

## **Westport Weston Family Y Submits Mahackeno Application To Planning & Zoning as Final Step in Approval Process**

### **Application to be Considered Under New Town Plan of Conservation & Development**

**Westport CT, December 17, 2007** – The Westport Weston Family Y today submitted its application to the Westport Planning & Zoning Commission, the final step in the approval process for a new Family Y at the Association’s Mahackeno Outdoor Center property. The more than 85-year-old not-for-profit community service organization delayed its application so that it would be considered under the new Town Plan of Conservation and Development, which went into effect on December 15th, thereby demonstrating its desire to be as integral a part of Westport’s future as it has been of its past. The application was developed by a team of well-known and highly experienced consultants to meet all of the P&Z qualifications and requirements. It also complies with the conditions of the Westport Conservation Commission approval.

In addition to the Conservation Commission, the Family Y plan has received approvals from the Westport Flood & Erosion Control Board and the Connecticut Department of Environmental Protection (preliminary and final approvals of the draft permit). In August, the Westport RTM voted to uphold the approvals of the Conservation Commission and the Flood & Erosion Control Board. As with previous application reviews and approvals, the Family Y has committed to cooperating fully with the P&Z process and requirements.

The proposal for Mahackeno, which the Family Y has owned and operated as its summer camp for more than 60 years, represents the culmination of a 13-year search for a new location during which it assessed more than 30 properties in Fairfield, Southport, Weston and Westport – locations that were either inappropriate for siting a Family Y, unaffordable or unavailable. They included the Town-owned Baron’s South, Winslow Park and Imperial Avenue properties, though past and current Town administrations have clearly rejected the possibility of any public/private partnership on Town-owned land.

“This is the moment when we hope the people of this town will accept the stark reality that Mahackeno is the only location that will keep a Family Y in Westport – and it is a wonderful location at that,” said Family Y CEO Helene Weir. “There is no downtown location for us; there is no public land at our disposal; the current facility cannot be renovated to meet the changing needs of our community and it has been sold because we cannot afford to stay in an outdated, inefficient building beyond the next few years. Replacing an old facility is not a situation unique to the Westport Weston Family Y, but is happening around the nation. When viewed on its merits, the new Family Y will be a significant asset to Westport. We hope that Westporters will support our application and our effort to keep the Family Y in town.”

The Family Y application meets the requirements of the established P&Z guidelines, including:

Traffic & Parking – Two studies assessed traffic in the vicinity of Mahackeno over four seasons, including summer when Camp Mahackeno is in session. The studies include comparisons over a number of years and projections through 2009. Traffic impacts of the new Family Y will be mitigated by improvements to Sunny Lane and the Merritt Parkway ramps that the Family Y will undertake at its own expense, estimated at \$1 million or more, resulting in a net neutral impact. These improvements will make access to both the Merritt Parkway and Mahackeno better and safer than it is currently. For parking, the plan submitted to P&Z reduces the number of spaces, significantly decreasing the impervious surface of the property from 10 to seven acres of the 32-acre total. Grass pavers and unpaved overflow parking will provide sufficient room to accommodate any major activities and events.

Smart Growth – The Family Y plan for Mahackeno, designed to protect the natural resources of the area and preserve the character of the community, and the commercial/residential mixed-use plan proposed for its current property are both consistent with “smart growth” principals. The new Family Y prevents the “sprawl” that would result if the property were developed with the 12 single-family residences it could accommodate, and preserves 25 of the 32 acres as open space – which is consistent with the objective of the new Town Plan of Conservation and Development to “preserve and enhance open space” that will encourage “passive recreation.” Further, one strategy of the Town Plan is to encourage private organizations with “managed open space” to remain in town. And the Town Plan objective of encouraging private entities to provide services for the good of the community is an approach that is at the heart of the Family Y mission.

Special Permit Use – The Family Y currently operates under a Special Permit at its Post Road facility and at the Mahackeno Outdoor Center, as do all schools, houses of worship, daycare facilities, senior and arts centers and other similar facilities that abut residential areas in the town. Accordingly, P&Z approval of the application for the new Family Y at Mahackeno will require a Special Permit. A key consideration in granting this Special Permit is to ensure equitable distribution of such permitted uses throughout the town. Unlike other areas in Westport, the section of town near Exit 41 of the Merritt Parkway has only one facility operating under a Special Use Permit – Camp Mahackeno – plus a cell tower, access ramps to the parkway, a restaurant and two houses. In contrast, for example, the area near Exit 42 has two schools and a number of houses of worship.

To develop an application that meets all P&Z requirements and regulations, the Family Y has engaged a team of planning/smart growth professionals, land use experts, traffic and parking consultants and architects from well-established and respected firms including:

Land-Tech Consultants, Inc. – Land-Tech Consultants is a multi-disciplinary environmental and engineering consulting firm established in 1979 to provide professional land use and public works consulting services. The firm works with a variety of corporate and municipal clients, which have included the Town of Westport. Land-Tech is the lead engineering consultant for Mahackeno.

Frederick P. Clark Associates, Inc. – Since 1950, Frederick P. Clark Associates has been providing community planning, development, environmental and transportation services to developers, private landowners, public institutions and communities in the New York-Connecticut metropolitan area, including the Town of Westport. The firm conducted the traffic studies for the Family Y and is consulting on the planned traffic improvements.

Redniss & Mead, Inc. – Redniss & Mead is the leading land-use consultant in the region. With a history dating back to 1957, the firm has a multi-disciplinary staff of licensed Professional Engineers and Land Surveyors, Land Planners and Environmental Scientists who combine traditional skills with creative planning and environmental sensitivity. Redniss & Mead is working with the Family Y to communicate the many ways in which its plans are consistent with smart growth and sound planning principles.

Robert A.M. Stern Architects, LLP – The Family Y has engaged the world-renowned Robert A.M. Stern firm to design a new facility with a sense of place that will become an architectural asset to the Town. The firm is designing the building to LEED environmental standards. It maintains an attention to detail and a commitment to design quality that has earned it international recognition and numerous prestigious awards.

The Family Y has been serving the community for more than eight decades. It is an organization that has had a significant, positive impact on the community by providing a place where people of all ages come together from different backgrounds, faiths, incomes and abilities to develop their spirits, minds and bodies in a warm and nurturing environment. And no one is ever turned away, regardless of ability to play or capacity to pay.

The contributions the Family Y makes to the community are many: financial assistance to members and grants for children with special needs; the largest provider of pre-school day care in Westport; Sibshops, Special Cares and Y-SEPTA Enrichment programs for individuals with special needs; fitness programs and social events for seniors. Through free memberships and use of the facilities and equipment, the Family Y supports community groups and the clients of local service organizations including A Better Chance of Westport, First Night of Westport/Weston, SpinOdyssey and Westport Department of Human Services. Plus the Family Y sponsors or hosts a number of community events and initiatives including America On the Move Week, Fall Family Fiesta, Flu Clinic, Point-to-Point Compo Beach Swim and Youth Fun Night.



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With this application to Westport Planning & Zoning, the Family Y is working to ensure that it will continue to benefit the people of the community by providing a positive experience for members and guests, thereby honoring its responsibility as a charitable non-profit dedicated to serving the public good. At the new Mahackeno facility the Family Y will not only provide a full complement of programs and services, but will also offer an improved summer camp and expanded public access to the open space of the Mahackeno Outdoor Center.

The Westport Weston Family Y is an important part of the town's fabric. But as noted by Iain Bruce, president of the Family Y Board of Directors, "It is easy for the community to take for granted that it will always remain so, but to do that and fail to support this move is to risk that the Family Y will not survive. Mahackeno is the best and only chance that there will be a Family Y in Westport for future generations. We approach that reality soberly and with a tremendous sense of responsibility and commitment."

## **About the Westport Weston Family Y**

The Westport Weston Family Y is an affiliate of the YMCA of the USA and a partner agency of the United Way of Westport and Weston. Its mission is to build strong kids, strong families and strong communities. The Westport Weston Family Y is governed by two boards comprised of 43 community volunteers. For additional information about the organization and programs, visit [www.westporty.org](http://www.westporty.org).