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Aquinnah tries again for special meeting

Posted February 16, 2006

By Nelson Sigelman

Aquinnah selectmen will try for the third time in two months to complete a special town meeting that has been postponed twice due to lack of a quorum.

The Feb. 21 special town meeting warrant includes an early test of Island voter sentiment regarding county government and asks voters to pave the way for a wireless communication system in Aquinnah that does not rely on high towers.

Reaching a quorum in the future would be made easier if at least 40 voters show up at 7 pm in town hall for the Tuesday night meeting and vote in the affirmative on article three, a measure that would lower the number of voters required for a quorum from ten percent to five percent of the electorate.

Two of the 12 articles voters will be asked to consider are directed at the 2006 May 10 town election ballot. The recent discussion swirling around the future of county government will be placed on the town meeting floor when voters are asked if they are in favor of placing a non-binding referendum question on the ballot "supporting the dissolution of the County of Dukes County."

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County government currently costs Island taxpayers \$750,762, in the form of an assessment levied against the six Island towns plus the town of Gosnold that make up the county of Dukes County. Aquinnah 's share of \$28,588 comes right off the top of town revenues and does not appear on the annual town budget.

MOVING?

A warrant article proposing that voters be asked on the election ballot if the town should honor one town resident annually as "Aquinnah citizen of the year" will be dropped because that is not the proper venue according to the state elections commission.

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AT VINEYARD DECORATORS

The Gay Head cliffs and Moshup Trail roadway are popular destinations for Island tour buses and a source of some irritation in town. Voters will consider an appeal to state lawmakers for authorization "to adopt by-laws regulating the length, height, and width of buses, tour buses, charter buses, common carriers of passengers by motor vehicles, or other such vehicles of more than ten passengers being driven or operating on town-owned roadways within the limits" of the town.

At the December special town meeting much of the lengthy discussion focused on the legal and technical issues surrounding wireless communication. The federal Telecommunication Act of 1996 (TCA) limits the obstacles towns may place in the way of wireless communication companies seeking to provide service where there is a lack of coverage. Voters approved by a two-thirds vote an amended article creating a special wireless overlay district that would allow the placement of equipment at the town landfill needed to operate a distributed antenna system (DAS), a less obtrusive wireless communication system that uses fiber-optic cable and a network of short antennas, which are often placed on telephone poles in strategic locations.

Another special town meeting was needed because substantial amendments were added to articles in the original special town meeting warrant, which proposed a wireless tower of up to 120 feet at the landfill site. That article was amended to lower the tower's height to 70 feet, making it unlikely that a company interested in putting up a tower would find the site attractive for such a system.

At the Feb. 21 meeting, voters will be asked to amend the zoning by-laws to allow for antennas in the town's Wireless Overlay District that do not exceed 70 feet and allow for the installation of antennas on existing utility poles or poles installed for that purpose.

Voters will also be asked to create a wireless district consisting of a parcel "...whose prior use has caused it to be

environmentally compromised, is severely restricted by that condition in its ability to support commercial or residential development and is under environmental supervision due to that condition including but not necessarily limited to the parcel at Assessors Map 8 Lot 31," namely the town landfill.

Selectmen will also ask voters to continue to provide them with technical help by providing \$10,000 for wireless consultant services to assist the town in "...putting out to bid, awarding, and overseeing the development of a wireless distributed antenna system with the express goals of minimizing the impact of wireless facility development on the town and generating revenue for the town from such facilities."

On another technological front, voters will be asked to take \$750 from the stabilization fund to pay a consultant to prepare a wind turbine grant application through the Massachusetts Technology Collaborative. Town officials are proposing to place a turbine behind the town hall for the purpose of cutting the town's energy bill.

In other business, voters will be asked to spend \$750 to fund consultant services in preparation of a wind turbine grant application; pay a \$268 bill for goods and services provided to the shellfish department last year; \$182.31 to pay for goods and services provided to the Fire Department.



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