

Why to Say 'Yes' To Mahackeno

I am a frequent user of the YMCA facility, and I fully support the Y's move to Mahackeno. The following points illustrate my full support for Mahackeno:

Research — The YMCA has conducted an exhaustive search (over 30 different sites) for the past 13 years. The Y has researched all "downtown" sites mentioned in the press and by Mahackeno opponents: Winslow Park, Baron's South, the Imperial Avenue parking lot, and Jesup Green, and numerous non-downtown sites. Furthermore, the Y has explored the option of rehabilitating and retrofitting the current facility. The cost to renovate is estimated at \$20 to \$30 million dollars, and would yield the current YMCA no additional space or flexibility.

Approvals — The Y has already received approvals from local and state experts at the Westport Flood and Erosion Control Board; Westport Conservation Commission; Connecticut Department of Environmental Protection (CTDEP), and "these approvals have been upheld on appeal, twice by the CTDEP and once by Westport's RTM."

Cost — There is no cost to the Town of Westport! No taxpayer's dollars are used to fund the YMCA. I reiterate ... a community center with no costs to the town! I am currently a Ridgefield resident and I assure you this fact is rare. We have a Recreation/Wellness Center which was funded mainly by taxpayers. Lastly, the current downtown facility will go back onto the Westport tax rolls, providing direct financial benefit to the town.

YMCA land — The Mahackeno community center will be sited on YMCA land! The town has rejected siting of the YMCA on town land over the years. In fact, town land has never been a serious option for the YMCA at any time. The YMCA has done an exhaustive search and additional sites/options are slim and none.

Building Siting — The main structure will be bordered by a major highway, a cellular tower, a commuter parking lot, a restaurant, and a pond. Construction will be largely limited to areas adjacent to the highway, leaving 25 of the total 32 acres as open space! The Y's proposal limits neighborhood impact during construction, and impact to the environment. Again,

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the proof behind this statement is the town and state approvals already obtained.

Land use — A community center represents a good use of the land/ open space compare to alternative uses. This center will provide a wide array of activities for all ages — the community! In conversation with nearby residents, they have mentioned that they would prefer to have the Y as a neighbor, than face the unknown of other potential development and uses, should the Y be forced to sell the property.

NIMBY — Other potential or future sites will be subject to the "not in my backyard" syndrome. There will be detractors on any site. In fact, this debate reminds me of the Compo Beach playground controversy (1989). Controversy will follow the siting of the YMCA, it is human nature.

Creed — The Westport YMCA's creed is "We will strive increasingly to quicken the sense of civic duty. We will transmit this town, greater, better, and more beautiful than it was transmitted to us." Need I say anymore?

Mahackeno is the best location for the YMCA community center. I strongly urge your support for the Y's relocation to Mahackeno.

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