

Dr Michael Edwards
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Frank deMayo, Town Supervisor
Vincent McPhillips, Councilperson
Brian McPhillips, Councilperson
Dean Farrand, Councilperson
120 North Main St, Liberty NY 12754.

September 8, 2020.

Dear Sirs,

Re: Swan Lake Sewer Proposal

As a full-time, year-round resident of Swan Lake and a user of the Swan Lake sewer and water systems I am writing to formalize the comments I made at the public hearing on August 31st concerning the Town of Liberty's proposal to spend \$20 million in upgrading and extending the Swan Lake Wastewater Treatment Plant and sewer system.

When I and my wife arrived in Swan Lake in 2002 we found a diverse rural community in an area of outstanding natural beauty. Since then we have committed substantial time, energy and financial resources to preserving this natural beauty by restoring a historic homestead at the corner of Briscoe Rd and Kelly Bridge Rd, contributing money and volunteer time to community organizations such as Swan Lake Renaissance and the Catskill Clean Water Fund, sitting on the Swan Lake sub-committee which contributed to the development of a new zoning plan and map for the Town of Liberty, and becoming involved in community actions to ensure that all new housing developments comply with local and state laws and regulations. I believe this puts me in a strong position to comment on the proposals you have put before us.

My position is clear: if the Swan Lake sewer system is not in compliance with local and state laws and regulations and is unable to cope with the demands currently placed upon it, it must be fixed in a way that respects and preserves the existing character of Swan Lake and offers value-for money in terms of the improvements proposed and their projected costs, their impact on the tax base of the Town and the cost of services provided to its residents, and the sewer requirements of those of us who currently live here. Your proposal achieves none of these things, and therefore I must oppose it.

By your estimates it will cost approximately \$10million to fix the current Swan Lake sewer system. The extra \$10million is to provide for additional residential development in the sewer district, amounting to roughly a doubling of the current number of dwelling units and sewer users. This level of residential expansion in a very small area will have a disastrous impact on the rural character of Swan Lake. It will also place those of us who live here in greater danger of road accidents and other consequences of adding hundreds of new homes and thousands of extra vehicles to roads that are already in high usage.

These roads are already deteriorating rapidly, imposing higher maintenance costs on taxpayers. There are few places to park safely in Swan Lake, inadequate pedestrian sidewalks, and no crossing points or traffic signals. Speed limits are confusing and inconsistent and there are no traffic management plans. Every day in the summer months I witness accidents or near accidents outside my house. With double or triple the number of residents these incidents will only increase. It is only a matter a time before someone is seriously-injured, or killed. The Town of Liberty will be liable for the consequences.

In addition, your proposal provides a series of projections concerning the expected impact of the sewer proposal on the town's tax base, but you only include data on potential contributions through tax revenue from new dwellings, ignoring the fact that all new development creates an additional cost of services provided in the form of roads, schools, water, parks, public safety and other essential services. Every piece of research I have found shows that for every \$1 a new dwelling contributes to the local tax base, between \$1.50 and \$1.75 is expended in the increased costs of such services. If these data do not exist for the Town of Liberty I hope you will use one of the tried-and-tested methods that are available to calculate them.

Hence, the net impact of the new developments you envisage on our taxes is likely to be negative, not positive, even if the per-capita costs of the actual works involved are spread across a larger number of users. Given that we already pay some of the highest taxes in America, this is simply unacceptable, especially for those in the district who live on low or fixed incomes. Your proposal effectively forces residents of the district to subsidize the up-front infrastructure costs of new housing developments, costs which developers should carry for themselves.

Your proposal also states a blanket cost of \$20million for the proposed sewer improvements - a very large amount for a district with 371 service connections - but fails to break these costs down in any detail whatsoever. The plans you have made available for this project on the Town's website simply provide a list of proposed works without any financial information attached to them. It is therefore impossible to judge whether your estimates are accurate or necessary to complete the improvements required.

It is highly misleading to present a document to a public hearing that presents data selectively and inadequately in this way. In effect, you are omitting the information the public requires to make an informed decision on what you are proposing.

Finally, there are much better options available to fix our sewer system and simultaneously protect the distinctive character and natural beauty of Swan Lake without imposing such a high, additional burden on taxpayers: namely, to use the same low- or no-cost financing mechanisms to fix what needs to be fixed at half the cost (or less), while including a small amount of additional capacity to cater for carefully-planned development that focuses on the highest-possible value-added uses in terms of the ratio of tax revenue to cost-of-services. These uses are commercial development, agricultural development, vacant land, and residential development of single-family homes, in that order. The least cost-effective form of development is to add multiple-family homes at medium to high-densities, which contribute less per capita in terms of tax revenue but impose a much higher burden on town services.

I would also suggest that you obtain an extension from the relevant authorities so that we all have more time to consider the options available and come to some sort of alternative which meets the interests of all of Swan Lake's residents. This would be far-preferable to years of litigation, counter-litigation, investigation, freedom-of-information and other requests that are needed to make thoroughly-informed decisions on the matter.

The future of Swan Lake - and indeed the whole of Liberty - depends on our ability to attract and retain talented and energetic people from all walks of life, backgrounds, occupations, ages, income levels, and faiths. At the moment the reverse is happening: we are losing people every day (including some of my neighbors). Destroying the natural beauty and distinctive character of the area will only make that situation worse.

Therefore, I respectfully ask that you do not approve the current proposals for the Swan Lake Wastewater Treatment Plant at your Town Board meeting on September 16.

Very truly yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'M Edwards', with a long horizontal flourish underneath.

(Dr) Michael Edwards