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## **Aquinnah Holds Special Town Meeting**

By IAN FEIN

Aquinnah voters will gather for a special town meeting on Tuesday to take up the topic of a town-owned cellular phone tower and act on a series of small spending requests.

Moderator Walter E. Delaney will open the eight-article warrant at 7 p.m. in the old town hall.

Cellular towers have been a lightning rod issue in Aquinnah and other towns on the Vineyard, as rural communities struggle to come to grips with the seemingly inevitable fate of such facilities. There are currently no cellular towers in Aquinnah.

The attempt to build a wireless facility at the town landfill follows two lawsuits filed by Cingular Wireless last month against the Aquinnah planning board for denying a proposed cellular antenna inside the steeple of the Gay Head Community Baptist Church.

Although it is not clear whether the articles would have any impact on the Cingular lawsuit, town officials said they see it as a way to maintain more control over the siting of cellular towers in the future.

The federal Telecommunications Act of 1996 severely restricts a town's ability to turn down a wireless facility, but does preserve local authority over the placement of such facilities.

If approved, the warrant articles would in effect limit any future antennae to the single landfill location.

Some Aquinnah residents have raised concerns about health issues related to the potential tower. But scientific studies about such health impacts are inconclusive, and federal law prohibits the town from using health concerns in denying an antenna application.

Selectman and planning board chairman Camille Rose said last month that the 6.4-acre landfill site is the one piece of land in the town that the board felt was safe and secure and would address most of the concerns of most of the people in town.

Selectman and board chairman James Newman said this week that even though he and the rest of the board are leading the attempt to build a wireless facility at the landfill, he hopes that residents opposed to the idea feel free to speak their minds at town meeting.

"Though I am in favor, I feel it is important that anybody who has a concern - either pro or con - has the ability to articulate that concern, and that consensus will govern the outcome," Mr. Newman said.

The first article, which seeks to create a wireless overlay district at the landfill, is a zoning bylaw amendment and will require two-thirds approval on town meeting floor. The second

article, which would authorize selectmen to lease space for antennae on the potential town-owned tower, will require a simple majority. The planning board will hold a public hearing on the wireless district article in the town hall on Monday at 7 p.m.

One small spending request that may spark discussion relates to the years-long debate about installing reflective road signs in town. Like the cellular tower issue, the road sign debate involves town officials trying to comply with federal requirements without losing Aquinnah's small-town rural character.

Town officials need another \$1,750 - on top of the \$3,000 already approved at a previous town meeting - to purchase the federally mandated signs.

Mr. Delaney, who is also the fire chief, said he sympathizes with town residents who are opposed to the signs, but maintained that it is simply a matter of public safety.

"I can understand. We're a rural town, and the feds said this is what you have to do," Chief Delaney said. "But when you go up in the woods at night, and you look for driveways in the dark, you have to know where to go."

Town administrator Jeffrey Burgoyne said the town needs 65 signs, and will seek to meet the minimum size requirements and limit the impact on the natural setting. As of this week town officials had not yet decided on a color for the signs, but were looking at options of red, green and maroon. A sign company representative is scheduled to meet with town officials today.

Chief Delaney said that at this point the aesthetic issue should be eclipsed by the public safety concern.

"I don't care what they are - just get something up," Chief Delaney said. "We've been arguing about this for too long."

Mr. Newman seemed skeptical that signs would be installed any time soon. "I'll believe it when I see it," he offered.

Because the article seeks to transfer money from the stabilization fund, it will require two-thirds approval.

Chief Delaney and the Aquinnah fire department are also requesting another \$1,750 transfer from the stabilization fund to install an electric line from the fire station generator to the new well at the old town hall, which would provide water to the library and other municipal buildings during an emergency.

The community preservation committee has authored two articles seeking to use more than \$35,000 in already collected Community Preservation Act (CPA) funds for various projects in town. The committee recommended putting \$20,000 toward renovation and improvements of the library entry area, where the money would be used to comply with handicap access requirements and to create a recreational terrace and ice-skating area.

The committee also recommended spending \$8,000 on landscape restoration and screening along the town parking lot at the Aquinnah circle, and \$5,000 to restore parts of town-owned

property at the Gay Head Cliffs.

One article that does not have the support of many town officials is a request from town treasurer and tax collector for an automatic mail machine. The machine would be used to help prepare tax bills, which are still done manually.

The machine would cost the town \$1,925 for the rest of the fiscal year, and then another \$275 per month for the duration of a four-year lease.

The finance committee voted not to recommend the request, and selectmen at a meeting last month expressed their opposition to the article. Because it is a request to transfer money from the town stabilization fund, the article will require two-thirds approval at town meeting.

"Maybe we can get pre-stamped envelopes or something, but this seems like a very expensive option," Mr. Newman said. "I personally can't support this."

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