

# Research Paper #6: SWAN Neighborhood Snapshot (12/21/2023)

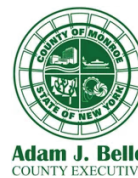


Prepared by Nicole Pratt, MS, Research Associate; Rafael Rivera Jr., BS, Research Assistant; Melina Golembiewski, Research Assistant; and, Janelle Duda-Banwar, PhD, Director.

[onthegroundny.com/about](http://onthegroundny.com/about)



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Adam J. Bello  
COUNTY EXECUTIVE



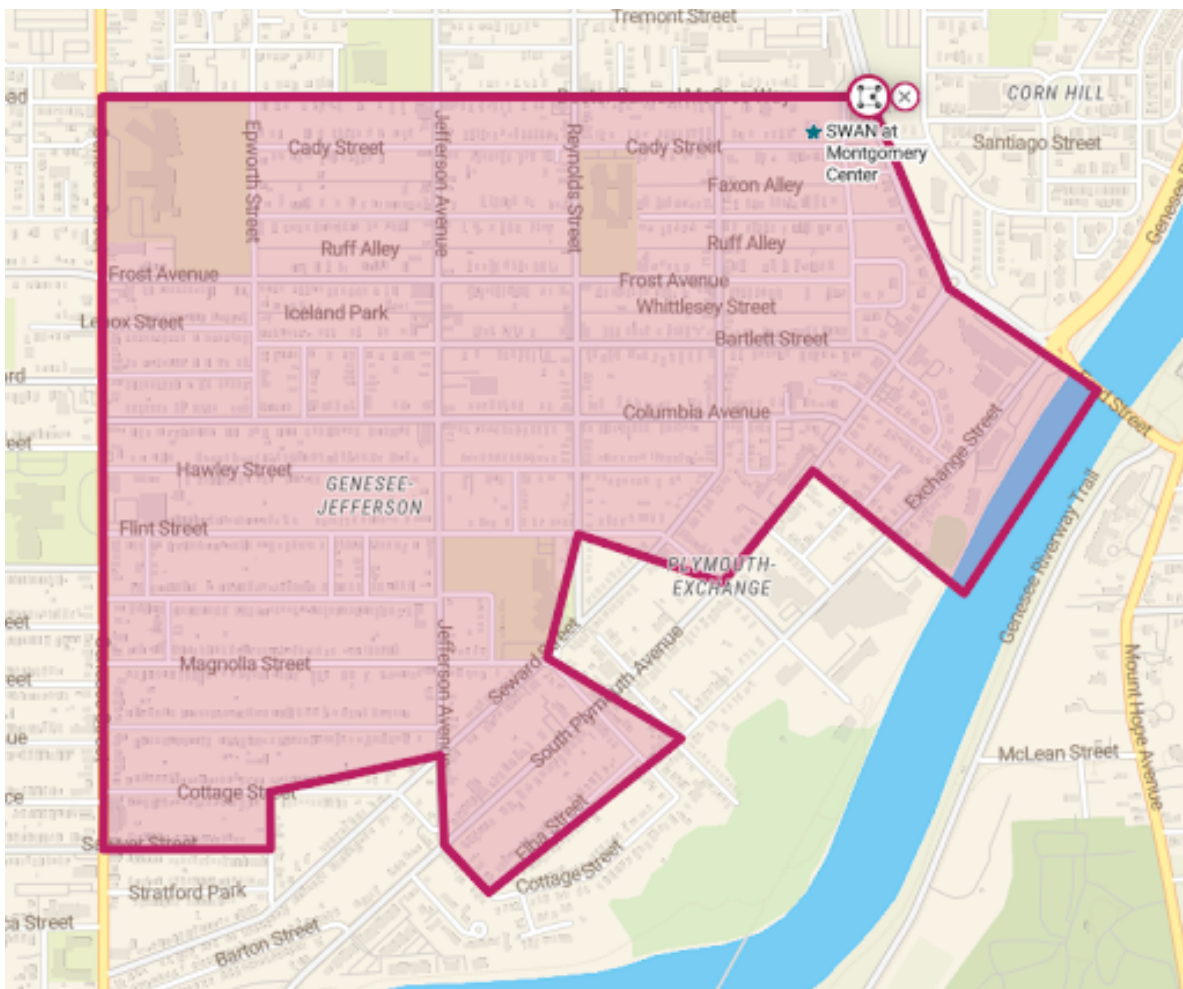
Image credit: swanonline.org/

The S.W.A.N. Neighborhood is full of rich history from cattle drivers to passionate activists, and in the 1850s the area was a bustling center. The S.W.A.N acronym stands for the Southwest Area Neighborhoods. Today, the culture of the area is described as having an urban-suburban mixed feel with it being a primarily residential area. The purpose of this paper is to look at the strengths, challenges, and culture of the S.W.A.N. neighborhood. This is a series of three research papers highlighting the three quadrants that the Neighborhood Collaborative Project (NCP) is focused on bringing services back into these neighborhoods. (For more information on the NCP see [rocncp.org](http://rocncp.org).) While writing this paper, the On the Ground research staff interviewed Marvin Hymes, a longtime resident of the neighborhood who has experience working in both the Montgomery Center and MC Collaborative. Marvin is currently employed with MC Collaborative as a social determinants of health worker for the NCP.

## Demographics

The community of S.W.A.N. is less demographically diverse than other neighborhoods, with 81% identifying as Black or African Americans. There is a relatively low immigrant population within the neighborhood of 6% and a low percentage of 5% that speak a primary language other than English which is lower than the 2022 estimated national average of 22%. The average median age within the community is 33.7 years old. According to Marvin, *“In Jefferson, it's more or less like you move down the street, you don't move away.”*

In reference to the fact that there is a subset of individuals that have been in the neighborhood for years, only moving to different parts of the area, as this is the place they call home. There is a high population of people with disabilities within the community, with just under a quarter having a disability. Of the people with disabilities in the neighborhood, almost half are unemployed and 30% are living in poverty. This is made even worse as the neighborhood is a medically underserved area which directly affects those living with disabilities.



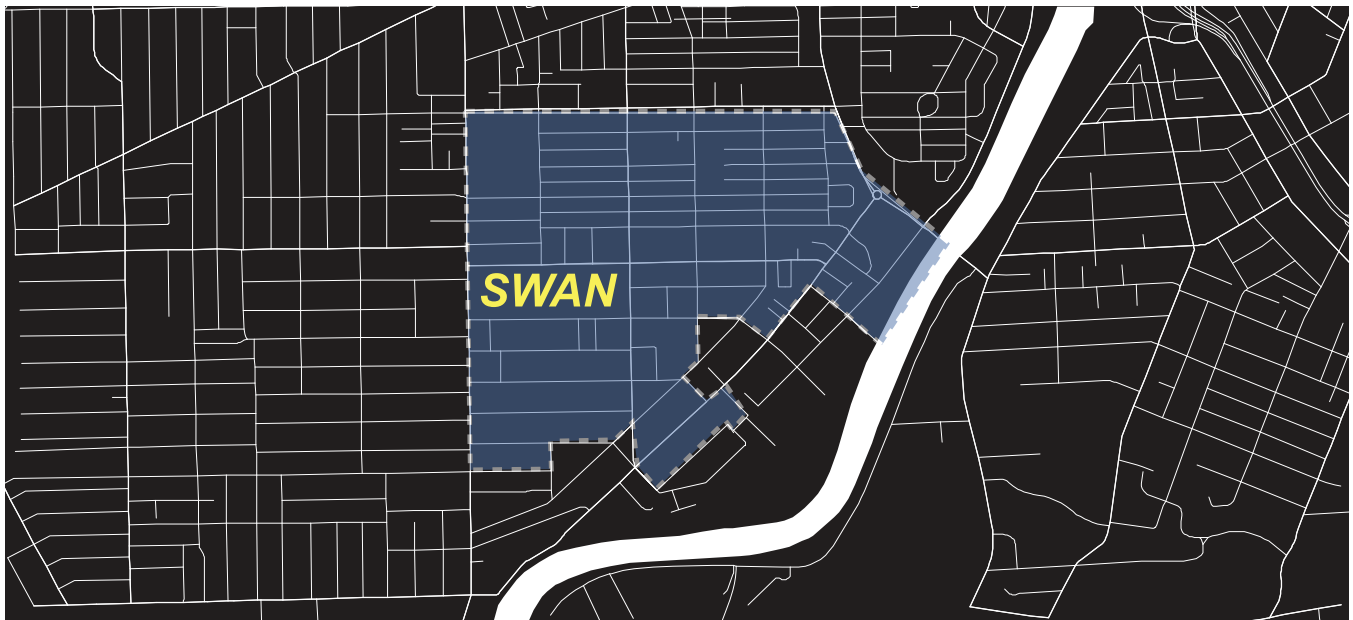
The map above shows the outline of what the Neighborhood Collaborative Project has identified as the Southwest NCP impact area. The neighborhood described in this paper, the S.W.A.N Neighborhood, overlaps with these boundaries.

## Income

Since the early days of the neighborhood's bustling economic status in the 1850s, many businesses have left, making the area primarily residential while leaving behind many vacant buildings and lots. The community suffers from a generally high inequality rating according to the Gini Index (.39-.55). The Gini Index is a measure of income inequality ranging from 0-1, where 0 is perfect equality, and 1 is perfect inequality. The average median household income within the area is \$29,171 which is less than half the median income of the US. Over 40% of the neighborhood is living in poverty. Due to the harsh economic conditions of the area, the upward mobility rate is between 1-2% for low income families in the area. Upward mobility is the rate that individuals are able to move to a higher social or economic position. To compare, the upward mobility rate for Monroe County is 16%. While commenting on the needs of the neighborhood, Marvin stated:

*"When you lack income, you lack the knowledge and resources [to get out of poverty]"*

According to Marvin, the low rates of upward mobility are because of a lack of opportunities for people to move up the social or economic ladder. Because of this, the ability of people with low income to sufficiently improve their economic status is very low. When it comes to housing within the neighborhood, there is a very high housing turnover rate in this neighborhood. There are blocks where 84% of the residents moved into their homes since 2011, indicating that only about 15% of the current residents have lived in the neighborhood for more than ten years. Along with this, 16% of the lots in the neighborhood are vacant. This could be caused by the harsh economic conditions within the neighborhood.





## Education/Employment

The economic diversity of employment is very low within the community. This is because a large percentage of the employed residents (40%) are in service jobs and 29% are in business & science occupations. When asked about the job situation affecting the Southwest area, Marvin replied that an overwhelming amount of the jobs offered to the community members are temporary, meaning most employed residents do not have a stable source of income. In 2021, 32% of the Southwest population were living below the poverty level, despite there also being a 119% increase in married-couple families who are both working and 10% of the community work more than one job. In addition to this, one can also conclude that the majority of people do not work within the community/close to their home as most people either drive to work or take public transportation. Only around 2% of the community works from home and 1% walks to work. Further, the majority of workers have not received higher than a high school diploma.

There are five public schools located within the neighborhood, three of which are Pre-K to 6 or 8 and two that are high schools. All five serve primarily minority students and the majority are economically disadvantaged, which is reflective of the neighborhood. The highest rated elementary school is the Joseph C Wilson Foundation Academy which is ranked 7th in Rochester City School Districts Elementary Schools. However, all of the elementary & middle schools within the community provide education well below national standards. The two highschools are Rochester Early College International High School (RECI) and Joseph C Wilson (JCW). Between the two high schools, RECI provides better education than JCW, with a state exam proficiency of 11%, compared to JCW, with a proficiency of 6%. RECI also has a higher graduation rate of 91%, while JCW has a graduation rate of 71%. However, Joseph C. Wilson Magnet High School has a rich history ingrained in the S.W.A.N. community. The school has been around since 1905, and was visited by President George Bush in 1989 to praise the students for their efforts, as the school was one of the 10 best senior high schools in New York at the time. The founder of the Southwest Area Neighborhood Association was also a County Legislator who fought to create the school and after its completion it was one of the highest rated high schools in the US. In 1989 President George Bush visited the school and told the students that “you are an example for the entire world.”

Overall, the majority (60.3%) of the community has earned a high school diploma. In addition, 10% of residents have earned at least a bachelor's degree. This data on education affects is directly linked to employment and upward mobility, as reflected in this neighborhood.

## Crime

In 2022, there were 218 crimes in the S.W.A.N. neighborhood. This was a 12% increase of crimes since 2018. There was also an increase in murders since 2018. In 2018 there were zero murders, however, since then the number has increased as high as 7 in 2021. There were 86 cases of larceny, making up 39% of the crimes. This was a large jump from the 65 that happened in 2021. One disheartening pattern in 2022 is that every school in the neighborhood had a crime occur there. Overall, crime has increased in the past few years resulting in more fear for the families living within the neighborhood.



## Culture

Although there has been much change throughout the years in Southwest Rochester, with less people going outside, many cultural aspects in the S.W.A.N. community are still alive. Also, according to Marvin, the southwest has a lot of festivals during the summertime, such as the Aberdeen Square Fair, which has a positive impact on the culture.

The neighborhood is home to the Phillis Wheatley Branch Library and a few parks that are scattered throughout the neighborhood. One major hub is the S.W.A.N. at Montgomery Center. The center provides support to the community through their program of assisting families with emergency services, providing education to everyone from children to seniors. They also have more fun programs such as arts and crafts events, a youth boxing club and a community garden, which can be seen in the image provided.



In addition to S.W.A.N., another organization in the Southwest Neighborhood is Barakah Muslim Charity. Barakah provides services such as a food pantry, refugee services, and reentry programs. Another cultural hub in the Southwest is the Memorial A.M.E. Zion Church. The church is the oldest African American church in Monroe County, and has been involved with a number of important African American figures. The church is known for providing shelter for escaped slaves freed by Harriet Tubman, giving Susan B Anthony a platform for her last public address, and being the home church of Frederick Douglass. Beyond the Sanctuary, another NCP partner, operates out of the church, and provides services such as a food pantry, client care, workforce development, and more.

Marvin Hymes has lived in Rochester his entire life, moving to different quadrants, but always coming back to the southwest area to interact with the community. He has worked with S.W.A.N since 1998, first volunteering in a substance abuse group after they assisted him in transitioning from street life. Recently, he started his current position with MC Collaborative working with residents to meet their basic needs. Needless to say, Marvin has a deep connection to the community and a strong commitment to helping the S.W.A.N. residents with whatever they need. He is someone who wants to be utilized by the community and offer whatever help he can.