

A Look Inside the Proposed New Y

by Will Rowlands

The Westport Weston Family Y recently released the plans for its proposed new facility at Mahackeno. Subsequently, the Westport News met with Jim Hardin, the Family Y's associate executive director, to go over the plans. Information supplied by the Family Y acknowledges that "the final building plan is dependent upon our ability to secure approvals from the various federal, state and local regulatory authorities."

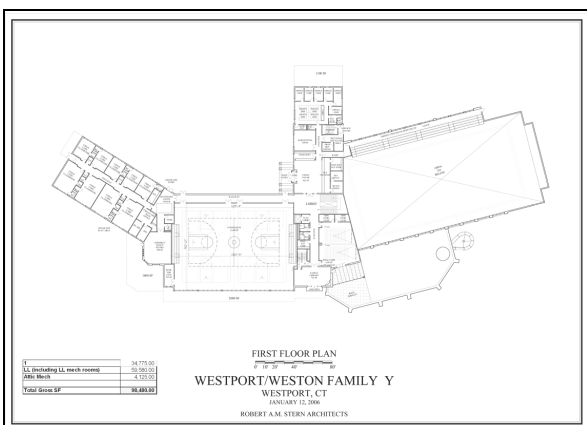
The planned facility would be a two-story structure but would only appear to be one-story from the entrance on the north side, facing the Merritt Parkway. The lower level would be visible from the south side. The building is oriented approximately east to west and would be situated on a slope on the northern side of Poplar Plains Brook, which runs through the Y's 32-acre property.

The main entrance to the facility would be on the north side. Other entrances are planned but access would be restricted. Campers at Mahackeno, for example, would probably make use of entrances on the lower level and childcare would have its own entrance.

The footprint of the building is about 60,000 square feet. According to the present plans, the lower level takes up 59,580 square feet and the first floor, or top floor, is 34,775 square feet.

Top Floor

The main entrance on the top floor gives access to a public area that includes administration, babysitting, member services and property management departments. Access is restricted beyond this point.



Floor Plan – Top Floor

The west wing of the top floor is given over to a 4,900 square foot childcare department with its own private entrance. An 11,400 square foot gymnasium is situated toward the center of the building. There is a 900 square foot aerobics and dance studio between the gym and childcare. Next to the gym is a fairly large area for meeting rooms and a "family

library." This area also sports an outdoor terrace on the south side facing Poplar Plains Brook and Mahackeno.

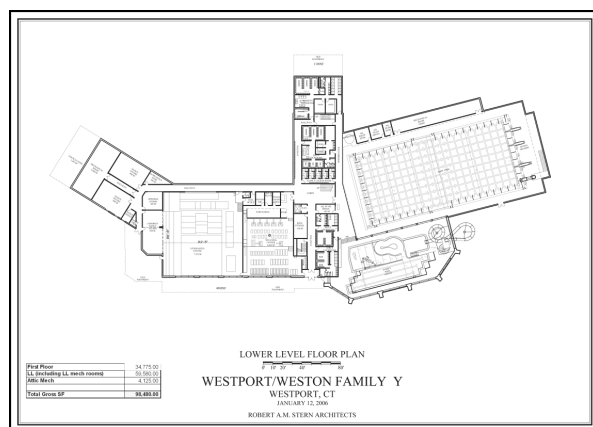
Lower Level

The lower level is accessible via stairs and elevators from the top floor. The western side of this floor is taken up primarily by three aerobics and dance studios totalling approximately 2,700 square feet. There is also a 400 square foot spinning room.

Toward the center of the building, under the gym, is a 7,125 square foot gymnastics center. A Wellness Center is situated next to the gymnastics center. Plans for the Wellness Center include a Pilates studio, stretching area, a kid's fitness center and space for weight training and circuit training.

Moving to the east, there's a fairly large section devoted to lockers. Plans for this area include a Men's Locker Room, Women's Locker Room, Boy's Locker Room, Girl's Locker Room and a Family Locker Room.

The Family Locker Room, a relatively new concept, can be used by families, couples or people with special needs. Each unit in the Family Locker Room will have a sink, shower, toilet and lockers.



Floor Plan – Lower Floor

The eastern side of the structure is occupied by the 50-meter long by 25-yard wide pool and a smaller area that would include a "fun pool" and a long, thin training pool.

What's Included

Information made available by the Family Y includes the following programming- and member-oriented spaces:

- Administrative Offices: 4,000 sq. ft.
- Aquatics Center: 29,000 sq. ft.
- Childcare: 5,000 sq. ft.
- Dance, Aerobics and Spinning: 4,000 sq. ft.
- Fitness: 6,000 sq. ft.
- Locker Rooms: 6,000 sq. ft.
- Multi-purpose rooms, library, hallways, closets, mechanical and other: 20,000 sq. ft.
- Sports & Recreation: 24,000 sq. ft.

What's Excluded

The plan for the new Y does not include any squash or racquetball courts. Family Y literature states that "estimated costs for construction of these courts are disproportionately high in relation to the projected numbers of members served."

Hardin said the number of members making use of the existing courts has been in decline and there is no evidence to suggest a reversal of this trend.

In order to build the courts at a cost proportionate to its projected use, the Y feels that it would have to build a separate facility. The only area available that would accommodate a separate building housing courts and related facilities is south of Poplar Plains Brook. A FAQ (frequently asked questions) sheet prepared by the Family Y states, "This placement would not only impinge upon Camp Mahackeno but also would require us to seek a zoning variance for non-compliance with the coverage ratio. As such, this option is not considered feasible."

The Men's and Women's Health Centers have also been eliminated. The name is somewhat misleading. In the present Y, the Men's and Women's Health Centers are upscale locker rooms.

"YMCAs nationally are getting away from private locker rooms within facilities," said Hardin. "Everybody comes in and gets access to everything. It's more open and egalitarian."

Timetable

Hardin made some educated guesses regarding the timing of events. He expects to be through the approval process by early 2007. After that, the next steps would be to complete fund-raising and break ground. At present, total costs associated with the new Family Y are estimated at \$42 million. Construction is estimated to take about 18 months. Putting it all together, Hardin ballparked completion by late 2008 or early 2009.



Aerial View of Site Plan (North is at Top)

Of course, there are a number of variables that could impact the schedule. Will the Family Y be able to sail through the approval process? How long will it take to raise the substantial funding required? And, finally, how long will it take to sort out the anticipated lawsuits by neighbors of the proposed new facility?

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