

The Martha's Vineyard Times

Third time is not the charm for Aquinnah

By Nelson Sigelman

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Blame it on the rain, the Red Sox, the Celtics, or Aquinnah voter apathy. Whatever the cause, the failure to reach a quorum of 39 voters Tuesday left the Aquinnah annual town meeting in limbo and town officials scrambling yesterday to plot a new course of action.

It also meant that because voters did not take action on proposed regulations for a town-wide energy District of Critical Planning Concern (DCPC), a development moratorium that was expected to be short-lived remains in place. Until voters approve or reject the proposed regulations, under most circumstances the town may not issue development permits of any kind.

The tentative plan is to combine an annual town meeting with a special town meeting on June 19.

The annual began on Tuesday, May 13, when a total of 69 voters, or 17 percent of the town's 396 registered voters, attended. Just after 10:30 pm, with considerable work unfinished, town moderator Walter Delaney adjourned the meeting and asked voters to reconvene two days later on May 15, at 7 pm.

Aquinnah voters are not known for punctuality, but by 7:25 pm, the town clerk counted 28 voters, 11 voters short of the 39 needed for a quorum. At 7:40 pm, still needing five voters for a quorum, Mr. Delaney decided to postpone.

He asked voters to return to the old town hall at 7 pm on Tuesday, May 20. But the town clerk said the third edition of the meeting was 10 voters short of the 39 needed.

Yesterday morning, Mr. Delaney and selectmen conferred with town lawyer Ron Rappaport and state officials about the steps the town must follow to conclude town business, before the start of the new fiscal year on July 1.

The officials needed to be certain what requests must be disposed of at the still unfinished annual town meeting, what could be shifted to a special town meeting, and what must be done to maintain eligibility for a \$50,000 state grant awarded the Aquinnah library.

Yesterday afternoon, Mr. Delaney told The Times that the town would "tentatively" reconvene the annual town meeting on Thursday, June 19. He said he was still awaiting Massachusetts Historical Commission confirmation that the date would meet the library grant requirements that the town provide matching funds in a timely manner.

This plan includes publishing another notice and republishing the annual warrant.

Mr. Delaney described the procedures he will follow. First he will reconvene the annual town meeting and take up articles 17 and 18, requests to set up revolving funds for town inspection services, the only articles that must be handled at an annual meeting.

Mr. Delaney will then call a recess and open a special town meeting for the purpose of taking up the articles not attended to by voters on the annual warrant. They will include the lengthy article made up of the proposed energy DCPC regulations.

Mr. Delaney said the special town meeting version would reflect the changes made by the MVC, when it approved the regulations at a meeting on May 8.

At the annual town meeting on May 13, voters received the proposed regulations as they appeared on the warrant and a long list of changes that would have needed to be proposed as amendments on the town meeting floor. Mr. Delaney said that process will now be avoided.

Mr. Delaney said a list of Conservation Preservation Act articles on the annual warrant would also be consolidated.

"Provided everything works out smoothly," said Mr. Delaney, the special town meeting would conclude, and he will reopen the annual town meeting. He would then ask for a vote to indefinitely postpone or table indefinitely all of the articles taken up at the special.

Yesterday, Aquinnah town coordinator Jeff Burgoyne said the extension of the DCPC moratorium is an unfortunate consequence of not enough voters showing up for town meeting.

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