



**Allen Raymond**  
*Chair*

*YMCA Board of Trustees*



**Rosemary Halstead**  
*President*

*YMCA Board of Directors*

“Y Mahackeno?”

Eighty-one years ago, businessman and philanthropist Edward T. Bedford saw the need for recreational activities for Westport citizens. Thanks to his vision the YMCA has been an integral part of the community since 1923, providing programs and services to thousands of Westporters.

Today, over 80% of our members – now over 7,000 strong -- consider the Y a Westport institution. An amazing 25% of the community participates in childcare, summer camp, swim lessons, sports and senior fitness. Last year alone, we awarded \$450,000 in scholarships and financial assistance so that no one was turned away from the Y because of an inability to pay. But our reach is much broader; over three dozen groups use the Y’s facilities for meetings, events and educational initiatives.

Demand for programs and services is strong and growing. Our current facility constrains our ability to meet the needs of our members. With five buildings cobbled together in downtown Westport, we currently have 16 elevators on the first floor alone, four stairways leading to nowhere and 20,000 square feet of unusable space.

The Y management and staff have been creative and determined in designing programs in spite of an aging and convoluted physical plant. Our aquatics programs have substantially outgrown our two swimming pools while youth sports and recreation programs compete with adult fitness programs for use of undersized facilities. Significant financial and human resources that would be best directed to innovation and expanded community services are spent on just keeping the existing facility running.

Some 48 years ago, the Westport “Town Crier and Herald” carried a story that made clear the Y facilities were overcrowded and that the sound solution was a new building. What may have been overstated in 1956 and eased with additions over the years is right on target today.

For nearly 10 years, the governing boards of the Y have studied our space problem and analyzed many possible options. In a 2002 Member Survey, our members were unequivocal in their directive: “Do something; take action!”

During the past 18 months, the members of both the Board of Directors and Board of Trustees have produced an action plan and we are now ready to share our thinking and our vision with the community.

Expanding and remodeling our current facilities would be costly, would require up to a two-year shutdown and, most importantly, would still limit our ability to offer the programs we envision as necessary. A split facility (buildings in two locations) would be financially burdensome, operationally inefficient and not in the best interests of our members.

Only one solution makes financial and operational sense and meets the current and future needs of the community: a full-service facility at a new location. While the Y would like to remain downtown, this option is not possible. The Y has carefully explored over 30 potential sites that have, among other possibilities, included joint ventures with the Town on Town-owned land. Each and every site has proved to be unsuitable or unavailable due to size, location or other limitations. It has become increasingly obvious that the most logical solution is, in hindsight, a simple one: Focus on what we own. That focus directs us to our 30-acre property called Mahackeno that for 65 years has been the site of the Y's summer camp.

The benefits of a new Y at Mahackeno are many: ample space for a state of the art facility, enhancement of the camp program, expansion of our current offerings, an ability to provide programming for under-served areas of the community such as youth, family activities and expanded recreational swimming as well as suitable surroundings for outdoor activities.

Because the Y is a not-for-profit organization, the sale of our downtown facility to a private developer would also return a significant property to the tax rolls of the Town. According to the 2001 Downtown Plan, a relocation of the Y from the corner of the Post Road and Main Street would ease downtown traffic congestion. The prospect of a new Y at Mahackeno is a win for the entire community.

We are in the process of completing preliminary traffic and environmental studies and the initial indications are favorable that such an endeavor is possible. At the same time the Y is mindful of our neighbors' concerns. To build a new Y at Mahackeno will be a challenge but we truly believe that we have a responsibility to secure the future of a YMCA that can serve the present and future needs of the entire Westport community.

Westport without a Y, or with a Y that is hobbled by lack of space and unable to grow to meet changing community needs is unacceptable. The time to guarantee the future of the Y is now. Because, in the end, whatever we do will touch the lives of myriad Westporters for years to come we need to ensure that we "do it right" and keep E. T. Bedford's vision alive. We invite the community to join with us.



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