

What If?

On the eve of the upcoming heated debates sure to take place at Town Hall in front of the Planning and Zoning Commission, one must ask this simple question: what if?

What if the limited vision of a few gave way to the hope of many?

What if this vital change away from a deprecating edifice was finally embraced with the expected joy as a benefit for the whole community and the town at large?

Planning and Zoning regulations are written by those who we used to consider our town elders, the protectors of our urban fate. They formulate in legal texts the vision of the townscape for its present and future development.

As a practicing architect, I have great respect for the visionary qualities it takes to be able to imagine how a community will transform itself and evolve over the years; and I regard the zoning texts as the guardians of the rightful balance and dynamism of cities and towns alike.

As such, the regulations make provision for Special Permits, so that a community could have fail-safe ways to better serve its constituents, despite an original intent and district zoning designation that can evolve over time.

The texts indeed allow this essential fight against the stagnation of the urban vision; and as the population grows and its needs do metamorphose, the Special Permits allow the construction of buildings that essentially benefit the entire community in locations that may not have been anticipated as possible when the regulations were written.

This provision has given our town schools and churches ... so why not consider now the Family Y a similar benefit to the Town of Westport?

Special Permit is not the granting of a "special treatment" as some have portrayed it; it is rather simply the translation of the vital need of special enhancement of an area of town, and a demonstration of a desire to proactively go beyond the original zoning district intent.

In studying carefully the mix and distribution of buildings with a purpose of community service on the map of Westport, it is blatantly evident that the area of Rice Lane and Lees Pond is deprived of that type of function; and this is just what the Westport Weston Family Y proposes to remedy by building its new facility at Mahackeno.

So let me ask again ... what if the residential district in which Mahackeno already stands was given that special enhancement to better serve the community and town at large?

Wouldn't that indeed be the very pursuit of balance and dynamism our town elders are seeking in their expression of the zoning regulations and their vision of the proper planning of Westport?

What if the solemn silence of multitude of leaves falling to the ground was replaced by the joy of the myriad of children's laughter rising to the heavens?

What if the Town of Westport helped Mahackeno happen?

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EAST NORWALK