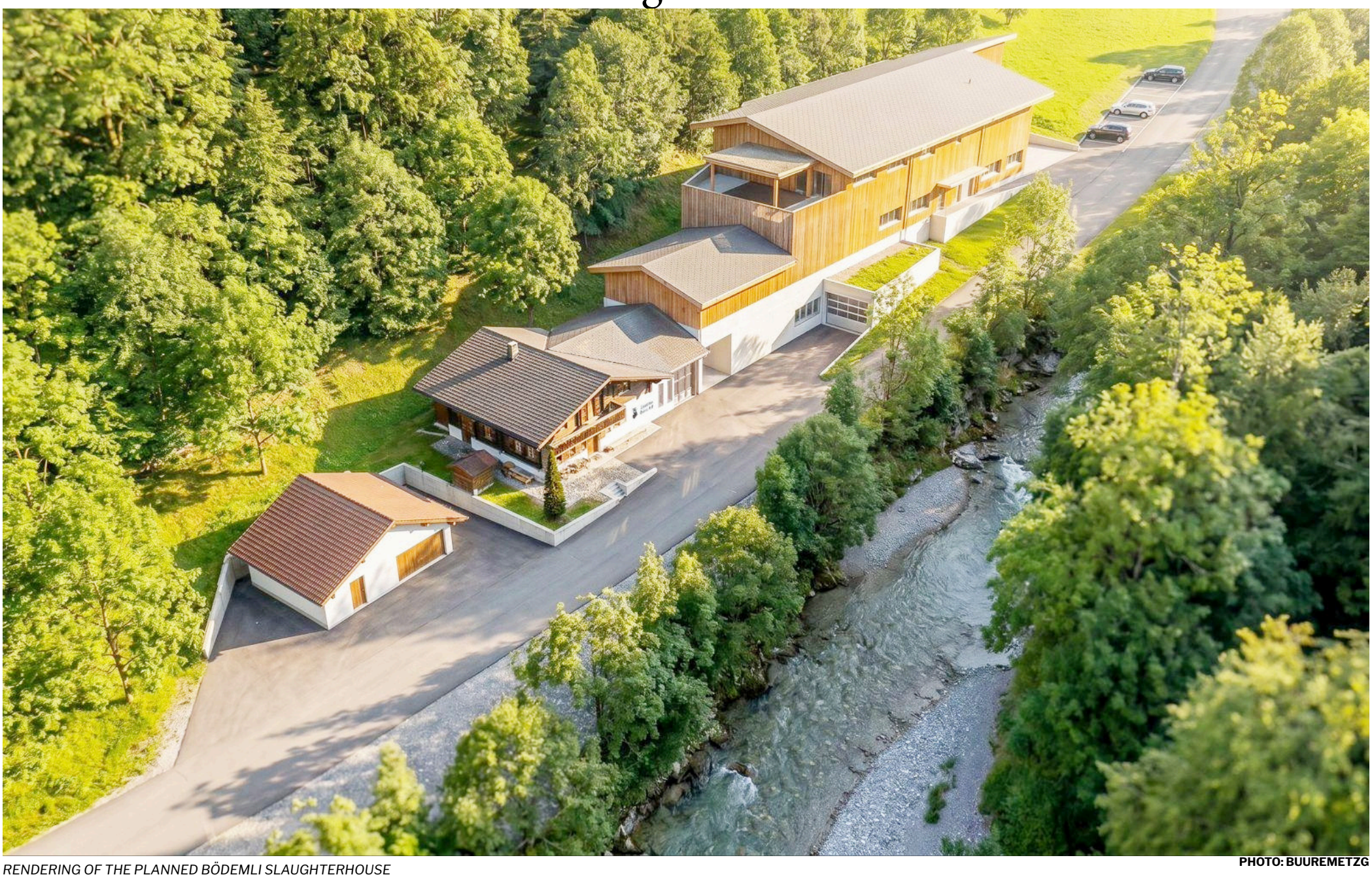
Business

Can Gstaad Keep Its Meat Local?

The Uncertain Future of Buuremetzg AG



RENDERING OF THE PLANNED BÖDEMLI SLAUGHTERHOUSE

PHOTO: BUUREMETZG

By Elisa Oppermann

On most Monday mornings, Rolf von Siebenthal can be found at the local slaughterhouse at Alte Lauenenstrasse 10, not far from the road leading towards Bissen, Wasserngrat, Lauenen and Turbach. Farmers from across the Saanenland bring their animals here to Buure Metzg, the regional butcher with locations in Gstaad, Schönried and Rougemont. Von Siebenthal, who is due to take over the business as part of a planned succession, sees his presence there as part of understanding the operation from beginning to end.

"Most of the time, the farmer whom the animal knows brings the cow or other animal to the slaughterhouse himself," von Siebenthal tells Gstaad Confidential. "It is received there and everything is done as quickly as possible to keep stress for the animal to a minimum." The name itself says something about the business. Buure Metzg is Swiss German: Buure means farmers, Metzg means butcher's shop — essentially, the "farmers' butcher". The name describes its business model remarkably well. According to the company, it works with more than 170 farms in the region.

Locally raised animals are slaughtered and processed nearby; the meat then goes to its own shops as well as hotels, restaurants and other customers. There are differing views on animal slaughter and questions of animal welfare. Von Siebenthal's argument for retaining a slaughterhouse in the Saanenland is primarily a practical one. If meat is to be produced locally and as much of its economic value as possible kept within the region, he argues, the entire chain needs to function locally — from farming and processing to jobs and the end customer.

Only then, in his view, can such a model operate sustainably in both environmental and economic terms.

For a farm, the short distance to the slaughterhouse is important, von Siebenthal argues. A substantially longer journey can be difficult to reconcile with the working day, particularly milking times. Without a local slaughtering facility, he believes animals would increasingly have to be collected and transported over greater distances to larger slaughterhouses.

He cites Oensingen as an example, which can be more than two hours away by livestock transporter. Longer journeys, he argues, also mean greater stress for the animals. But the question extends beyond a single butcher. Agriculture and local production remain a visible part of everyday life in the Saanenland. Cheese is made on the alpine pastures, animals graze only a few kilometres from Gstaad's Promenade, and restaurants can serve meat that often comes from farms in the surrounding valleys. Local production, however, cannot meet all of the region's demand.

That sits in an interesting contrast with Gstaad's development as an international luxury destination. Global brands are now as much a part of the village as family businesses, farms and local producers. To visitors, the two may appear to coexist naturally. For the region, however, the second half of that equation is harder to replace. An international business can, in principle, open in many places. A farm, a local butcher or a production structure built up over decades within a region cannot be recreated quite so easily once it has disappeared.

For Buure Metzg, that question has become very concrete. A new generation is ready to continue the business. What remains uncertain is whether it will have the infrastructure required to do so.

Who Takes Over and Where?

The present structure of Buure Metzg dates back to 1996, when Robert and Marlise Bratschi, together with Martin and Nicole Hauswirth, took over Rudolf Matti's butcher's shop on Lauenenstrasse in Gstaad. Rougemont followed in 1998 and Schönried in 2007. Almost three decades later, another generational change is approaching.

According to von Siebenthal, Robert Bratschi intends to retire. Martin Hauswirth, who is responsible for the Schönried operation, is also approaching retirement age. The plan is for von Siebenthal to take over Buure Metzg. He and his wife are currently advancing plans for the company's next phase. But succession requires more than finding somebody willing to continue.

It requires somewhere from which to operate.

And, ultimately, it requires money. "A project of this size depends on financial support," von Siebenthal says. According to him, the new production site will require external investors to participate in its financing. How that financing will ultimately be structured remains open. But that is a problem for later. First, it must be established whether the project can be built at all

A Site on Borrowed Time

Buure Metzg's headquarters are on Alte Lauenenstrasse in Gstaad. The company carries out slaughtering there, as well as a substantial part of its processing and production, alongside retail sales. It also operates branches in Schönried and Rougemont.

The premises in Gstaad do not belong to Buure Metzg. According to official planning documents from the municipality of Saanen, the original lease ran until 2023. The property owners subsequently extended its use on a transitional basis in view of the already planned replacement project.

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Von Siebenthal says that *transitional arrangement expired in spring 2026. Buure Metzg therefore no longer has a long-term secured basis for its present main site.* He is, however, keen to make an important distinction: the property owners are not the reason the business now finds itself under time pressure. On the contrary. Von Siebenthal stresses the support Buure Metzg has received from them and says he is grateful that the company can continue using the premises despite the agreed extension having expired. He does not expect to be asked to leave at short notice.

That is still not the same as long-term certainty. Buure Metzg also says its present main site has reached — and in some respects exceeded — its structural and operational limits. Municipal planning documents also address the location in the village centre, noting concerns raised during the planning process about the compatibility of slaughterhouse operations with surrounding residential and commercial uses. The significance of Buure Metzg extends beyond its own counters. It supplies restaurants, hotels, shops and other customers throughout the valley.

In a conversation between Gstaad Confidential and Franz W. Faeh, Culinary Director of the Gstaad Palace, about food sourcing, Buure Metzg also featured as a local supplier. For part of the region's hospitality industry, the future of the company is therefore also a question of how locally produced meat might be sourced and processed in future. The proposed solution lies at Bödemli on Turbachstrasse, where a slaughterhouse already operates. The plan is to expand the existing facility, concentrate slaughtering there and at the same time create a new production site for Buure Metzg. That requires an extension of the existing commercial zone.

The need for a new site has therefore been known for years. Finding a way to deliver it has proved more difficult.

Why Is It Taking So Long?

As the Anzeiger von Saanen reported in May, discussions surrounding the project date back to 2018. In July 2020, Saanen's municipal council agreed to proceed with the application to extend the Bödemli commercial zone. A public consultation took place in 2022. The planning process involved, among other things, questions surrounding forest clearance and replacement planting and subsequently had to pass through a preliminary review by the canton. The project was then revised.

Von Siebenthal says *the company deliberately kept the matter out of the public eye for much of this period. The hope was that the outstanding issues could be resolved through the ordinary planning process without turning the butcher's future into a public campaign.*He describes a lengthy exchange with cantonal authorities as planning requirements evolved and further information became available. For a company whose existing premises were simultaneously becoming an increasingly temporary solution, the resulting delays became progressively more difficult.

Eventually, he decided the situation needed to be discussed publicly. Von Siebenthal explicitly says he does not blame the municipality of Saanen. He describes the municipality as supportive. The difficulty, he says, is that a project of this kind does not depend on the municipality alone: zoning, forestry and other planning matters are subject to cantonal procedures and legal provisions that extend beyond a municipal decision.

Politically, the support was unusually clear. Saanen's municipal assembly approved the zoning change by 378 votes to three. On February 4 2026, the Canton of Bern's Office for Municipalities and Spatial Planning approved the changes to the zoning plan and building regulations required for the expansion of the Bödemli slaughterhouse. The remaining objections were rejected. That might sound like the end of the planning process.
It was not.

How Can an Approved Project Still Be Challenged?

For international readers, the Swiss system requires a brief explanation. Municipal approval does not remove the legal rights of people affected by a planning decision. Under Article 60 of the Canton of Bern's Building Act, planning measures concerning basic building regulations or development plans must generally be made available for public inspection for at least 30 days. During this period, those entitled to object may submit a written and reasoned objection. The law also provides for attempts to resolve existing objections before a planning decision is made.

In the Bödemli case, two objections were submitted during the public consultation period. An attempt to reach an agreement in January 2024 was unsuccessful. The objections therefore continued through the approval process.

The canton ultimately approved the zoning change and rejected the remaining objections. An appeal was subsequently filed against the approval decision of the Office for Municipalities and Spatial Planning.

The appeal was submitted to the Canton of Bern's Directorate for Internal Affairs and Justice.

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According to information available to the Anzeiger von Saanen, it reached the directorate's legal office in early March. When the Anzeiger reported on the case in May, proceedings were still pending. No precise date for a decision is currently known.

The crucial distinction is this: the project has not been rejected.
The municipality approved the zoning change. The relevant cantonal authority approved it. Detailed planning can continue and a building application can be prepared.
But until the appeal proceedings are concluded, the zoning change cannot become legally binding. A building permit based on it therefore cannot yet be issued. For von Siebenthal, the problem is increasingly one of time. According to Buure Metzg, the company employs more than 40 people and works with more than 170 farms. Its existing production site no longer offers long-term security.

At the same time, Robert Bratschi and Martin Hauswirth, two longstanding figures in the business, are preparing to step back from operational roles. The intended successor is ready to continue but does not yet know when the facility on which that succession depends can be built. *"If there is no solution now, the business will have to close."* von Siebenthal says

That is his assessment, not a predetermined outcome. The property owners continue to allow Buure Metzg to operate from its existing site, and the Bödemli project remains active. Even if the legal hurdle is removed, the company will then face another challenge: securing the investment required for construction. For von Siebenthal, the case therefore raises a broader question: how much of its own food infrastructure does a region such as the Saanenland want to retain?

Local meat production does not end with raising an animal. It also requires slaughtering, processing and distribution to remain possible within a reasonable distance. According to von Siebenthal, the quantities of regional products sold each year in the Saanenland indicate that there is demand for such a system. The Saanenland will not be able to supply itself with all its food. Von Siebenthal nevertheless sees considerable regional potential in its grassland-based agriculture, particularly dairy and meat production. His argument is narrower: if one link in that value chain disappears, animals can still be raised on local farms. What happens afterwards, however, would no longer be entirely local. He also points to the current drought affecting parts of Europe. The Saanenland, he says, has so far been comparatively spared.
For von Siebenthal, this underlines the value of regional agricultural structures — provided the region retains the infrastructure needed to process what it produces.

His criticism increasingly focuses on the appeal that remains pending. From his perspective, the interests of individual appellants stand against those of farmers, employees and the regional food supply. The appellants, for their part, are exercising a legal right to seek a review of a planning decision. Whether and when the appeal will be withdrawn or decided remains open. Only once the zoning change becomes legally binding can the project move into its next phase. Financing for the new building must then still be secured.

The future of Buure Metzg therefore currently depends on two things that Rolf von Siebenthal can influence only in part: the outcome of the legal proceedings and the financing. The next generation is ready. When it will be able to take over and from which site, remains uncertain.

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