

## The Martha's Vineyard Times



### Aquinnah faces \$2.9 million budget

By Nelson Sigelman - May 3, 2007

Aquinnah voters gather Tuesday at 7 pm in the intimate confines of their aging and well-worn town hall, a building they will be asked to spend money to repair, to take up a spare annual town meeting warrant and a fiscal year 2008 operating budget of \$2,888,996.

Efforts to put the town's financial affairs in order have paid off. For the first time in many years, town leaders knew well before the annual town meeting that there was approximately \$215,000 available in so-called free cash, money certified by the state in excess of expenses in the prior fiscal year.

As a result, Aquinnah voters, who had become accustomed to last-minute announcements concerning the amount of free cash available to blunt proposition 2.5 requests, will convene without the budget uncertainty and long list of overrides that had become a staple of prior years.

The annual meeting will be preceded by a special town meeting to clear up business in the current fiscal year 2007 that ends on June 30, 2007.

Voters go to the polls on Wednesday between noon and 7 pm to vote in an election with one contest, a race for one seat on the board of selectmen, two Proposition 2.5 questions and one ballot question.

Voters will be asked if the selectmen should seek legislative approval to allow the town to issue licenses for the sale of beer and wine to be consumed with meals by patrons of restaurants with a seating capacity of not less than 15 people

The question stipulates that Legislative approval would still require approval by Aquinnah voters in a town election.

#### **Budget includes raises**

Town employees are the principal beneficiaries of next year's operating budget, which includes an across the board 4-percent cost of living increase and several salary hikes.

The budget line for the town accountant department will increase from \$44,450 to \$61,985, approximately 39percent, mostly on the strength of an increase in the accountant's wage from \$40,450 to \$55,775.

The assessor's department expenses will more than double, rising from \$20,000 to \$46,380. That figure reflects the town's decision to hire a state-certified assessor to replace long-time assessor Jeananne Jeffers, who retired last year.

The police department budget, which next to education takes the biggest bite from the budget, would rise from \$324,775 to \$391,719. The department budget reflects an increase in the salary for Chief Randhi Belain from \$71,968 to \$80,226 and an increase in department wages from \$227,707 to \$276,068.

Library wages will also increase, from \$37,121 to \$46,121. Overall, the Library department would jump from \$50,051 to \$68,263.

Aquinnah's part-time building inspector, Jerry Wiener, who works full time in Oak Bluffs, will receive a salary increase from \$7,260 to \$9,000.

Increased capabilities will fuel an increase in the cost of ambulance services from \$109,344 to \$135,126.

The addition of the Martha's Vineyard Shellfish Group assessment means that expenses for the Shellfish/Harbormaster department will increase from \$40,625 to \$69,214.

One line that will decrease is for legal expenses, a drop from \$40,000 to \$30,000.

The cost of educating Aquinnah students will total \$1,040,459. The elementary school assessment would drop slightly from \$666,496 to \$659,730. The high school assessment will rise from \$347,361 to \$380,729.

### **Warrant appears tame**

Most long-time observers of Aquinnah politics know that any gathering of voters in the Island's smallest town has the potential to produce unexpected debate even about seemingly uncontroversial articles.

Next week voters will have the opportunity to pick and choose from a nine-article special town meeting warrant and a 16-article annual.

Spending requests include \$11,000 to pay for an audit of the FY 2007 financial statements; \$5,000 for a police computer server, \$5,000 to identify and make necessary repairs to the roof and chimney of the old town hall, and \$12,000 for the purchase and repair of playground equipment and site restoration.

The discovery that the town had never completed the permitting process for the landfill local drop is behind a request for \$10,000.

The annual town meeting will begin with a request that voters approve the FY 2008 operating budget.

Article six, which will also be presented to voters in the form of a Prop. 2.5 override, is a request to appropriate and borrow \$80,000 to pay for the preservation and repair of the historic old town hall.

Article seven, the only other prop. 2.5 request on the ballot, asks voters to appropriate and approve borrowing \$45,000 to purchase a new highway department dump truck.

The Community Preservation Committee will ask voters to approve spending community preservation funds divided between open space, historic preservation, affordable housing, and a reserve fund.

Voters will also be asked to spend Community preservation funds on a list of projects including: \$7,000 for exterior paint and repairs to the Aquinnah Library; \$10,000 for restoration costs for the Edwin Vanderhoop Homestead; \$10,000 for structural repairs to the old town hall; and \$10,000 for surveying, site clearing, and other pre-development expenses for the proposed development of affordable rental housing in the town center.

In addition, voters will be asked to spend \$5,000 from free cash to enable the Police Department to participate in joint training with other public safety officials; \$1,626 from free cash to pay Aquinnah's share of a new copier machine for the Tri-Town Ambulance; \$2,500 from free cash to pay for development and installation of a town website; and \$2,600 from free cash to upgrade the town's assessors' maps.

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