who launch kayaks and small fishing boats from the access point on Route 55, or who enjoy the peace and tranquility of the Swan Lake park and the picnic areas along Briscoe Rd. These community organizations enjoy strong support from the Town of Liberty Parks and Recreation Department, which does an excellent job of maintaining the park, the Swan Lake castle, and surrounding areas. As noted later in this report, we envisage the lake, the park and the adjacent basketball and tennis courts as an anchor for future recreational development.

Our vision for the future of Swan Lake.

We began our discussions by outlining our different visions for the community (see below for each person's full statement). A strong consensus emerged that we all want Swan Lake to be:

- A vibrant and diverse community that welcomes everyone
- A place that preserves and protects its rural character and natural beauty
- With a stronger local economy that provides more opportunities for business and recreation

We further agreed that achieving this vision requires:

- A careful balance between development/growth and preservation/regulation
- Putting essential infrastructure in place *prior* to major new developments (affordable housing which is accessible to everyone, water, sewer, roads, traffic management measures and sidewalks)
- More activities and facilities that will attract people to visit and stay in Swan Lake (tourism and recreational opportunities, places to eat and shop, better parking)
- Improving the visual character of the hamlet (removing/renovating dilapidated buildings, better signage, maintaining gardens, ensuring screening of new developments)

To make these ideas more detailed and concrete we divided these themes among members of the Sub-Committee, who presented their findings for discussion, after which the following ideas and recommendations were agreed.

Economic development, agritourism and recreation.

Additional recreational amenities and visitor-oriented facilities designed to attract more people to the area, support local businesses, and strengthen the local economy are all essential. The overall goal should be to enhance the quality of life for residents while making Swan Lake a destination where visitors will choose to spend several hours or an entire day, rather than simply passing through.

Proposed improvements include the following:

- Kayak, canoe, and paddleboard rentals, including life jackets and oars.
- A designated picnic area with post-mount grills, benches, restrooms, and improved lake access points.
- Better parking facilities and clearer visitor directions.
- Walking and nature trails with appropriate signage.

- Additional food options such as a café, ice cream shop, and casual dining establishment to sit alongside existing options like Tybergs Pizza, J and H and Zaftig.
- Making sure that the J and H Express gas station shop stocks items that visitors may need for recreation, including bug spray, sunscreen, water, and Swan Lake-branded merchandise such as T-shirts.
- Farmers markets and craft markets in the gas station parking lot or the lower parking area at the Swan Lake Firehouse, and seasonal community events to provide more reasons for visitors to remain in the area and contribute to local commerce such as movie nights (already planned by the Swan Lake Fire Department for the ballfield), live music and bands, and Perseids Star Parties in mid-August, when the meteor shower is at its peak. Swan Lake's rural setting and dark skies make it well suited for this type of event, though light pollution from new developments and large buildings needs to be regulated in the Town Code along the lines of the Dark Skies Protection Act² which is currently under consideration at the State level. Lights can be put on timers or motion-activated.
- Establishing a new Swan Lake recreation hub. **Because of the importance of the lake to the Town as a whole, we propose that a recreational corridor be formally established linking Swan Lake with Walnut Mountain and the O and W rail-trail.** A walking trail could be established to link different sites within this corridor. In addition, Swan Lake Park could serve as a local recreation hub with renovated basketball and pickleball courts and a municipal parking lot on land currently owned by David Weiss. As part of these renovations the park could be extended behind or across some of the land currently occupied by the courts with additional picnic tables and a modest boat launch facility. Discussions about how to achieve these goals are actively underway between David, the Town Supervisor, and local volunteers. A transfer of ownership of the affected property to the Town would be essential, and any liability for use of the courts would have to be covered by the Town. Should this transfer be finalized, we believe that funds could be raised to complete these works through a mixture of government grants and voluntary fundraising activities.

Traffic management and retail development.

As is well-known, traffic has increased substantially in the hamlet of Swan Lake as a result of growing residential development and the demand for services like supermarkets and eateries that go with it. Most of this increase in traffic is seasonal, with Stanton Corners Rd increasingly a highway that is choked with traffic during July and August as hundreds of cars weave their way in and out of the shul, supermarket, liquor store, cafe, pizza parlor and post office, as well as drivers who use the road as a cut-through to Route 17. Cars are also regularly parked on both sides of the road. This is an "accident waiting to happen" as the saying goes, and the risks to

² [NY State Assembly Bill 2025-A4615](#)

public safety involved will only grow as new developments expand on the Bethel side of the Town line.

Therefore, we propose a full traffic study be undertaken by the Town Board along Stanton Corners Rd and Route 55 during the summer months (it is pointless to undertake such a study in the spring, autumn or winter). This will provide essential baseline data on traffic patterns that is lacking at present.

In addition, expanded municipal and commercial parking capacity is required to take cars off the roads while people are visiting shops and other services. One option would be to set new retail and commercial spaces further back from Stanton Corners Rd with expanded parking facilities in front of them (as with Shoprite in Liberty), something that may require adjustments in the Town Code and Zoning Law. Alternatively, or in addition, such spaces could be provided along Route 55 where more land is available.

One such retail/commercial development has already been approved off Route 55 on the Bethel side of the Town line consisting of two stores, a restaurant and parking for 100 cars, so this may help in drawing traffic away from Stanton Corners Rd. There is also a possibility that another developer will redevelop some of the current buildings on Stanton Corners Rd into a new retail development with more parking set back from the road, but there are no details of this plan as yet.

Visual character of the hamlet.

The visual appearance of the hamlet of Swan Lake has improved considerably in the last ten years, with areas such as the Swan Lake Park, castle and community gardens being well-maintained. Business owners along Stanton Corners Rd have also improved their properties with new design features, and the remodeled Lake Lodge Resort on Route 55 provides an excellent example of how new development can elevate aesthetic standards.

Some eyesores remain, including the line of buildings along Route 55 from the garage to the dam, the old antique store building next to the Fire Station, and the house on Route 55 that has multiple vehicles permanently parked outside (see below for photos). There is also at least one dormitory in the old Stevensville Hotel that has its roof caved in and poses a safety hazard to campers. These buildings need to be remediated as a matter of priority. According to the owner of the buildings between the garage and the dam, these properties will eventually be improved but nothing significant is planned in the next year or two. Local residents may be able to exert pressure to at least have them pressure-washed and painted, and for weeds to be removed around them.

The planned replacement of the road bridge across the outlet of the lake by Sullivan County provides an ideal opportunity to remove the old bridge behind it too, which is decaying and

represents both an eyesore and a public safety hazard, though according to Town and County officials there are currently no plans to do this. Eventually the Swan Lake dam will have to be repaired and the spillway widened in line with DEC requirements, but this is the responsibility of the lake owner.

In terms of future residential development, the sub-committee strongly recommends that mandatory screening be introduced for all projects above a certain size to replace the current discretionary approach of the Planning Board, which results in clear-cutting followed by planting a few saplings which require fifty years or more to produce an effective screen. The goal should be invisibility (or as close to it as possible given topography and other constraints) so that new developments blend harmoniously into the rural landscape of Swan Lake. This will help to preserve the visual character of the hamlet and its surroundings and may also reduce potential community opposition to new developments. The point was made that the porch of Nancy's house (where we held two of our three meetings) is a few hundred feet away from Presidential Estates, yet no houses, other buildings or roads are visible. Leisure Lake Estates on Kelly Bridge Rd is another good example of "invisibility."

To achieve this goal the Town should set restrictions on clear-cutting so that sufficient forest buffers are retained on all sides of a development to provide for adequate screening. These restrictions will need to be written into the Town Code. As an example, the Town of Rockland is developing a new Local Law to govern clear-cutting as part of its own Comprehensive Plan update³.

Beautify Swan Lake and local volunteers will continue to care for the gardens that enhance the look of the community. Help from the Parks Department in caring for the Swan Lake park and surrounding areas is greatly appreciated.

Natural Resources and Environmental Conservation.

It is striking that the Town of Liberty puts little structured effort into environmental conservation in an area of such outstanding natural beauty. We believe that this must change to have any hope of protecting the rural character, natural resources and future economic and fiscal viability of our community. **The Town's new Comprehensive Plan should include specific goals and strategies designed to protect open spaces, dark skies, viewsheds, forests, lakes, rivers, wildlife and scarce environmental resources of all kinds.**

The starting point of this effort should be a written environmental action plan which includes a map of all areas and resources that the Town wants to protect. This plan can also be used to kick start the process of designating Swan Lake and other places as Critical Environmental Areas, and signing up to the Hudson Valley Community Preservation Act, which was recently extended to cover Sullivan County.

³ [Supplement-To-the-Comp-Plan-2.pdf](#)

In the longer term we suggest that interested volunteers and community organizations in Swan Lake work with the lake owner and the Town, County and State to explore whether a higher authority might be interested in taking over and protecting the lake and its surroundings as a public resource in perpetuity along the lines of Lake Superior State Park in Bethel, which is owned by the State and operated by the County. Another option is to find a new owner for the lake who will fix the dam and preserve the lake for future generations to enjoy – perhaps a non-profit with deep pockets like the Open Space Institute. In the meantime, the Catskill Clean Water Fund and local volunteers will continue to care for and manage the lake in order to control invasive species and limit boat traffic from non-residents.

Recent changes to the New York State SEQRA Law at the state level and new affordable housing legislation that has recently been introduced at the federal level will reduce the ability of the Town and its residents to evaluate the environmental impact of new residential developments below a certain size. Therefore it is critical that Liberty's own Town Code and Zoning Law are adjusted to fill this gap.

Given the large and rising number of Airbnbs and other short-term rentals in Swan Lake and a spate of recent complaints concerning noise, over-crowding, parking and parties late into the night, the Town needs a policy that regulates their use and specifies detailed regulations around noise and other disturbances. The Building Department should have the responsibility to enforce these regulations.

Infrastructure, Water and Sewer.

We feel strongly that essential infrastructure such as water, sewer and roads should be in place before any major expansion in commercial or residential development is approved so that any negative impacts on private or public wells and waterbodies can be anticipated and mitigated. This also applies to basic information on the status of aquifers, wastewater discharge into local streams and rivers, traffic patterns and other public resources. At present such information is largely lacking.

The Delaware River Basin Authority has already carried out an aquifer study⁴ but this is not specific to Swan Lake and only gives data for the Basin as a whole. It concludes that at present, the rate of water withdrawal from the aquifer is sustainable. Dean Farrand is conducting a study of private wells in the Town, and the County says that it is conducting a countywide study of the condition of all our aquifers, but no results have yet been made available. Once the findings of these various studies are made known we will be in a better position to decide whether specific research is required on water issues in Swan Lake given the rapid expansion of residential developments on the Bethel side of the Town line. There is already some evidence from other

⁴ [SOTB2025.pdf](#)

parts of the hamlet like Kelly Bridge Rd that some private wells are suffering declines in yield and water quality, with filters having to be replaced at shorter intervals.

The Swan Lake Wastewater Treatment Plant (which serves a large part of the hamlet) is in the process of being expanded and upgraded (assuming adequate grant financing can be secured), but the condition of the pipes in the Sewer District also needs checking since these are very old and infiltration is already a substantial problem. This includes the pipe that carries the sewer main under the old bridge across the Swan Lake dam which has not been inspected in many years. The key is to do whatever research is necessary *before* problems arise.

Action points for the Swan Lake community.

- **Organize an expanded program of community activities designed to attract more visitors**
- **Participate in a joint effort to rehabilitate the basketball and tennis courts and turn this whole area into a new and expanded recreation hub**
- **Initiate discussions to obtain Critical Environmental Area status for Swan Lake and explore options for future ownership and use of the lake**
- **Continue to maintain community gardens and other public spaces in partnership with the Town**
- **Continue the program to eradicate invasive chestnut weed from the lake and promote effective lake and boat traffic management**
- **Work with the owners of designated dilapidated buildings and the Building Department to achieve appropriate renovations and improvements**

Action points for the Town of Liberty.

- **Organize a joint meeting of the Liberty and Bethel Town Boards to plan ahead for Swan Lake's unprecedented population expansion.**
- **Undertake a traffic study along Stanton Corners Rd and Route 55 during the summer months.**
- **Produce a written environmental action plan which includes a map of all areas and natural resources that the Town wants to protect.**
- **Adjust the Town Code to include new regulations on clear-cutting, screening and light pollution in developments over a certain size to promote invisibility.**
- **Produce a policy that regulates short-term rentals and specifies regulations around noise and other disturbances.**
- **Undertake a study of the condition of the sewer pipes in the Swan Lake Sewer District including the sewer main underneath the decaying bridge across the dam.**

Our visions:**Nancy Levine:**

As a member of the comprehensive plan committee focusing on the hamlet of Swan Lake, and as someone who has lived here for most of my life, I want to begin by stating that the last comprehensive plan was excellent and thoughtfully prepared. Unfortunately, however, relatively little has been accomplished in Swan Lake since that time, particularly in the area of infrastructure.

As growth continues throughout the region — much of it originating in Bethel — Swan Lake will inevitably experience significant impacts from the increased traffic and population pressures. We must stop putting the cart before the horse and begin addressing these issues proactively before additional development occurs.

Infrastructure improvements are essential. We need sidewalks to improve pedestrian safety, as well as road improvements to better handle the growing traffic volume. Planning responsibly now will help protect both residents and visitors in the years ahead.

At the same time, I sincerely hope we can preserve the natural beauty and rural character that make Swan Lake such a special place. One of the things I value most about Swan Lake is that it has always been a diverse and welcoming community, and I would like to see that continue into the future.

Additionally, we should address the eyesores in the center of Swan Lake and work to enhance and promote the recreational opportunities the lake itself provides. With thoughtful planning, Swan Lake can grow in a way that improves quality of life while still preserving the character and charm that longtime residents treasure.

Mike Edwards:

A vibrant community that is open and welcoming to everyone, economically rooted in well-designed recreational opportunities and other services, and with its natural beauty, rural character and healthy environment permanently protected.

I say this not just because I like lakes and forests and views and open spaces, but because preserving these things is our only route to a viable economic and financial future which generates sufficient jobs and taxes.

Michael Barton:

As a 25+ year resident of the general area in different parts of the county, I think it's important to look at the positive and negatives of growth in other areas of Sullivan County and utilize that information to ensure Swan Lake and the Town of Liberty stays a wonderful place for all. There are lessons to be learned especially from the Town of Fallsburgh where too much was done too quickly without regard to the infrastructure upgrades needed to handle the increasing population which has led to numerous, costly issues for all the taxpayers. Even in Swan Lake itself there are massive upgrades needed to the sewer and water systems before more building can be done. This area wasn't built with future population growth as we are seeing in mind, and that should all be addressed first and foremost before more buildings are constructed in the area. I am all for growth, but it needs to be done responsibly.

Abe Rutner:

I agree that we must preserve the natural beauty of Swan Lake, as nature is the primary draw for both full-time and second-home residents. Regarding existing houses and developments, I believe they should maintain their status quo concerning planning board approvals, including non-conforming bungalow properties. Updating codes is often not feasible if it limits the planning board's flexibility regarding zoning. While the planning board should ensure public input, it is not fair to existing residents to limit their current zoning rights.

Regarding new development, I believe it should ideally not be visible from the road, similar to the Leisure Lake model. Furthermore, however property owners with current zoning should not be subject to down-zoning, as this creates undue hardship and is unfair to the owners.

I think it should be a balanced approach. So swan lake can thrive and stay beautiful.

Marilyn Wood:

I have been a resident of Swan Lake for nearly 26 years, alongside my husband, Paul. We are the owners of BeaverWood Farm, a local destination that welcomes hundreds of visitors each year.

For Swan Lake, I would like the Comprehensive Plan to support a strong sense of community, protect the environment and our quality of life, and encourage development that is appropriate, responsible, and beneficial to the people who live here.

To me, the future of Swan Lake should reflect a balance between preserving the character of the area, supporting thoughtful and sustainable growth, and ensuring the community remains a welcoming place for both year-round residents and visitors.

With its rural beauty, proximity to the metropolitan area, and relative lack of noise, air, and light pollution, Swan Lake has the potential to become a destination for people seeking to enjoy nature while also bringing valuable tourism dollars into the Town of Liberty.

As agritourism continues to grow in popularity, many travelers are choosing shorter but more frequent weekend and day trips within a few hours of home. These visitors are often looking for peaceful rural destinations that offer tranquility and an escape from urban life. I believe Swan Lake could become an affordable, less commercialized vacation alternative that appeals to those visitors.

There are many small, community-focused improvements that could help make Swan Lake more vibrant and appealing. Renovating the courts around the lake and offering boat or kayak rentals could create new recreational opportunities for residents and visitors alike. Reaching out to astronomy clubs in the city could also attract visitors interested in gazing at the stars before dining at local restaurants and purchasing gas and snacks before they head out.

We could also encourage more regular community activity through recurring weekly or monthly flea markets, craft fairs, or seasonal outdoor events featuring food trucks and local vendors. An “ugly produce” market — similar in concept to Misfit Market — could give local farmers an opportunity to sell imperfect or surplus fruits and vegetables in the large parking area at J&H Express, also known as the Swan Lake Country Store.

Other ideas could include an annual water chestnut harvesting competition, outdoor movie nights by the lake, or family-friendly community events where local businesses could participate and benefit.

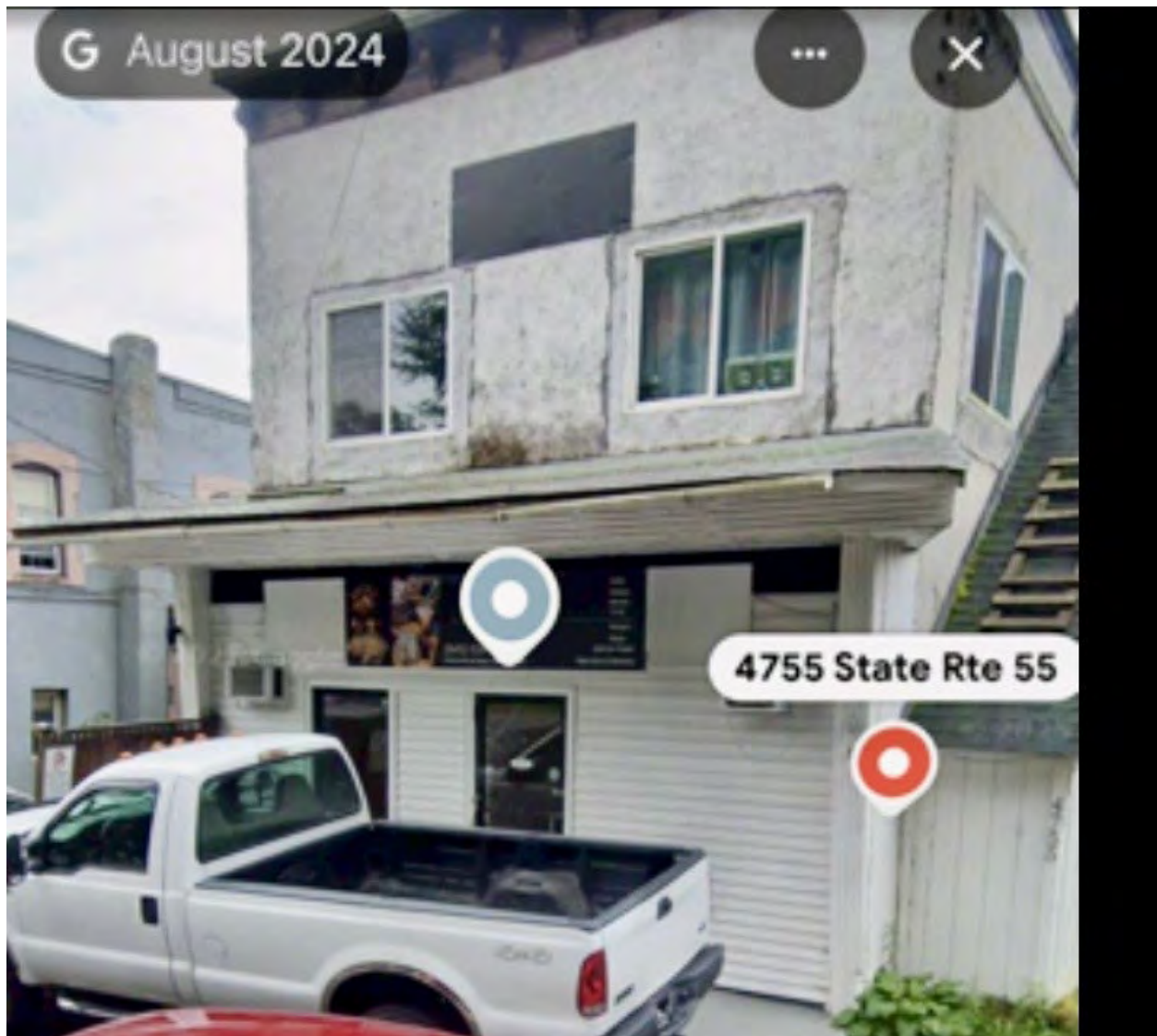
A local e-newsletter, similar to the Catskill Crew, could also help keep residents and visitors informed about upcoming events, local businesses, and community activities.

At BeaverWood Farm, we welcome hundreds of visitors each year, and many of them ask the same questions: What is there to do nearby? Where can we shop, eat, or find local products? That tells me Swan Lake has real potential to become a destination where out-of-town visitors can enjoy themselves while supporting local businesses and contributing to the local economy.

Dilapidated buildings in Swan Lake.



4751 - 4753 State Route 55
44.1-54



4755 State Route 55

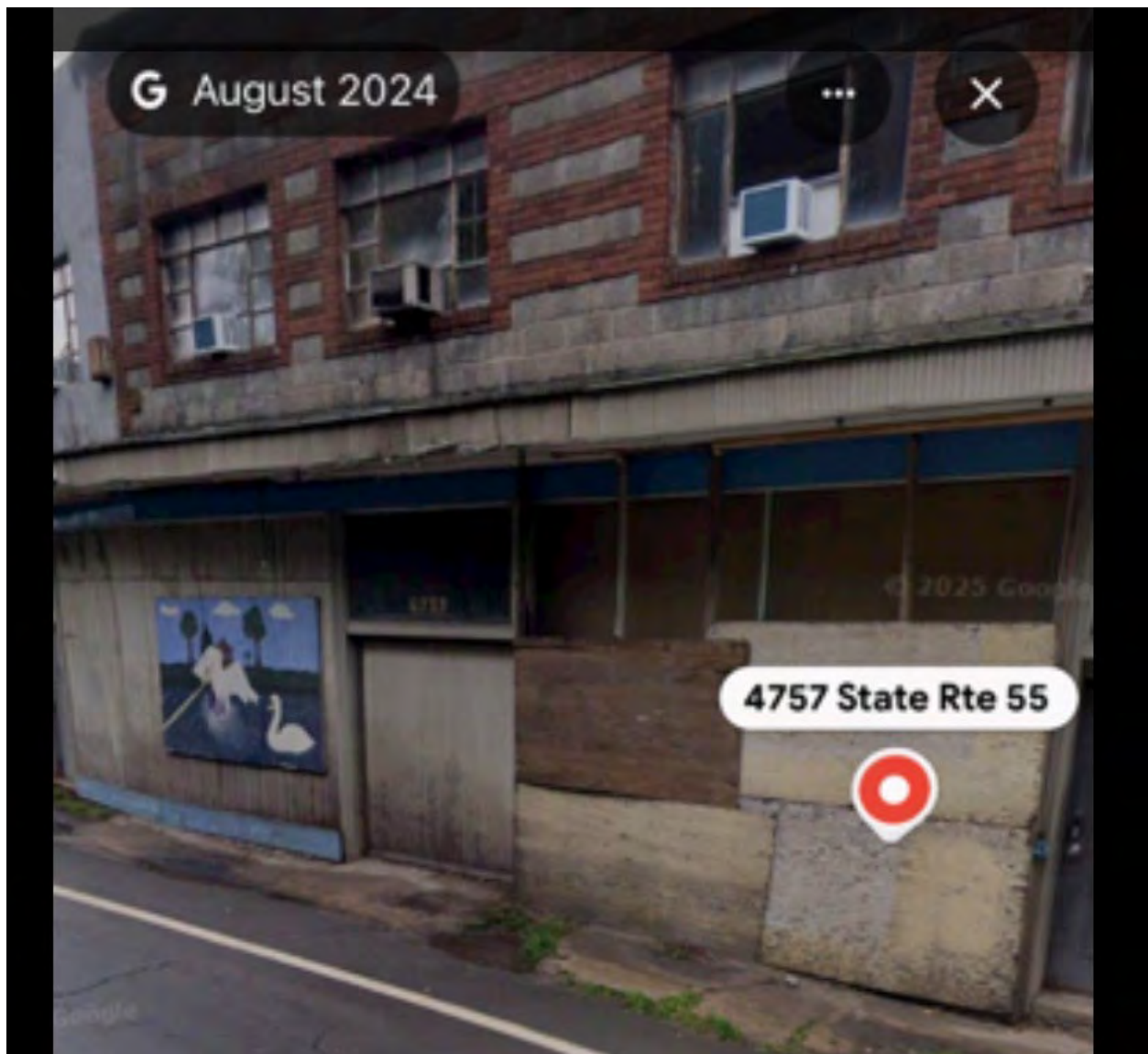
44.1-53

Formerly Mike's Deli

4757 Rt 55 LLC

4 Dallas Drive

Monroe, NY 10950



4757 State Route 55

44.1-51

AR1 Floors Inc

461 Bedford Ave

Bklyn NY. 11211





4765 State Route 55

44.1-49.1

4755 Rt 55 LLC

4 Dallas Dr

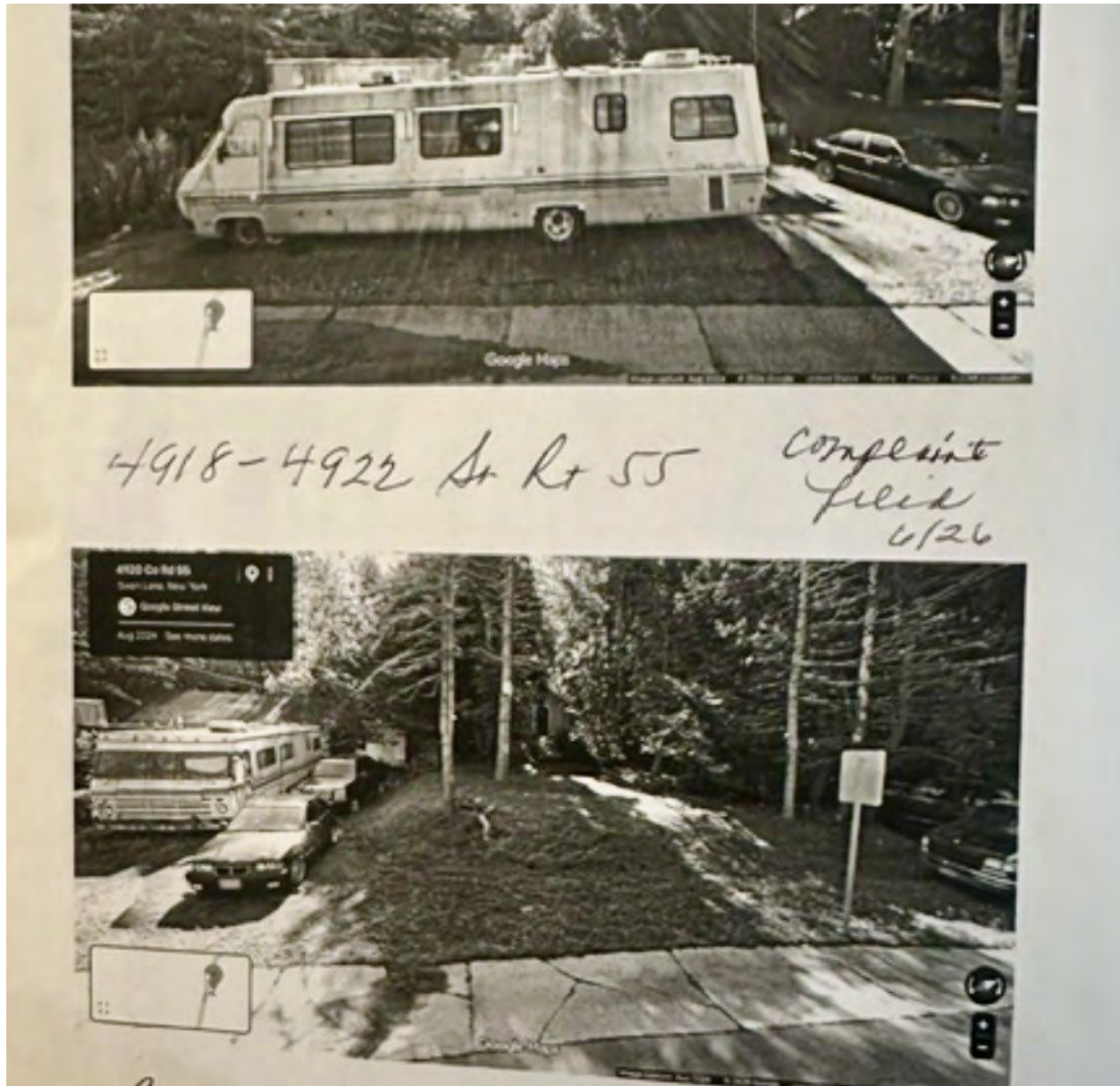
Monroe, NY 10950



46 Stanton Corner Rd
47.-5-11
Swan Lake Gardens II, LLC
173 Wallabout St
Bklyn, NY. 11206



Actually 10 Stanton Corner Rd
47.-5-1
Ganei Yisroel LLC
PO Box 95
Swan Lake 12783



4918-4922 State Route 55
46.-1-4
Estate of Stephen Conklin
34 Seaman Ave Apt 2D
NY, NY 10074



44.-1-21
Briscoe Rd
Congregation Iched Anash
76 Rutledge St
Bklyn, NY 11249