

The Y Debate — The Real Choice

The opponents of the Westport Weston Family Y project at Mahackeno have cleverly framed the issue as (i) the Y at Mahackeno vs (ii) the Y Downtown. If that were in fact the choice, I would opt for keeping the Y downtown. However, that is not the choice. There are no suitable downtown sites and the town has made it clear that town land, such as Baron's South or Winslow Park, will never be given to a private entity like the Y. Accordingly, the true choice is (i) Y at Mahackeno vs. (ii) no Y in Westport at all. As a director of the Westport Weston Family Y, I can assure you that the Y cannot stay in its current building, which has served the community well for 85 years, as the building is antiquated and no longer financially viable. Like countless homeowners who have outgrown their house, the Family Y needs to move to a new facility that can accommodate the needs of the community.

The opponents of the Y at Mahackeno have been lobbying against our move and they have framed the issue as a fight to prevent development and preserve open space. Once again, this ignores the realities. If the Y is foreclosed from using its own land at Mahackeno, the Y and Camp Mahackeno (which the Y operates) will close and the Mahackeno property will then likely be sold. Without an operating Y in Westport, there would be no reason to keep the Mahackeno property. The likely buyer would be a private developer who could build two acre-zoned homes throughout the 32-acre Mahackeno property. Put another way, is Westport better served by (i) having a vibrant community Y and Camp Mahackeno that has served so many families over the past 85 years, or (ii) using the property for new two-acre McMansions? I think that the

choice is obvious.

Indeed, if the question is which use will preserve more open space, once again the Y at Mahackeno is the answer. The new Y will use only 7 of the property's 32 acres, located in the far corner of the property near the Merritt Parkway. Over 75 percent of the Mahackeno property will remain as it has been — undeveloped parkland.

I hope that the community will look beyond catchy but false slogans like "Y Downtown." Instead, I ask Westporters to look at the realities of the situation — how the Y will function at Mahackeno vs. the closing of the Y and the likely use of the Mahackeno property should the Y's P&Z application be denied. It will be a crying shame if the end result is that a vibrant part of our community, serving infants to the elderly, the physically fit to the physically disabled, providing an array of programs not otherwise available in Westport, is thrown out of business in favor of new two-acre McMansions. Would that really be in the best interest of our community?

**JON COOPERMAN
WESTPORT**

One If By Land

The depressing news has reached me that Shirley Land is leaving town.

Shirley has done everything in Westport and she leaves a big gap when she heads for North Carolina.

Aside from all her good work, Shirley was a part of one of the most creative photos ever taken in Westport.

It was during Westport's sesquicentennial celebration in 1985. We got Ed See, a Westport lawyer, dressed up somewhat like a Revolutionary War soldier, no small task. We found a Revolutionary hat for Shirley. We gave Shirley one lantern and Ed got two lanterns.

When it got dark, we placed them in front of the Saugatuck