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## The Politics of Delay

Never let it be said that the Westport Conservation Commission doesn't look at all possible sides of an issue. After five months, the commission last week wrapped up its public hearings on the application by the Westport Weston Family Y to build a new headquarters at Camp Mahackeno. It was the lengthiest series of hearings on an application in the commission's history.

With the commission's work sessions on the application scheduled to start this week, it will still be a month or so before it gives thumbs up or thumbs down.

Then, if Conservation approves, it will be on to the Planning & Zoning Commission, a process that promises to drag on even longer. And opponents of the Family Y's proposal are trying to get the state Department of Environmental Protection to reconsider its preliminary approval for the Y to construct a septic system at Mahackeno.

At this rate, the Y's new facility may be ready for the as-yet-unborn grandchildren of current members.

Of course, opponents of the Y's plan, citing safety concerns with the proposed septic system, as well as traffic and quality of life issues, would prefer that the approval process go on forever, or as close to forever as possible. If, in the end, P&Z approves the proposal, legal action by the opponents is a virtual certainty.

And if the Mahackeno plan gains local commission approval and legal appeals fail, opponents still won't quit, we predict.

A letter to the editor in last week's Minuteman, from an opponent of the Family Y's proposal, seemed to acknowledge the possibility that the Conservation may end up giving its approval.

The letter suggested that, regardless of the Conservation Commission's decision, it is "unfair" for the Y to persist in its plan in the face of so much opposition. "The Y's weaving their legally correct way through the technical regulations is not a good answer," the letter stated.

Well, excuse us for thinking that the "legally correct way" is exactly the way that controversial issues should be settled in a democracy, and that the good-faith decisions by local commissions should be allowed to prevail over more emotional appeals.

Now, there's nothing wrong with opponents bringing political pressure to bear on the issue, and they have done so with appeals to First Selectman Gordon Joseloff to find an alternative that would be acceptable to everyone.

Of course, an alternative that would have kept the Family Y downtown, as opponents now favor, would have been readily available about five years ago. Y officials were looking to build on town-owned land at Baron's South, but political pressures at that time apparently led then-First Selectwoman Diane Farrell to prevent the Y from taking that route. There's no going back; the Westport Senior Center is now located on the best building site at Baron's South.

It's our feeling that Y opponents, deprived of the Baron's South solution, are now seeking an outcome based on delay as much as it is on facts and law. And that's not the way democracy should work.

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