

# The Martha's Vineyard Times

## For Aquinnah, it's level spending, DCPC

By Nelson Sigelman

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Aquinnah has a reputation for unique ways of managing its affairs. On Monday the town will hold the last of this year's round of annual Island town meetings and do something no other town did.

Aquinnah will not increase its total operating budget by even one dollar. The budget for fiscal year (FY) 2009 that begins on July 1 is \$2,860,203, the same total approved for FY 2008.

The budget is frugal but it is not as simple as it appears. Voters will be asked to approve five Proposition 2.5 override questions totaling \$112,228. Although the money could have been included as part of the budget, town leaders preferred to give voters an opportunity to fund the requests through the override process.

Voters will also have a choice about how the town calculates its up-Island Regional School District assessment. The FY 09 budget presented to voters is based on the state's so-called statutory assessment method. If the voters accept that calculation, the town would part ways with the regional agreement upon which West Tisbury and Chilmark based their FY 09 assessments. If Aquinnah does so, the result will prove particularly costly for West Tisbury.

The annual town meeting will follow a special town meeting that begins at 7 pm in the old town hall. Voters will be asked to take action on a total of 41 warrant articles.

On Wednesday, voters go to the polls from noon to 7 pm to decide a three-way race for a seat on the board of selectmen and vote on seven ballot questions.

[A copy of the annual and special town meeting warrants can be found at [here](#).]

The election takes place at a time of change for a town known for its political intimacy and the delicate nature of its relationship with the Wampanoag Tribe of Gay Head (Aquinnah).

In November, the Wampanoag Tribe elected Cheryl Andrews-Maltais of Edgartown as its chairman, ousting incumbent Donald Widdiss.

In January, a complete revaluation of Aquinnah property, overseen by the town's first professional assessor, resulted in significantly higher assessments for waterfront properties, the correction of inaccurate property records, and the elimination of elderly exemptions that had been granted incorrectly.

As a result, Aquinnah's total valuation - including residential, commercial and personal property - increased by approximately 30 percent. To buffer the impact of these changes, town leaders created a budget designed to keep the tax rate as low as possible. The result is a rate that dropped from \$4.03 to \$3.25 per \$1,000 of valuation.

Town leaders are moving ahead with plans for an energy district of critical planning concern (DCPC). If approved the regulations would allow for the erection of wind turbines and affect future building requirements. At the same time, the tribe is moving ahead with plans for a wind turbine of

its own and plans to erect a test tower this month.

## **Another tool**

The special town meeting warrant includes the usual financial housekeeping items and a number of requests to spend community preservation funds.

Those requests include \$10,000 for the construction of brick walkways at the Gay Head cliffs and \$15,200 to bury approximately 400 feet of overhead wire along the south side of the Aquinnah circle.

Unlike the vigorous campaign and election drama that accompanied the question of beer and wine sales in Tisbury, in Aquinnah the issue has caused barely a ripple.

Begun as a nonchalant effort and approved by the legislature, the measure is on the ballot. If approved, the selectmen would be able 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.

A prelude to the vote will be article nine, a proposed addition to town bylaws that would make it illegal to transport or consume an open container of alcohol on town roads or in public places.

Aquinnah police chief Randhi Belain told The Times that Tisbury, Oak Bluffs, and Edgartown have similar bylaws, and the timing is right for Aquinnah to adopt one. He said town officers would continue to exercise discretion, but the bylaw would provide another useful tool for enforcement action when needed.

Article 28 on the annual warrant would authorize selectmen and the board of health to create a rental registration bylaw that would affect house rentals.

Many Cape towns have similar bylaws intended to prevent overcrowding and unsafe conditions. For example, Yarmouth does not allow any person to rent or lease a house or a room in a house for living purposes without first registering with the board of health and paying an annual permit fee.

## **School costs**

Town leaders managed to contain the FY 09 budget by level funding most departments. The major increases are salary increases tied to new wage scales for town employees and employee benefits.

A major increase is the cost of retirement benefits. That will jump from \$51,683 to \$86,995.

The town would also see a significant decrease in school costs tied to declining enrollment numbers and the adoption of the statutory formula.

The high school assessment would drop from \$319,791 to \$318,020. The regional school district assessment, which pays for Aquinnah students to attend the Chilmark or West Tisbury schools, would drop from \$659,730 to \$536,016, based on the statutory formula.

School officials said they have been completely caught off guard by the possibility that Aquinnah could upend the regional formula. If that happens, Chilmark would see its assessment drop from \$1,727,527 to \$1,626,183, a savings of \$101,345. However, West Tisbury would need to come up

with \$128,573 because its assessment rose from \$5,553,733 to \$5,682,306.

Articles four and five on the annual warrant provide an opportunity for voters to stick with the regional agreement and pay the additional \$27,228. Because the money would come from the stabilization fund, a two-thirds vote is required. Town coordinator Jeff Burgoyne said the selectmen plan to ask the moderator to take up the school articles prior to presenting the operating budget.

## Energy DCPC

Three DCPCs unique to Aquinnah provide regulatory controls, backed up by the Martha's Vineyard Commission, for the Gay Head cliffs area, Moshup Trail, and the town as a whole. Tonight, the MVC is scheduled to take up proposed regulations that would create an Aquinnah energy DCPC. The last step in the DCPC approval process would be town meeting approval.

The regulations that will be presented to voters focus on wind turbines. However, in the future, town leaders expect to present amendments to the DCPC regulations that would govern new construction.

The stated purposes of the proposed DCPC include reducing the overall consumption of fossil fuels through energy conservation and the local generation of energy from renewable sources, while protecting the cultural and natural environment of the town.

The new regulations include requirements for a professional energy audit before the issuance of a building or special permit and a call for solar or geothermal heating of pools and hot tubs.

The regulations restrict wind facilities in specific areas of town, including the Moshup Trail and Cliff DCPCs, but allow for placement, depending on the public benefit of the facility."

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