

O P I N I O N

EDITOR'S NOTEBOOK / Will Rowlands

Once More Into the Breach

After contentious sessions before the Flood & Erosion Control Board, the Conservation Commission and the Representative Town Meeting (RTM), the Westport Planning and Zoning Commission (P&Z) will soon review the Westport Weston Family Y's proposal to build a new facility on its Mahackeno property near the Merritt Parkway. (See page A6 for dates.)

As a result, the controversy, which was only smoldering, has once again caught fire.

It recent days, two people we were talking to for a story accused us of being biased, an insult to any journalist worth his or her salt.

It is time to clear the air.

On a personal level, nobody on the editorial staff of the *Westport News* can be described as strongly for or against a new Y at Mahackeno.

As a paper, the *Westport News* has not editorially endorsed the Family Y's move to Mahackeno.

We have editorialized in favor of due process and calm, reflective consideration of a property owner's request by the duly elected or appointed officials whose job it is to review such proposals.

It seems the standard being applied by some is "if you're not with us, you're against us."

We have no issue with the Y staying downtown. But where would it go? A number of downtown sites have been mentioned as possible alternatives but the

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Y
We build strong kids,
strong families,
strong communities.

reality is that, after all this controversy and talk, there are still no offers on the table.

Some have argued that the Family Y is being hasty and more time should be given to looking for alternatives. Consider the Family Y's point of view; they've looked at some 40 possible sites and have been working on this initiative for 13 years. Hardly what could be called a head-long rush.

Of course, what is perhaps most disturbing is the hyperbole and personal attacks we've seen.

And it's not just all the ill will — which is bad enough — some deeper issues have almost been lost in the scuffle.

If sewers are safer in environmentally sensitive areas, why do our regulations

encourage alternative wastewater treatment systems in such areas? Are lines being drawn to protect the environment or prohibit development?

Have property owner's rights diminished to the point where they need the approval of the entire community to proceed?

Is the job of elected town officials to represent their constituency or to promote personal agendas? Where is the line?

And, if we *really* want to know how townspeople feel about critical issues, maybe we should consider amending the Town Charter to allow for more referendums.

These are uncomfortable questions but they are important ones for the future of

the Town of Westport.

We commend all of the members of the Flood and Erosion Control Board, Conservation Commission and Planning and Zoning Commission for their time and effort in difficult circumstances.

We hope the toxic environment doesn't scare too many people away from public life.

As the P&Z gets ready to review the Family Y's proposal, we urge Westporters to eschew invective when they express their thoughts on this matter. Turn it around, imagine yourself on the commission (or submitting the application) and act accordingly.

We don't always agree but we all have to live together.



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