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## NEWS

### Aquinnah Reconvenes Town Meeting

By IAN FEIN

Aquinnah voters this week will pick up where they left off one month ago and reconvene their annual town meeting to try to adopt a balanced town budget.

The original town meeting adjourned early on May 9 when it became clear that a large contingent of voters were unhappy with the budget as presented. This week's meeting, a continuation of the chaotic first installment, will be held on Thursday at 7 p.m. in the old town hall.

Town officials are hopeful that public sentiment has improved in the last month.

"We're hoping that the meeting goes well and is productive and that our budget can be put to bed with everybody feeling positive about it," said selectman James Newman.

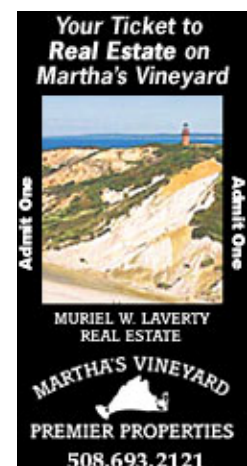
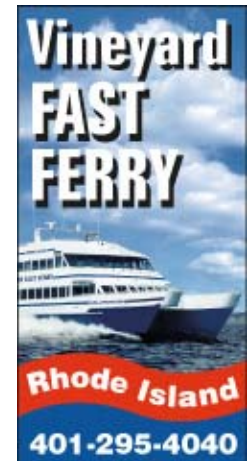
It is essentially a second try at a failed first attempt. Voters last month did not make it past the third article of a 30-article warrant before the meeting collapsed into anarchy.

The meeting on Thursday will begin with the third article, a revised \$2.6 million town budget.

"We're starting all over again," said moderator Walter Delaney.

If voters do not approve a budget by June 30, the Aquinnah town hall may have to close its doors. But the budgetary prospects have more clarity after the results of the annual town election on May 10, when voters approved six of 12 Proposition 2 1/2 override requests and gave themselves roughly \$120,000 in breathing room to balance the budget. Proposition 2 1/2 is a state law that restricts annual increases in the town property tax levy limit.

A \$40,000 override for the harbor master budget passed at the polls, which might quell some of the dissent on town meeting floor. A number of voters last month criticized selectmen for putting the harbor master budget at risk.



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Town officials in the last month reviewed the election results and decided which of the failed override requests they still wanted to pursue.

The \$27,000 payment to the Martha's Vineyard Commission, which failed at the polls 92-61, is a statutory assessment and therefore must be paid. Town officials said they also need at least \$1,000 for assessing department expenses, and want to contribute the town's \$6,000 share to the Dukes County Housing Authority. They decided not to pursue three operating overrides that failed at the polls - salaries and health insurance for assessors, as well as the town's contribution to the regional Martha's Vineyard Shellfish Group.

They will try to bring the desired payments under the Proposition 2 1/2 limit by cutting \$34,000 elsewhere in the budget.

As it will be presented to voters on Thursday, the proposed budget will have an \$8,000 decrease in legal spending and a \$1,000 cut in treasurer's expenses. Selectmen have also eliminated the most expensive health insurance option for town employees, resulting in a \$15,000 decrease in the benefits section of the budget, and instead of hiring two full-time summer police officers, the town will go with one full time and one part time officer, saving another few thousand dollars. The town housing committee offered to lower its expense line by \$6,000 to fund the regional housing authority,

Voters last month also soundly rejected two non-operating overrides for alarms in the fire station and a debt exclusion request to build a new garage for emergency vehicles. Town officials for now will abandon the \$170,000 garage and \$3,500 fire station warning siren, but might try to tap the stabilization fund for a \$5,000 carbon monoxide detector.

They may also seek to take \$5,000 from the stabilization fund to cover additional assessors' expenses expected in the coming year.

A large number of the articles on the town meeting warrant addressed the budget override requests, and therefore may no longer require approval nor much discussion. However, the last 12 articles have not been affected by the budget maneuvers.

The remaining articles include: a request from the tri-town ambulance committee to begin charging for ambulance calls, a request from the selectmen to change the position of town administrator to town coordinator, and two stabilization fund requests - \$30,000 to pay for a townwide revaluation for fiscal year 2008, and \$25,000 for a new police cruiser sedan. Stabilization fund payments require two-thirds approval.



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Originally published in The Vineyard Gazette  
edition of Tuesday, June 6, 2006

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