

## **Aquinnah goes back to the voters for money**

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By Nelson Sigelman

Frustrated in three attempts to pass a Proposition 2.5 override, Aquinnah selectmen next week will hold a special town meeting in an effort to pump more money into the town's 2005 operating budget.

Taking a new tack in a budget struggle that began almost six months ago, selectmen will ask voters on Dec. 16 to approve transfers totaling \$57,300 from the town's stabilization fund. A two-thirds vote is required for approval on transfers from the stabilization fund.

According to Marjorie Spitz, Aquinnah town accountant, there is currently approximately \$250,000 in the town's stabilization fund.

The nine warrant articles include a request for \$25,800 to fund town employee wages and salaries, including cost of living adjustments; \$10,000 for town legal expenses; \$5,000 for maintenance of town buildings and grounds;

\$2,500 for shellfish/harbormaster expenses; \$4,000 for the fire department; and \$6,000 for community programs.

Last June, selectmen presented a budget with deep cuts and optimistic revenue projections in order to avoid a shutdown of town government on July 1, 2004, the start of the fiscal year. They have since struggled to reverse some of those cuts most notably to town employee salaries.

In a special election on Oct. 28, Aquinnah voters rejected 11 of 12 prop 2.5 questions totaling \$102,967, agreeing only to an increase in spending for snow and ice removal, but nothing else.

Last month, stung by their third prop 2.5 defeat at the voting booth, selectmen decided to go back to the town meeting floor and ask voters to approve transfers from the stabilization fund based on assurances that the money would be replaced.

Carl Widdiss, chairman of the board of selectmen, said the town expected to receive approximately \$225,000 in so-called free cash, undesignated money remaining in a town's account at the end of the fiscal year and certified from the state department of revenue services. He said that money once available could be used to replenish the stabilization fund.

Next week's special town meeting is the latest act in a 2005 operating budget drama that began with the annual town meeting in May that did not conclude until late June when town officials cut approximately \$180,000 from the budget and revised revenue projections in order to begin the fiscal year with a balanced operating budget.

The budget struggle takes place against a backdrop of continuing disagreement over the extent to which the Wampanoag Tribe is meeting its obligations to the town and taxpayers, in particular the costs borne by taxpayers to educate children living in the tribal housing complex.

The special town meeting begins at 7 pm in the Aquinnah Town Hall.



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