

It's Time For Facts Instead of Fiction

"Old Hill Area" readers, as well as Westporters in general, should be aware of the tactics being used against the Family Y at Mahackeno by the "Y Downtown" group in general, and Amy Ancel (RTM District 3) in particular.

A flyer dated Jan. 15, 2008, titled "Say No to Mahackeno," signed by Representative Ancel contains so many factually inaccurate statements, exaggerations and unethical, if not illegal, tactics, that a proper response is probably too long to be printed as a simple letter to the Editor.

Below is just a sample.

1. The bolded and underscored opening sentence reads: *Can you afford to add ten minutes or more to your driving times every day?* That is the first of six exaggerated references to traffic. Where is the information to back up this claim? The extensive traffic reports submitted with the Planning and Zoning application will be subject to a careful and thorough review town and paid for by the Family Y.

According to the submitted studies, there is not even one spot at any hour of the day that will even reach one 10th of Ms. Ancel's claim. Let's let the town's experts weigh in to see whose information seems more credible. Taxpayer-supported local and state experts will be involved in

the review process in addition to the objective consultants hired by the town.

3. Claims that the "Old Hill area" is a "residential-only district" and should be protected from "commercial encroachments" are false on both counts. All single-family, residentially-zoned property in Westport is subject to Special Permit uses. Special Permit use approval is in no way synonymous with any kind of special treatment. Westport's Zoning Regulations are very clear and list dozens of non-single-family residential uses that are permitted in single-family residential zones, See Section 11-22 and 2.3 (i.e., government buildings, schools, daycare centers, places of worship, country clubs, riding academies, boarding stables and commercial kennels, hospitals, etc.).

There are also stringent requirements to establish any such use. For examples, see Section 32 (Supplemental Use Regulations); Section 35 (landscaping, screening and buffer areas); Section 43 (Special Permit and/or Site Plan review procedures); and Section 44 (Special Permit and/or Site Plan Documents Standards and Objectives) which contain dozens of pages that outline which non-single-family uses can be established under which set of strict guidelines.

Trying to use inflammatory word images like "commercial encroachment" to cast the Y like some out-of-place commercial office complex belies not only the law but also the position this important institution has in our community.

4. The flyer claims "we are working tirelessly to protect your property values ..." Again, no factual information is provided that sup-

ports the claim of negative impact.

The Y's application contains information that the new facility will have no measurable impact on "Old Hill area" property values. Are there people who would prefer not to live next door to the Y? Sure. Are there also people who would love to have this community amenity in their backyard? Absolutely. I know a family that recently moved to the Mahackeno area for this very reason.

The Y Downtown folks certainly have the right to express their opinion but when they disseminate "misinformation" that tries to scare people, cloud the truth and waste community resources, they should be held to the same "burden of proof" standard that the Y has been held to during this entire application process.

To date, when the state DEP, the Conservation Commission, the Flood and Erosion Control Board and the RTM have sorted out fact from fiction, the Y's applications have been approved/upheld at every step.

The last step in the local approval process is the Planning & Zoning Commission and the Y's P&Z application is on file in Town Hall. Read the information in the record, do your own research, come to the public meetings and draw an informed conclusion. The Planning and Zoning Commission and staff are sure to do their usual in-depth analysis.

Let's support the process that works. Let's focus on the facts, not the fiction. To do less is a disservice to the entire community.

STEVEN HALSTEAD
WESTPORT