

VINEYARD GAZETTE

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Aquinnah Election Draws Three Candidates for Selectman's Seat

By JACK SHEA

When they go to the polls next week, Aquinnah voters will choose among three candidates for selectmen — all of whom are familiar faces in town.

Incumbent selectman Camille Rose is running for reelection; her challengers are Roxanne Ackerman, a longtime member of the school committee member and John Walsh, a member of the town finance committee. The annual town election will be held at the town hall on Wednesday, May 14; polling hours are noon to 7 p.m.



Roxanne Ackerman questions wind project.

Camille Rose has lived in Aquinnah for more than 40 years and was a former commercial fisherman with her late longtime partner Alfred Vanderhoop. She retired from fishing in 2001 and has been active in town affairs. Among other things, she was a former longtime member of the town planning board.

She is completing her first term as selectman.

And she refuses to be photographed by the press.

A former operations manager for a hazardous material transportation company in the Boston area, John Walsh is a former summer resident of the Island who moved to the Vineyard full time in 1989. He has been on the town finance committee for the last six years.

Roxanne Ackerman holds a master's degree in library science and was the town librarian for 15 years until 1999. More recently, she has become involved in Island shellfish biology and this year became a full-time oyster farmer on Menemsha Pond. She has served on the town school committee, and the regional high school district committee, for 25 years.

In interviews this week, the candidates spoke about the issues in this remote town that sits on the extreme westernmost edge of the Vineyard.

“Our first need is to develop a mutually beneficial relationship with the tribe,” Camille Rose said. She recalled 20 years ago when the tribe and the town were not considered

distinct entities. "Town hall was the center of town life. Tribal meetings were held there. There was no discomfort between tribal people and other Aquinnah residents. We have to make the town and the tribe as close as they were when I got here," she said, adding:

"Developing a sense of community also requires providing amenities for residents. While that can be a struggle when you're trying to hold taxes down, there are ways to do it, such as grant funding."

She spoke about the need for affordable housing in town, and not just for young people.

"This community must be affordable for all our people, young and old. We have to keep taxes down and have appropriate development that encourages year round residency," she said.

She believes there are times when it makes sense to join with other Island towns.

"I'd like to explore more regionalization, including assessing, and to some degree in police and fire services," she said, adding: "I plan to reexamine each of our regional agreements for fairness and to try to find better regionalizing models."

And Ms. Rose, who has shepherded the townwide energy district of critical planning concern, which comes to a vote at the annual town meeting on Tuesday, is of course an advocate for green alternatives — especially wind power.

"It's inevitable and we have a chance to do it properly. Wind energy is a tremendous opportunity for Aquinnah and I believe community wind is the way to go," she said.

By contrast, John Walsh is wary of the Martha's Vineyard Commission. "We were told when the town got recognition as a district of critical planning concern that the commission would disappear after the process but that didn't happen. If Aquinnah can be free of commission regulations, I will be a happy camper as a one-term selectman," he said.

He said he believes Aquinnah's small size limits its ability to achieve economies of scale.



John Walsh is wary of Martha's Vineyard Commission.

"This town was too small to begin with, so splitting it in two when tribal recognition occurred was a social disaster," he said. The tribe was granted federal recognition in 1987. "The tribe built its own community center and that has kept townspeople apart. The tribe doesn't use the town hall, and other townspeople, even though they are welcome, just don't go to the tribal community center," Mr. Walsh said. He has proposed a monthly potluck at town hall to help bridge the social divide.

Mr. Walsh also believes Aquinnah must change its development policy. "We have to make this a place where people want to build and live," he said, concluding:

"The selectmen's job is especially important in Aquinnah . . . essentially, we have an administrator, an accountant and a tax collector. There's a lot for selectmen to do here but we don't do anything except what we need to do."

Roxanne Ackerman agrees the town needs to work to remain affordable and mend its social rifts. "We need to try to get along together. Our kids need to have a place in Aquinnah in the future. To accomplish that, taxes have to be kept in check," she said, adding: "I have seen both sides of town and tribe life and I don't want to see the sides in conflict. Working together is the biggest need."

She expresses healthy skepticism over the budding community wind project in town. "Our real estate is all Aquinnah has to sell and I am not in favor of windmills at the Gay Head Cliffs. I do believe small windmills should be encouraged. We have to be cautious about wind technology. Let's look at the feasibility of it. I know we don't have resources for major research here but what is the experience of other communities?" she asked.

With her background as a shellfisherman, she is of course a staunch advocate for the fisheries. "We need to protect and grow our fisheries and a good start is to listen to the tribe. They have plenty of experience and real knowledge of our land. They are a valuable resource," Ms. Ackerman said.

She supports more regionalization and has a strong commitment to education. "The state has forced regulations on us but we still provide a good education. We produce good citizens," she said.

Voters next week will also confront seven ballot questions; five are requests for exemptions from Proposition 2 1/2, one is a resolution against the Iraq War and another would allow the sale of alcohol in restaurants, if approved. The alcohol question, which was narrowly defeated last year, has been a bit of a sleeper in Aquinnah, where there are currently only two restaurants.

The exemption requests are:

- \$15,000 for a capital buildings and grounds stabilization fund.
- \$10,000 for a capital equipment and vehicles stabilization fund.
- \$10,000 for a contingency fund for substitute labor for town employees.
- A \$50,000 bond issue for an addition to the town fire department.
- Debt exclusion for the purchase of the Vanderhoop homestea