



We build strong kids, strong families, strong communities.

FAQs

How does the Westport Weston Family Y serve the community?

Founded by Westport citizens more than 80 years ago, the Westport Weston Family Y is a private nonprofit organization providing an array of programs and services designed to build strong kids, strong families and strong communities. It is locally operated by professional staff and a volunteer Board of Directors and Board of Trustees, with support from the national YMCA organization when needed. The Family Y is a membership organization that also fulfills a charitable mission in its communities.

The Family Y's Sports & Recreation gymnastics program has enabled youngsters to compete at the national level and the staff of its Aquatics Department has taught thousands of children to swim.

With its American Camping Association accreditation, the Family Y's Camp Mahackeno has been the place to revel in outdoor summer fun for thousands of children. Serving all generations, the Family Y also provides programs dedicated to the health and well-being of adults and senior citizens, including for individuals with special needs.

Its Child Care program, accredited by the National Association for the Education of Young Children, is the largest in Westport providing early care and education for children 6 weeks to 6 years old. The School-Age program operates after-school activities for students in Westport and Weston.

The Family Y's charitable mission provides access to the Y and its programs for those who can not afford them through scholarships, camperships, program discounts and grants for children with special needs. In addition, it supports organizations and/or their members including Interfaith Housing Association, A Better Chance, Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts, CLASP, STAR, the American Red Cross and the Westport Young Woman's League and many others,

Why does the Family Y need to move from its current location?

The current building has approx 86,000 square feet of space of which only 65,000 square feet is usable. This limits the ability to meet the growing programming, activity and service needs of the community. In effect, the current facility is 'bursting at the seams'. For example, childcare is currently located in the basement level and spinning class is in a former office space. Additionally, this facility is wearing down - from leaky roofs and aging pipes, to systems, including the elevator and boiler, in constant need of repair.

The building does not meet new codes and poses potential safety issues for members, staff and other users. Renovation of the current facility or demolition and construction of a new building on the current site was deemed infeasible, and the issue of inadequate parking would still remain.

What is the vision for the future?

The Family Y's vision for the future is to continue its tradition of serving the greater good - and doing so in a modern facility that safely accommodates programs and activities that will serve the community for generations to come. To make this vision a reality, building a new facility at Mahackeno is the best solution.

Why Mahackeno and what is the process to locate the Family Y there?

Member surveys in 2002/03 indicated overwhelming support for a new YMCA and motivated the Family Y to examine its options. After investigating more than 30 sites in Westport, Weston, Norwalk and Fairfield, all of which were rejected for a variety of reasons including, but not limited to, zoning regulations, property size, available programming space and cost, the Family Y boards

determined that the Y's existing 32-acre Mahackeno Outdoor Center property would provide the best location for providing the Westport/Weston community with the world class, modern Family Y it deserves.

The Mahackeno site is of sufficient size for the new facility. It is an accessible location, approximately two miles from the current building and just south of the Merritt Parkway near the intersections of Route 33 and Sunny Lane, also bounded by Lees Pond and Rice's Lane. The location is central to the Family Y service area which encompasses both Weston and Westport. The proposed building, parking area and surrounding grounds use only about 6 acres of the total site, with the balance remaining as open space.

The site plan places the building at the northeast corner of the property adjacent to the Merritt Parkway, and does so in a manner that leverages the naturally sloping terrain to maximum effect. As a result, with the planned two-story building, only one story will be visible from the Merritt Parkway or as you approach the building on Sunny Lane and the building will not be visible from Rice's Lane.

While there are private homes in the area, the building has been sited to impact the fewest number possible. Additionally, the proposed building site is land that is currently used only for parking.

The Mahackeno site removes the need for the Family Y to purchase land, which would add considerably to the overall cost of the project. The sale of the existing Family Y building will further offset the construction costs of the new Family Y.

Still, the Family Y will need to raise additional funds through a capital campaign. After an independent planning study in 2004 showed that 85% of those interviewed were willing to contribute to such a campaign in support of a new Family Y at Mahackeno, the Y launched its Imagine the Possibilities Capital Campaign in 2005. The campaign is being chaired by three prominent Westport and Weston families – the Gaults, the Mitchells and the Taucks.

To assure a world-class facility, the Family Y boards engaged the services of a world-class firm, Robert A.M. Stern Architects, headquartered in New York City with both a global and regional presence. Architectural plans were designed and scaled to be not only beautiful and appropriate for the location, but also feasible and fiscally responsible. The lead architect for the new Family Y is a Westport resident.

Once plans were developed and approved, the Family Y moved ahead with the permitting process toward final approval of the project by all required regulatory bodies and, finally, the Westport Planning & Zoning Board.

What will the new Family Y facility include?

With the close collaboration of the senior staff, the Family Y is planning a facility that will deliver programming, activities and services to meet the needs of a diverse community, today and in the future.

The new Family Y will include a 50-meter pool that will be 25 yards wide. This configuration provides at least 18 25-yard lanes - three times the current capacity - that can be used by the swim team, adult lap swimmers, and the adult masters swim team. A shallow portion will serve for aqua-fitness classes and other activities. The new pool allows for multiple and simultaneous programming opportunities, not possible at the existing facility. In addition it will eliminate over-booking and crowding and will accommodate everyone who wants to sign up for swim lessons or the swim team, without the need to rent space at Staples High School for the senior swim team.

The new facility will be able to offer water polo, diving, synchronized swimming and other activities for which there is currently no pool time. Members will enjoy more open pool time at convenient hours for family fun and lap swimming.

The planned aquatics center will also include a warm-water pool with a lazy river and a slide for family fun, as well as a zero-entry section to accommodate members with physical disabilities or who seek physical therapy.

The new Family Y will also include two high school basketball courts with spectator seating, courts that can also be used for volleyball, badminton and fencing; an expanded gymnastics facility that will accommodate girls who are taller than 61 inches, which the present facility cannot do; an above-ground Child Care Center that has a contiguous playground; an enhanced and enlarged fitness center and more room for aerobics and dance classes.

Outside at the campgrounds there are walking and hiking trails, outdoor ball fields and Lees Pond for fishing and boating activities. Co-locating the new Family Y with the Camp creates a vastly improved, consolidated facility and establishes access for broader public use of this open space.

The indoor space includes programming- and member-oriented space which includes Aerobics; Aquatics Center; Basketball Courts; Child Care; Dance; Fitness; Gymnastics; Racquet Sports and Spin. Administrative Offices, Multi-Purpose Rooms, Lockers, Hallways, Closets, Mechanicals, etc. account for approximately 30,000 square feet.

Will the Family Y have to charge more for Memberships and Programs?

A key motivator for this move is that the Family Y is an important part of the community and must continue to meet the needs and expectations of the individuals within the community - as regards activities, programs, services, facilities and amenities.

In the current facility, the Family Y's ability to meet these expectations is severely compromised and the effects are readily apparent in higher than normal attrition rates for membership and program participation over the past three years.

With the new Family Y it is anticipated that there will be growth in membership, as well as in program participation, and we are studying appropriate scheduling to accommodate this growth as well as the corresponding costs.

Regardless of where the Family Y is located it is anticipated that costs will increase year-to-year as a result of inflationary pressure, even if the Family Y remains in its current facility.

Does the Family Y at Mahackeno fit within the current zoning for the property?

Yes. Town zoning regulations provide for special uses within residential areas "to provide for necessary public facilities and services" and the use is a permitted use. The Mahackeno Outdoor Center currently operates year-round under a special use permit.

The Family Y will be able to meet the Town's land use regulations at Mahackeno but will require the granting of a special use permit in order to build the proposed facility. This would be required for any new Family Y location.

What will the building look like?

Preservation of the character of the land is important and has been incorporated into the planning process, producing plans in which the building has been sited and designed within the context of its surrounding environment.

The building is classic New England design that draws from the heritage and traditions of American camp architecture. It combines aspects of Adirondack "great camps" with the more conservative and straightforward architecture of New England summer camps - like Mahackeno.

What about the concerns of neighbors who live adjacent to the property?

The Family Y has always been a good neighbor, concerned about the best interests of the community and responsible to the needs of the community as a whole. It is planning a facility to optimal conditions and standards that will enhance the appeal of the surrounding neighborhood.

The Family Y will address any and all reasonable concerns of those who live adjacent to the Mahackeno property. To that end, the senior staff has met with, and will continue to maintain open communications with, the neighbors.

It has engaged well-respected consultants to study potential impacts related to the environment, sanitary requirements, and traffic. It is making every effort to address those issues within its control and has begun developing plans for on-site sewage treatment, installation of smart signalization traffic lights, and a dedicated traffic lane to handle vehicle flow. A more than \$1 million investment in traffic improvements will make access, not only to the Family Y, but also to the Merritt Parkway, far better and safer than it is today. The plan is to restrict access through the Rice's Lane entrance to all but emergency vehicles once construction is completed.

Will the building have an environmental impact?

The intent is to make the building as environmentally friendly, or "green," as possible. The architect and engineers have focused on increasing the efficiency with which the building and the site use energy, water and materials.

The plan is to reduce building impacts on human health and the environment through better siting, design, construction, operation, and maintenance throughout the complete building lifecycle.

What is the total cost and how will the project be funded?

The current estimate is \$42 million which includes costs for traffic, septic, site development, building construction, furniture, fixtures and equipment, etc., as well as estimated inflation during the life of the building project.

This project assumes funding from three revenue sources: the capital campaign, sale of the existing Family Y building, and loan proceeds. All expenses for traffic studies, consultants, designs, etc. are being funded by money raised through the ongoing Imagine the Possibilities Capital Campaign. There is no plan to use endowment funds. And as a private institution the Family Y receives no public funding.

What are the details of the planning and approval process for this project?

There are numerous preliminary phases related to a project of this type even before submitting applications for a building permit.

To begin realizing the potential offered by Mahackeno, the Family Y has already completed the following project phases:

- Studied hydro-geologic and geo-technical conditions through drillings and engineering studies
- Surveyed physical, topographic and hydrologic conditions of entire 32-acre property
- Surveyed and mapped wetlands, floodways and other features
- Studied archaeological features

- Conducted traffic studies and analysis; developed preliminary traffic design
- Master-planned, programmed and schematically designed building and ancillary facilities
- Prepared and submitted draft application to CT DEP for proposed septic design
- Studied cost of entire project; conducted detailed value-engineering analysis
- Studied membership, future revenues/operating expenditures associated with facility
- Developed feasible plan of finance for project

The project is advancing through the following planned phases:

- Proceeding toward a tentative determination on septic design from CT Department of Environmental Protection
- Application to Westport Conservation Commission, Flood & Erosion Control Board, various code compliance meetings
- Application to Westport Planning & Zoning and Architectural Review Board
- Other Permits and Registrations; e.g., Army Corps of Engineers, CT Department of Transportation, etc.
- Construction targeted to begin in 2007 with a building schedule of 18-22 months

How can I help *Make Mahackeno Happen*?

- Support the vision
- Ask questions
- Stay informed
- Contribute ideas
- Attend public meetings in support of the Family Y
- Write letters to the editor, Sign Petitions
- Educate your friends and neighbors
- Contribute time or money

Who do I contact for more information or to offer a helping hand?

Helene Weir, CEO
 Westport Weston Family Y
 (203) 226-8981 x131
 hweir@westporty.org