

Facts About the Westport Weston Family Y at Mahackeno

Regardless of your opinion, you should know the facts.

Claim: *50-meter pool is the reason for Family Y facility at Mahackeno*

Status: **False**

Facts: The Family Y facility at Mahackeno is designed to meet the changing programming, activity, service and support needs of the community and will replace a deteriorating facility that is not code compliant or ADA- accessible and lacks adequate space.

The Mahackeno facility will include an Aquatics Center with two pools (warm-water pool with lazy river and slide plus zero-entry access; 50-meter pool with 18 25-yard lanes) plus Basketball Courts, Child Care with contiguous playground space, Dance and Aerobics Studios, a Fitness Center, a Gymnastics Center, Locker Rooms for boys, girls, men, women and families, a Library, Multi-Purpose Rooms, Racquetball and Squash Courts and Spin Studios.

Claim: *Majority of Westporters are opposed to a Family Y at Mahackeno*

Status: **Unproven**

Facts: According to Y Downtown, in the past two years they have gathered 2,300 signatures on their petition – approximately 12% of the total adult population in Westport.

Results of the Westport Community Survey conducted in 2007 indicate that 7% of respondents cited “YMCA moving” as an issue of major concern, with 5.3% of respondents suggesting “Don’t move the YMCA” and 5% suggesting “Build a new YMCA.”

Claim: *Westport Downtown Merchants Association does not support Family Y move to Mahackeno*

Status: **False**

Facts: In March 2006, the *Westport News* published an article entitled ‘Downtown Merchants Clarify Stance on Mahackeno Y’ because the Westport DMA felt that “...its views had been misconstrued in some quarters.”

“It is still the preference of the WDMA to have the Y located in the downtown area. That said, we have come to realize that the YMCA appears to have exhausted all efforts to remain in the downtown area and therefore we support their proposed move to Mahackeno and hope it allows them to serve their members properly, now and in the future.

“The redeveloped YMCA building at 59 Post Road East will become a new anchor, adding new vibrancy and excitement to the Main Street area.

“[As a result of this move] there will likely be a significant positive long-term effect for both the downtown and the town as a whole ... there ought to be a much greater benefit to our merchants. More variety of shops, restaurants, housing and theater, etc., will mean more general activity in downtown, especially at night, and greater sales possibilities for our merchants. This should translate into more sales tax revenue to the state, and greater property taxes from a new development to the town, since the Y currently pays no tax for that property.

“[If the Y is not successful in making a move to Mahackeno] it will likely mean that the Y will continue to lose members, since it is not cost-efficient to continue to maintain and keep up the current Y with band-aids, and it will continue to physically deteriorate, which would be a shame to see happen to such a beautiful property. Any benefits to our merchants will likely erode as well, as their membership erodes. If the Y plans do not go forward, the Y might ultimately have to close. This would be a blow, not only to the downtown merchants, but to the town as a whole.”

Claim: *Wastewater treatment system to be used at Family Y facility is experimental and untested*

Status: **False**

Facts: The Modular FAST[®] (Fixed-Film Activated Sludge Treatment) System is a proven technology that has been in use for 40 years.

- Patented in 1970 by Smith & Loveless, a 60-year-old company
- Originally developed for marine applications
- Installations in 70 countries on all seven continents, including more than 10,000 FAST systems
- Approved by the U.S. Coast Guard
- Tested and approved by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency

In 2007, the FAST System was approved for Family Y use by the Connecticut Department of Environmental Protection and the Westport Conservation Commission. The Conservation Commission approval was upheld by the Westport RTM.

Claim: *Several alternative sites exist in the downtown area to accommodate a new Y with some reasonable modifications to the current plans, including Imperial Lot, Baron’s South, Jesup Green and Winslow Park*

Status: **False**

Facts: More than 30 locations have been investigated over a 13-year period.

Talks have been held with two successive administrations of the Town of Westport.

Town-owned properties – including Baron’s South, Jesup Green (Imperial Avenue Parking Area) and Winslow Park – are either unsuitable or not available for use by the Westport Weston Family Y based upon past rulings by Westport P&Z and former administrations and as a result of development plans identified by the current administration following completion of the Weston & Sampson Master Plan in 2007.

There is no downtown site for the Family.

Claim: *Family Y in downtown location is “central and accessible”*

Status: **Unproven**

Facts: Analysis of where members live indicates that a majority of the members live beyond any reasonable walking distance to the existing Family Y facility and, therefore, reach this destination by car.

Given the Family Y service area of Westport and Weston, significant numbers of the members drive past the Mahackeno area en route to the downtown site.

The current location of the Family Y is not “central” – equidistant from all points within Westport. Any location in Westport is “accessible” given the overwhelming reliance on automobiles for transportation in this community.

Claim: *Construction at Mahackeno will result in massive deforestation of old growth trees*

Status: **False**

Facts: A maximum of 730 trees at a diameter of 8” dbh or more (measurement at which trees may be considered mature) will be removed from the property to accommodate the building. 60% of these trees will be 8” – 12” dbh.

Following construction, 459 shade trees, 24 understory trees and 1,045 shrubs will be planted in the parking lot and vicinity of the building plus 144 shrubs along the brook bank bridge leaders.

This results in a total planting of 483 trees and 1,189 shrubs.

Claim: *Family Y wants to build a large aquatics, sports and fitness center*

Status: **False**

Facts: The Family Y is a charitable organization dedicated to serving the public good. It is the 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 focus of this non-profit is the health and wellness of people in the community it

serves and their quality of life. The range of services and support provided by the Family Y is broad and includes the *Activate America* program, classes for children with special needs, its position as the largest provider of childcare in Westport, financial assistance to neighbors in need, programs that develop social responsibility in children and teens and support of other community-based charities.

Claim: *Family Y facility at Mahackeno will result in hopelessly clogged roads and extended commuting times*

Status: **Unproven**

Facts: The Family Y recognizes that traffic is a concern in this town and throughout Fairfield County. With plans to build a new facility at Mahackeno, it has a responsibility to its members and the community to provide for acceptable traffic flows on the surrounding roads and through the adjoining neighborhoods.

At its own expense, the Family Y will implement plans to mitigate any increase in traffic generated by the Mahackeno facility.

- Widen the Merritt Parkway Connector: The existing two-lane Merritt Parkway Connector between the Route 33 intersection and the Merritt Parkway eastbound ramps will be reconstructed to provide two travel lanes in each direction.
- Expand Sunny Lane and Add Signalization: An additional lane will be added to the Merritt Parkway off ramp and signalization will be added at the intersection of the Connector/Sunny Lane/Merritt Parkway ramp intersection. Sunny Lane will be reconstructed to provide one lane for eastbound movements and two lanes for westbound movements at the newly signalized intersection with the Connector Road and the Merritt Parkway ramps.
- Install “Smart” Signalization: The traffic signal at the State Route 33 and the Connector Road will be upgraded to accommodate the additional lane on the Connector and coordinated with a traffic signal at the Merritt Parkway ramps, both for eastbound and westbound movements.

Once completed, these changes may actually be an improvement over the current traffic conditions in that area.

Claim: *Family Y facility will cause environmental damage to Lees Pond, the Saugatuck River and Long Island Sound*

Status: **False**

Facts: When the new Family Y is built at Mahackeno, there will be three primary sources of water: stormwater run-off, wastewater discharge and drainage from the pools.

Stormwater: The design of the project at Mahackeno included an analysis to

compare the peak discharge in Poplar Plains Brook as it enters Lees Pond under existing conditions and the peak discharge under proposed conditions. Calculations by renowned engineers and specialty consultants show the 25-year discharge in Poplar Plains Brook at its confluence with the Saugatuck River (Lees Pond) to be about 606 cubic feet per second (cfs) and the 25-year discharge under proposed conditions to be about 608 cfs (a difference of 0.3%). Thus, the project does not result in increased flooding or erosion in Poplar Plains Brook, in the Saugatuck River or on the adjoining properties.

Regarding stormwater quality, this project includes a system of six underground infiltration areas plus one bioretention area (rain garden). These infiltration areas and the rain garden are designed to capture and hold the runoff from the first inch of rainfall – the so-called water quality volume – from the proposed driveway, parking areas and building roof. More than 80% of annual runoff occurs during storms producing less than one inch of runoff, so the infiltration areas will capture more than 80% of annual runoff and, therefore, more than 80% of any potential stormwater contamination.

The plans and calculations related to the stormwater drainage system – including collection, treatment and discharge – have been reviewed and approved by: the Westport Engineering Department; Stearns & Wheler – a civil and sanitary engineering firm hired as the consultant by the Westport Conservation Commission; the Westport Flood & Erosion Control Board; the Westport Conservation Commission.

Plans for stormwater drainage and treatment have been developed to a standard that Stearns & Wheler, consultant to the Conservation Commission, characterized as “state of the art” and noted as a “...stormwater treatment system [which] meets the Best Management Practices established by the State and exceeds conditions that exist most elsewhere in the town of Westport.”

Wastewater: A typical septic system consists of a holding tank and leaching fields. Effluent is held in the tank and metered out to the leaching fields where it percolates into the ground and is renovated solely by passage through the ground and by bacteria in the soil. This is the case without regard to proximity of the system to bodies of water.

In the system proposed for the Mahackeno site, effluent flows from the source to two holding tanks below ground which have a capacity of 34,000 gallons. From those tanks the effluent flows to a pump chamber and is pumped to the FAST System south of Poplar Plains Brook where it is treated for BOD (a measure of the relative oxygen-depletion effect of a waste contaminant) and nitrogen before it is

distributed among six leaching beds located more than 400 feet from the river and Lees Pond, where it percolates into the soil and is further renovated.

The Connecticut DEP requires not less than 21 days travel time from the leaching beds to the river, after which time the effluent, having been previously treated, is deemed to be fully renovated. Because soils at the Mahackeno site are particularly suitable, the treated effluent will move only 65 feet – of the 400-foot distance to the river – in 21 days so that the travel time to the river for the Family system exceeds 65 days, after which time it is said to be renovated to “drinking water standards.”

There is no direct wastewater discharge from the system to the river and in any case, whatever finds its way to the river will have been fully renovated and in compliance with all DEP requirements. Further, this is one of the factors considered by the Conservation Commission when six of the seven commissioners voted to approve the Family Y permit which includes use of the FAST System.

Pools: As part of the normal Family Y maintenance operation, the two pools will be drained and cleaned every 5 to 7 years. Prior to drainage, the water will be treated to remove the chlorination. Once the chlorine removal process is complete, the water will be drained at a controlled rate of flow into a dedicated treatment and disposal system. This maintenance will be timed to coincide with periods of lowest potential precipitation. In the event that there is a significant rainfall, the pools will not be drained at that time.

The planned Family Y facility is sited close to the bottom of the 80-square mile Saugatuck River watershed. The current eutrophic (high mineral and organic nutrient content and low oxygen content) condition of Lees Pond is the result of a number of factors including, but not limited to, residential septic systems, use of lawn fertilizers and animal waste. The proposed systems for the handling of sewage, stormwater and pool drainage have been designed specifically to manage the flow of water from any source and to avoid any further negative impact to this environment.

Claim: *Family Y plan does not meet the standards of Special Permit Use*

Status: **Unproven**

Facts: In the zoning and subdivision regulations of the Town of Westport, Special Permit Use details 13 instances – from fire stations and schools to houses of worship and libraries – in which buildings, facilities and uses are allowed in an AAA Residence District for non-residential purposes.

The downtown facility of the Westport Weston Family currently operates under Special Permit Use, as does Camp Mahackeno.

The application submitted to the Westport Planning and Zoning Commission for a new facility at Mahackeno has been developed to meet the requirements of Special Permit Use.

Westport P&Z is in the process of reviewing this application.

Claim: *Family Y plan does not conform to the Town Plan of Conservation and Development*

Status: **Unproven**

Facts: The Family Y application submitted to the Westport Planning and Zoning Commission includes plans for siting, architecture, LEED-certified construction, landscaping and preservation of 25 acres as recreational space at Mahackeno which conform to the Town POCD and will result in various benefits to the community, including:

- Protection of important natural resources
- Preservation of open space and creation of greenways
- Protection and enhancement of scenic resources
- Protection of historic resources
- Development of a sustainable building

Westport P&Z is in the process of reviewing this application.

Claim: *Proposed facility is destined to become a regional YMCA, with new members coming from both directions of the Merritt Parkway, adding even more traffic congestion and unraveling the community feeling that the Y now offers in Westport.*

Status: **Unproven**

Facts: The Family Y welcomes all who want to participate in its programs – not just those who live in Westport and Weston – because doing so is a basic tenet of the mission and principles of every Y. It extends this welcome at the current facility, will do so at the new facility and would never do any less under any circumstances. And those it welcomes become a part of the Family Y community.

With eight (8) additional YMCAs in this region – Bethel, Bridgeport, Darien, Fairfield, New Canaan, Norwalk, Trumbull, Wilton – people in the area have many other YMCA options from which to choose.

Claim: *Westport will lose one of the last large remaining parcels of open space.*

Status: **False**

Facts: Mahackeno is 32-acres of private property that has been owned by the Family Y for more than 60 years.

Following construction of the new facility, 25 acres will remain as managed open space for recreational use and accessibility to this land will be expanded.

(It should be noted that zoning provides for As-of-Right subdivision of the Mahackeno property into approximately 12 parcels for single-family dwellings – with attendant roads, septic systems, utilities and other structures and improvements – interspersed throughout the property.)

Claim: *Family Y at Mahackeno will decrease property values*

Status: **Unproven**

Facts: Results from the Value Impairment Analysis submitted to P&Z indicate that “...there would be no significant adverse effect (from the ‘Y’ development proposed) on the values of the residential properties referenced on Twin Falls Lane, Rice’s Lane, Richmondville Avenue, Calumet Road, Stone Drive and Quarter Mile Road.

“[T]he negative impact on the values of 8 and 10 Sunny Lane would be less than 5%, and ... there would be no measurable negative impact on other residential properties in adjacent areas.

“[T]he Special Permit standard would be met ... [and] the development proposed would not have a significant adverse effect on adjacent areas located within close proximity of the use.”

Claim: *Family Y has no “Plan B” if Mahackeno application is denied*

Status: **False**

Facts: The governing boards of this non-profit organization have a fiduciary responsibility to make certain that the Family Y achieves sustainability by locating and designing a facility for optimal use and with minimal staffing, energy consumption and maintenance requirements.

Because the current facility does not meet this standard, the building has been sold and the proceeds will be applied to the construction costs of our new facility.

Talks have been held with two successive administrations of this town. More than 30 locations have been investigated over a 13-year period.

There is no downtown site for the Family Y. There is no public land at its disposal. There is no location in Westport that is more central or accessible than another to everyone who lives in this town and in the neighboring community of Weston.

If the Family Y is unsuccessful in securing this final approval from P&Z then, as regrettable as this will be, it will proceed with the sale of the current location and the Family Y will close.