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May 13 - May 19, 2004 Edition
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Aquinnah annual meeting gets only some of its work done *May 13, 2004*

By Nelson Sigelman

As is the custom, Aquinnah voters took their time getting down to business. But once Walter Delaney, town moderator, gavelled the annual town meeting to order some time after the 7 pm scheduled start, it was apparent that the approximately 70 voters gathered were in a mood to talk.

Voters approved a budget request of \$2,459,335 for the 2005 fiscal year, which begins July 1, 2004, and approved all but two of 16 warrant articles, including seven Prop 2.5 questions.

Yesterday, voters went to the polls. Incumbent selectman Mike Hebert faced a challenge from Camille Rose, chairman of the planning board, and incumbent Walter Delaney squared off with challenger John Walsh for the position of town moderator.

Although voters did not leave the intimate surroundings of Aquinnah town hall Tuesday night until shortly before 11 pm, they did not finish their annual town meeting work.

There is no certain rule governing when a practice becomes a custom, but for the fourth year in a row voters were asked to adjourn the annual town meeting and reconvene on June 24 to conclude town business.

The continuance was necessary because none of the annual town meeting's Prop 2.5 questions, including a request for \$260,000 to fund the 2004 fiscal year operating budget, appeared on yesterday's election ballot.

As a result, the town will hold a special election on June 16 to decide the ballot questions, followed by the tag end of the annual town meeting one week later, to deal with the election results.

The inconvenience raised only one question. Wendy Swolinski asked why Aquinnah would not be voting the next day when the issues were still fresh in voters' minds, which is what typically happens in other Island towns.

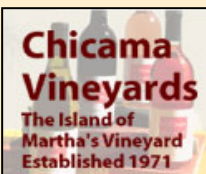
Mike Hebert, chairman of the board of selectmen, said it was "a matter of timing." Town officials did not learn the free cash amount — zero — early enough to have the Prop 2.5 questions printed on the town election ballot.

"All I can say is that we are getting better," said Mr. Hebert. "We are much closer to having everything on time."

Living in a thicket

The meeting began with a line by line examination of the 2004 budget. At the conclusion of the budget review, voters questioned town officials, and school officials who were also present at the meeting, about rising town and regional costs.

Asked about the Island's high per pupil costs when compared with off-Island school



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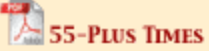
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systems, Kriner Cash, Martha's Vineyard school superintendent, said Martha's Vineyard offers its students a quality education, which costs money. He said the schools always respond to what the voters want, and if the voters did not want certain programs, they need to tell school officials what programs they want to cut. "There is no waste going on in the schools," he said.

An article designed to put some teeth into local regulations prohibiting clear-cutting without a special permit drew extended discussion about what landowners would and would not be able to do on their property if the bylaw was approved.

John Walsh said people should be encouraged to create fields. "The idea that we should all live in a thicket doesn't appeal to me," he said.

Peter Temple, planning board member, emphasized that the intent of the bylaw was not to prevent people from working on their property but to prevent developers from taking advantage of existing regulations. The measure was approved 47-23. A measure meant to regulate the siting of generators and solar panels also passed, 49-20.

Voters also took up six separate articles related to the expansion of emergency medical services in the Tri-Town district, which includes Chilmark and West Tisbury.

Voters accepted the gift of an ambulance from the Wampanoag Tribe. Nick Thorne, an Aquinnah EMT, stressed the importance response time plays in saving lives. He said the four-wheel drive ambulance would prove to be an enormous benefit to the town and Island.

Aquinnah voters agreed to pay the town's \$4,391 share of operating costs for the ambulance from the town stabilization fund, removing the appropriation from the uncertainty of a Prop 2.5 vote.

Voters also agreed to take \$21,880 from the stabilization fund, rather than seek a Prop 2.5 override, to pay for the town's share of raising ambulance service to the paramedic level.

The garaging of the ambulance, and the fact that Aquinnah pays an equal share of Tri-Town ambulance district expenses despite the fact that the town is much smaller than Chilmark and West Tisbury, generated much discussion.

Michael Stutz said that in all fairness the town should not be paying the same amount as West Tisbury, which has many more households.

Voters approved three articles seeking funding for enhanced emergency medical services. Those articles now await prop 2.5 approval next month.

Voters tabled a request for \$150,000 to purchase a new tank truck for the fire department, saying the time was not right for such a large expenditure.

Thrift was also behind a motion to table a request for \$117,000 needed to construct a two-bay garage.

In other action, voters approved a request for \$30,000 for a new police cruiser, which now goes to a prop 2.5 vote; an increase in the land bank exemption to not less than \$300; and agreed to explore a swap of town-owned land for the purpose of affordable housing.



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