

The Martha's Vineyard Times

Three seek Aquinnah selectman's seat

By Nelson Sigelman

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Aquinnah voters will choose from among three long-time residents who have been active in the affairs of the Island's smallest town to fill one seat on the three-member board of selectmen.

The polls will be open Wednesday from noon until 7 pm in Aquinnah town hall on State Road.

The three candidates are incumbent selectman and planning board chairman Camille Rose, finance board member John Walsh, and up-Island school committee board member Roxane Ackerman.

Ms. Rose (photo unavailable) is seeking a second term. She has lived and worked in Aquinnah for the past 35 years, much of that time as a commercial fisherman. She was chairman of the first Gay Head Planning Board and has served in various capacities and on different boards, including the finance committee, shellfish committee, Martha's Vineyard Commission, and numerous advisory committees over the years.

John Walsh has raised two sons, both of whom graduated from Island schools and now live on the Vineyard. He has been a builder and for a time operated a bed and breakfast in Aquinnah. He has been an active member of the finance committee.

Roxane Ackerman has been the Gay Head librarian and a shellfishermen. She worked at the Social Law Library in Boston, the library that serves the Massachusetts Supreme Judicial Court, and she has raised four children in Aquinnah. She now has an oyster farm on Menemsha Pond.

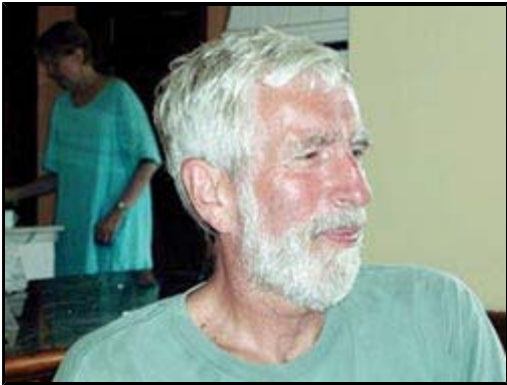
The election takes place against a background of change in the way the town conducts business. This includes a revamped salary structure for town employees and the decision last year to hire a professional assessor.

The Times recently forwarded a series of questions to the three candidates for selectmen. Each candidate was asked to respond within a 450-word limit.

Why are you running for election (re-election)?

Camille Rose: My first term as selectman was a learning experience. It has taken this much time to learn something about the complexities of municipal finance. I would like to put that knowledge to work.

There are several projects I would like to follow through including the DAS cell phone plan, improving the Cliff area, expanding Philbin Beach, refurbishing town-owned properties, and developing a productive, close relationship with the Tribe.



John Walsh.

John Walsh: I have participated in town government on the finance committee for six years. In that time we have slowly watched the town hall transform itself from chaos to a much more organized and professional operation with an infrastructure in place that gives the voters significantly more control over town government.

We have a manager who oversees the day-to-day operations, a wage scale that makes us competitive in the job market, and an assessing process in sync with state standards.

Roxane Ackerman: I am running for selectman because I see unnecessary dissension in the agenda set at Town Hall. We have great volunteers who serve brilliantly on committees. Elections and town meeting are democracy at work; working together not challenging each other for sport. We should support our youth who want homes in Aquinnah.

I have served as school committee representative for 25 years supporting standards for excellence in education fostering good citizenship for our future. Costs are high and we work hard to bring the best budget to you inviting the public, selectmen and finance committee involvement. My colleagues from schoolwork serve effectively across the Island in many positions for networking. Aquinnah does not have to invent although there is talent in our community to serve our needs brilliantly.

Please comment on the town's relationship with the Tribe. How might it be improved?

Ms. Rose: The town and the Tribe should explore the possibilities of a joint master plan. We share one of the most special places in the world; we should share a vision for the future.

Pooling our resources and love for the land, we can ensure the preservation of our beautiful landscape while building a thriving and vital community. Exploring how we can save this place for our children would be a wonderful joint venture.

Mr. Walsh: I support the Tribe in all of its endeavors and wish the members only the very best of luck. What is good for the Tribe is good for the town and vice versa. We are all in this small space together. Whether it is windmills or any other business plan they create to make jobs for their membership, they have my full support.



Roxane Ackerman.

Ms. Ackerman: The town's relationship with the tribe is strained. I have worked with the tribe in many capacities. There is plenty of talent, good will and resources to make the town a prosperous and healthy home for all. In Palm Springs, Calif., the Cahuilla Tribe own every other lot in a checker-board. This is a success story I observed traveling to the native judiciary.

Please outline some of your solutions to control costs and restrain the tax burden placed on property owners.

Ms. Rose: Everyone speaks of affordable housing, but we don't spend enough energy on keeping what housing we have affordable. If we want to maintain a community where the young people full of energy and the elders full of wisdom can afford to remain and pay their real estate taxes, we need to keep expenditures to a minimum while not stinting community services. We must encourage development that fits into the character of the town instead of becoming a summer colony for the wealthy where the average working man cannot afford the real estate taxes. We need to take advantage of grant money and we must increase local revenue sources that will not burden the taxpayer.

Mr. Walsh: In the past year I went to the selectmen and proposed that we pursue the renovation of the old town hall kitchen. It had been derelict for years and the condition of the building and its abandoned condition bothered me as a citizen.

I became convinced that the town could remedy many of its problems by the radical infusion of music, laughter, and fun.

The hope is that we can have a monthly potluck music night to bring the whole community together.

Aquinnah is a very small town to divide in two. The creation of the tribe split the social and political energy of our small town into pieces that combined with the abandoning of the old town hall as a social center left the community as a whole no focal point. I would like to oversee the completion of renovations to old town hall.

At the end of May we will schedule a community sing-along and potluck music night to open the new kitchen that I hope is the start of a schedule of monthly gatherings of food, drink and songs that can help bring back a sense of fun that was so much what the town was about for generations.

I would like to encourage citizens to remove the town-wide DCPC and restore political planning power to the town rather than the Martha's Vineyard Commission. The ultimate community bonding power is the power of the town meeting. In the town meeting we the people control our future. We are the people whose loyalty is to Aquinnah and not some larger political entity that may need to sacrifice our interest to solve some regional problem.

I feel that our best use is as a summer town whose winter residents benefit from the tax base and jobs that summer people provide. We also need to take care of our own, and support of affordable housing for long-term residents is at the top of my list.

Ms. Ackerman: Some of the solutions to control costs and restrain the tax burden placed on property owners is to prioritize our needs. Many costs are so small that they do not seem significant, but they add up. Have we tried to cut a percentage across the budget? Negotiating and mediating, as well as listening should bring some results. I am also realistic that building a budget is challenging.

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