

**Westport News 03.28.08**  
**Letter to the Editor**

**A Letter to P&Z**

I would like to take this opportunity to bring my personal and professional perception forward in these times of debates at Town Hall.

As previously mentioned in my "What If" letter to the editor (and communicated to the P&Z), as a practicing architect with 20 years of experience, I have a tremendous respect for the zoning regulations issued by our towns and their officials. I work with them almost every day in my practice, and I regard them as the guardians of our urban landscape, as well as an invaluable tool to help in the evolution of our communities.

With that in mind, and with my thorough knowledge of Westport's development and architectural silhouette, I was asked to add to my responsibilities as a member of the Board of Directors and serve on the Y's Building Committee for the selection of the winning project to be built at Mahackeno. We carefully, and for numerous volunteer hours, scrutinized the different proposals and firm profiles, and after well-balanced selection processes and debates determined that the scheme and concepts presented by Robert A.M. Stern Architects were the most suitable for the site in particular, and for Westport at large.

His understanding of the land structure and topography was impeccable, his proposal was the only one keeping the new building on the very northern part of the site, and the design was unique in its clever use of the natural slope to reduce the overall mass and height of the facility. With almost half of the floor area being on a partially buried lower floor, still exposed to natural light on the

South side, the design takes a 102,000-square-foot building and succeeds in having coverage of only 64,000 square feet. With the large pool volume being equally lowered and taking advantage of slope and exposure, the scale is there again successfully reduced.

From the very early stages of design selection, the Building Committee was clearly informed that here was a firm that understood the nature of the challenges of placing this essential community facility on the fringe of a triple A residential zone (even if in this case bordering the Merritt Parkway, quite remote from direct neighbors).

We all believed, and still passionately do, that this project was and is the best location for the new Y, guaranteeing the most preservation of natural land and minimizing impact for roadways and impervious areas at Mahackeno.

We were also given some preview images of what the building should look like and the quality of the architecture; its domestic nature despite the inherent scale of its size was really compelling. The decision of the Building Committee was an easy one, and we all still feel that out of all the proposals we examined, the one Robert A.M. Stern Architects provided was and will remain the best for Westport and for Mahackeno.

***Herve Hamon***  
**Norwalk**

*Hamon is a member of the Family Y's Board of Directors.*