

The Martha's Vineyard Times

Editorial

Spencer Booker in Aquinnah

Posted May 3, 2007

Aquinnah sports a unique set of municipal governance problems. Here is one sovereign nation within one sovereign town, a few hundred residents and voters, a spectacularly attractive landscape that is home to a wary host of summer property owners with a great interest but no say in municipal affairs, bustling summer tourism, and real estate taxes that hit the voters harder than the seasonal property owners who pay a great deal of the freight.

This strange mix has resulted in municipal chaos, chronicled in The Times for years. Recently, we've seen progress, as the rolls of tax delinquents have been whittled down, and professional management has helped the selectmen to oversee and increase efficiency of town government.

The success in the lawsuit pressed by the non-resident taxpayers that ultimately defined and limited the sovereignty enjoyed by the Wampanoag Tribe of Gay Head (Aquinnah), according to the settlement agreement signed by the tribe's members in 1983, has also helped to stabilize the relationship between the tribe and the town of Aquinnah. And last month, the tribe and the town agreed on cooperative land use and planning procedures and regulation, embodied in a memorandum of understanding between the two governments. The agreement is intended to keep them out of court. This recent history suggests that more progress is likely to be made, with the right leadership mix.

Adding Spencer Booker to this leadership, as the third town selectman, makes sense. Mr. Booker, a member of the tribe, has been a resident of Aquinnah for more than a decade. He appears to believe that working out the problems and conflicts that will certainly beset town-tribe relations in the years ahead is preferable to endlessly deferring efforts at resolution and ending up in court. On the question of how the tribe might share in the cost of educating Aquinnah children, Mr. Booker says determinedly, "This is a topic that must have open dialogue between the tribe and the town. We have children to educate within our town's borders, and as with everything in our society, the cost just keeps going up. To that end we must sit down and see where both governments can complement one another in defraying the costs associated with educating our children. Ultimately, it's in their best interest that we do so. As a selectman, I will."

The prospect that issues such as how a small town, with a sovereign nation within it, pays a big bill for education may be resolved constructively will be made more likely by the presence of a thoughtful member of the Wampanoag tribe on the board of selectmen. Mr. Booker says he is oriented toward getting results. He has promised, "I will do what those before me have done - work for the common good of everyone in Aquinnah, tribal and non-tribal alike. We all drink the same water, breathe the same air, and plant the same soil. It is in that spirit that I will conduct myself and the affairs of Aquinnah."

Aquinnah voters will do themselves a good turn by electing Mr. Booker next week, and then holding him to his promises.

This page URL:

<http://www.mvtimes.com/news/2007/05/03/editorial.php>

This Page was generated with **web2printer 4** in: 0.237473 seconds <http://www.printer-friendly.com>