

The Martha's Vineyard Times

Aquinnah approves alcohol sales

By Nelson Sigelman - March 15, 2007

Motivated by several significant articles on the warrant, Aquinnah voters braved a night temperature that dipped below 19-degrees and turned out in force for a special town meeting last week.

Although there had been some concern about reaching the needed quorum of 40 voters, about 7 pm Thursday night, the scheduled starting time, the old town hall was rapidly filling with voters.

In an evening marked by much last-minute tinkering with the language of articles, voters took action on 27 separate warrant articles.

Despite a sizable contingent of tribal members who voted no, voters endorsed an agreement between the town and the Wampanoag Tribe designed to avoid future land use and permitting battles.

After considerable discussion, voters took the first step in a process that would eventually permit restaurants in town to sell beer and wine.

Despite the urging of selectmen, voters also rejected a proposal to reduce the quorum from 10 percent of the electorate to 7 percent.

Down to business

On Thursday night Aquinnah voters got first crack at an issue that is expected to come up for discussion during the annual round of spring annual town meetings, a request to create an Island wide Energy Conservation District of Critical Planning Concern.

The article as presented to Aquinnah voters included language describing some examples of the type of structures targeted by the new district's regulations, "for example, structures having more than 2,000 square feet of interior space within their weather walls at ground level."

Voters questioned the vagueness of the language. One voter asked for a definition of new renovations. Another wanted to amend the square footage to avoid putting an undue burden on small homeowners.

Selectman Jim Newman, one of the backers of the energy DCPC and architect of the article, quickly backtracked. He said the goal was to create the DCPC and not set any parameters. The language was only meant to provide an example, he said, of future regulations.

Another voter pointed out that Aquinnah already had a sufficient number of zoning regulations. Mr. Newman invoked the threat of global warming, telling voters that at some point he would be able to fish off his deck and he lives on a hill.

After dropping any reference to regulatory examples, voters supported a nomination by selectmen of a DCPC designation by a vote of 43 to 10.

An article asking voters "to endorse" the "Intergovernmental agreement on cooperative land use and

planning between the Wampanoag Indian tribe and the town of Aquinnah" was not expected to spur debate and it did not, but there was a brief surprise.

In January members of the Wampanoag tribal council had voted overwhelmingly in favor of the 12-page document, the outgrowth of a long legal battle over the limits of tribal sovereignty and intended to help avoid future lawsuits.

Moderator Walter Delaney read the article and waited for the expected discussion. No one asked to be recognized, or spoke up. "No discussion?" asked Mr. Delaney, the surprise in his voice evident.

At that, Jason Baird, a member of the Wampanoag Tribe stood up. "I just want to go on record saying that I am absolutely, unequivocally not in favor of this."

Donald Widdiss, chairman of the Wampanoag tribe and one of the architects of the agreement, remained silent.

"Any further discussion?" asked Mr. Delaney. Hearing none he called for a vote. With a sizeable number of tribal members voting no, the article passed 28 to 18.

An article intended to gauge whether town voters wanted to adopt a new school funding formula was postponed indefinitely. Selectman Camille Rose asked voters to put off action while Island selectmen worked to find a new model that would be both equitable and not destroy long-standing relationships made in good faith.

In many ways her request was a moot point. Town counsel Ron Rappaport said that the reference in the article to "an aggregate wealth funding formula" was a term without legal meaning and any vote would have no effect because the town was not voting on the assessment.

However discussion continued with John Walsh, a member of the finance committee, arguing that town voters should take the opportunity to save the estimated \$100,000 in school funding costs. He said two towns, Oak Bluffs and Aquinnah stood to benefit. "The majority is not going to vote to pay more money, and if we don't ask for our share we are not going to get given it," said Mr. Walsh.

But Jeffrey Madison, a former selectman saw it differently. He said regional agreements were hard to craft and Aquinnah, a community with no school, should not risk alienate its neighboring communities when the issue was education.

With little discussion, voters agreed to adopt a school funding formula for the Up-Island Regional School district. Mr. Madison also took the floor to argue successfully against a motion to reduce the quorum from 10 percent to 7 percent. Selectmen argued that it was important for the town to be able to conduct business and 10 percent was often unreachable in the winter.

Mr. Madison said seven percent would reduce the quorum from 40 to 28 people. He aid he could not support the notion of 15 people being able to decide important town votes. Voters rejected the article 38 to 7.

The lengthiest discussion of the night was reserved for the last article of the night, a request to place a question on the annual town election ballot authorizing selectmen to seek legislative approval to permit restaurants to serve beer and wine.

Some voters argued that it was a long ride down-Island and restaurants should be allowed to serve beer and

wine for the enjoyment of customers. People were carrying in beer and wine, said one voter.

But others argued against any change, taking the position that if it is not broke, don't fix it. The real debate was on the seat limit of "not less than 30 people" included in the warrant article.

Voters objected saying it was unfair to small establishments. An amendment changing the number to 15 seats passed, 36 to 12. The question as amended passed by a vote of 38 to 14.

In other business voters: approved the addition of \$3,977 to the Tri Town ambulance operating budget; \$10,249 for highway improvements; \$1,900 for a new water heater in the police station; \$20,000 for the mortgage on the Edwin Vanderhoop Homestead; \$5,000 for the services of a consultant; and \$5,700 to repair the West Basin ramp and dock. They also agreed to authorize selectmen to pursue a fiber optic wireless network in conjunction with neighboring towns.

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