

Aquinnah voters, step up

To the Editor:

I would like to thank the Martha's Vineyard Commission for approving and passing the proposed amendments to the town zoning bylaws as regards our designation as a district of critical planning concern. The planning board made a wise move by inserting regulations creating a wireless overlay district that specifically indicates accommodations for the Distributed Antenna System (DAS), while making it impossible for a wireless communications company to build a cell tower.

Cell towers are passé. They are a health hazard and just plain unsightly. However, the federal Communications Act of 1996 (TCA) limits the obstacles a town may place in the way of wireless communications companies seeking to provide service where there is a lack of coverage. We are urging Aquinnah residents to assist us in moving ahead with a safer, newer technology - the Distributed Antenna System (DAS). Nantucket is on board with it, so is Northampton, Brookline, and Pepperell. It consists of a series of small antennas, placed atop poles at strategic locations and connected by fiber optics. A base unit, or shed, accommodates the electronics equipment.

The DAS is the safest cellular communications service we could find. Each antenna cannot exceed the minimum of 199 watts, and the fewest number of antennas necessary will be utilized. The RF's emitted are much lower than a cell tower's, therefore much safer.

The DAS project is an ecologically minded one. The fiber optic cables will be trenched underground, wherever possible, in order not to break the skyline. The poles will be made of a material that will discreetly blend in with the surrounding landscape. The small base station (which holds the wiring equipment) will be a fireproof shed at the landfill, surrounded by local naturalized landscaping plants.

I think Aquinnah residents will find that improved wireless communications can have many benefits, especially to emergency response professionals and families with children or the elderly. In addition, the poles can support another emerging new technology - Wi-MAX, which is wireless Internet for entire towns. How cool is that? I believe we can retain the charm and character of Aquinnah, while cutting ourselves a niche as being on the forefront of ecology and technology.

Aquinnah residents can be assured that we are working with the Aquinnah planning board, MVC, legal and wireless communications counselors, and local ecologists to make this project the best it can be for everyone. Our own research and grassroots work has been instrumental in making this happen, but we couldn't do any of it without the Aquinnah voters. Thanks to everyone working on this project - too numerous to mention.

Aquinnah residents: please vote at town meeting next week. (As always, we suggest using cell phones and computers at your own risk).

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Aquinnah