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**Westport Weston Family Y
Encourages Y Downtown Group to “*Imagine the Possibilities*”**

Westport CT, December 8, 2005 – Last Wednesday evening members of the Westport Weston Family Y Board of Directors presented plans to the Y Downtown group for the proposed new facility at Mahackeno. One of a series of forums being held for various associations and organizations in Westport and Weston, the Family Y was very pleased to agree to this group’s request for a presentation.

After a brief welcome by Rosemary Halstead, President of the Board of Directors, Ted Davis, Board Member and Chair of the Mahackeno Steering Committee, began his presentation by acknowledging the difference of opinions about the proposed move to Mahackeno while calling for a “spirit of cooperation [and] an open dialogue” about plans “to create a facility for the people of Westport and Weston [that will serve] for the next 50 to 100 years.”

Citing numerous factors and considerations – including the age and condition of the current facility’s physical plant and their impact on the Family Y’s ability to deliver programs, activities and services to meet the current and future needs of the community, the meticulous investigation of alternative sites located in the downtown as well as other areas of Westport, Weston and neighboring communities, and the opportunities afforded downtown Westport as well as the Family Y by moving to a new facility at Mahackeno – Mr. Davis provided the audience a full and accurate account of the thoughtful deliberation and planning that has been given to this matter.

The lengthy discussion following Mr. Davis’ presentation included an exchange about many issues and opportunities related to the site, the building, and the facility’s potential impact on the neighborhood, the environment, traffic and Camp Mahackeno. Presenting the proposed site plan in which the building is positioned to reduce or limit its view from neighboring homes and adjacent roadways and an architectural design which complements the existing landscape, the Family Y Board members demonstrated the care and concern with which the initiative has been developed. Their commitment to proceeding in a responsible manner was underscored by the information they shared about the paid professional consultants who have been and will be engaged to study and plan for impacts related to the environment, sanitary requirements and traffic.

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With their answer to each question, it was clear that the Board's primary goal is to build a facility to ensure the Westport Weston Family Y will be able to deliver varied and year-round programming and services to the community – from expanded Childcare facilities and ADA-compliant accessibility to integrating with the existing Camp and creating the opportunity for outdoor activities.

In response to those in the audience who continued to advance locations in or near downtown Westport such as Baron's South, the Chair of the Mahackeno Building Committee, Les Wolf of Weston, offered "we ended up at Mahackeno – which we feel is ultimately the best place – not because we refused to [consider] downtown locations," emphasizing that "time and effort and money had been expended" on exploration of downtown properties. As for Baron's South, Mr. Wolf stated that the Town leadership had made it clear municipal property would not be available for sale or lease to private institutions.

Other questions were fielded by individuals having technical expertise or knowledge of specific issues. Peter Romano of LandTech Consulting spoke about plans for on-site sewage treatment as well as smart signalization of traffic lights and a dedicated lane for traffic to the proposed new Family Y facility that would handle the flow of vehicles while James Hardin, Associate Executive Director of the Family Y and past president of the Downtown Merchants' Association (DMA), provided information about current and projected usage levels and capacity of the Family Y as well as DMA plans for development of downtown Westport.

That the volume of traffic throughout Westport is a concern is one that was expressed by members of the audience who focused on the potential for additional traffic load at the Kings Highway North and Post Road East intersections of Wilton Road. Acknowledging this as an issue affecting anyone traveling through these intersections – including the Boards, staff and users of the Family Y – Ted Davis advised that it is a problem over which the Family Y has no control or authority and suggested this matter be pursued with Town officials.

At the end of the evening, those associated with the Family Y expressed appreciation for the opportunity to meet with members of the Y Downtown group and for the insights gained as a result.

"We presented the reasons why the Family Y needs a new facility, the options that had been explored to determine where the new facility would be located, the individuals and constituencies who had been engaged in the years'-long process, and what plans had been developed for the proposed new facility at Mahackeno," said Ted Davis. "Everyone who was in the room this evening is a member of this community and I know we all want what is best for the community." Mr. Davis said that hearing the concerns of the neighbors had been useful "because we want to be sure that we make every effort to address those issues that are within our control – such as our plan to restrict access through the Rice's Lane entrance to our property to all but emergency vehicles once construction of the facility is completed – and the only way we can do so is by conducting forums such as this one."

"As a result of these meetings, people are made aware of the fact that we've been working on a viable solution for the better part of 15 years," Les Wolf continued. "We have considered more than 30 sites including Baron's South, Winslow Park, Imperial Avenue, Baldwin Parking Lot, the Police Barracks, Nyala Farms, the Jaeger property, Bayberry Lane and Norden Park, we have expended significant sums to determine whether many of these sites were feasible, and we have calculated the financials for and

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community impact of a renovation to our existing facility. Hopefully, people will come to realize that our plan for Mahackeno is not only the best option, it is the only reasonable option.”

Everyone associated with this project understands the importance of a successful outcome. Allen Raymond said it best when he hosted a similar forum on a sunny Sunday afternoon in early September at Mahackeno Outdoor Center. “After years of due diligence we know that Mahackeno is the last best hope for the Family Y. We are focused on developing a plan for the property which will meet or even exceed the standards required for approval by the various regulatory authorities.” If this cannot be accomplished, the Chairman of the organization’s Board of Trustees knows the community will be the worse for it because the programs at the Family Y – an organization which has served Westport, Weston and neighboring towns for more than eight decades – will become increasingly constrained by the physical incapacities to the point that the institution’s viability will be threatened. For someone who has devoted his life to efforts which benefit the larger community, Mr. Raymond says simply, “that should not be allowed to happen.”

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. Our mission is to build strong kids, strong families and strong communities. The Westport Weston Family Y is governed by two boards comprised of community volunteers. Visit www.westporty.org for additional information about the organization and its programs.