

Aquinnah's Winning Ways

It is a town where neighbors are still neighbors in the most intimate sense of the word, a town that takes pride in its old-fashioned ways, and this includes the lack of cellular telephone service. But the residents of Aquinnah do not have their heads in the sand and they confronted the modern day reality of cellular towers at a recent special town meeting with thoughtful discussion and deliberation. The topic is due for final deliberation and fine-tuning at a special town meeting on Tuesday night.

The proposal now on the table calls for creating a district in town where cellular towers may be allowed by special permit. The bylaw has been incorporated into the townwide district of critical planning concern (Aquinnah is the only community on the Vineyard that has placed its entire township under the special designation).

The article was the result of a citizen-led movement to address the problem of cellular towers, and comes against the backdrop of a legal challenge from Cingular over its failed plan to put a cellular antennae in the steeple of the Gay Head Community Baptist Church. Also, in a more recent action taken by the Aquinnah selectmen, the proposed cellular antennae issue is now before the Martha's Vineyard Commission. A decision from the MVC on whether to hold public hearings and review the project as a development of regional impact is expected later this month.

The cellular tower problem is not unique to Aquinnah, but in fact faces every town on the Vineyard.

At the special town meeting early this month in the old town hall, Aquinnah voters listened and asked questions and in the end made a sensible, informed decision, acting in the interest of their town.

At this juncture, Cingular should take its cue from the good citizens of Aquinnah and be a good citizen, too. The company should drop the big-guns lawsuit against the town, shift gears and submit a plan to install a cellular antennae in the new town-approved district near the landfill.

It is the right thing to do, and Cingular could set the example for the future by working with town officials instead of battling them in court.

In the end everyone would win.