

# The Martha's Vineyard Times

## Aquinnah tries special meeting again

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Published: February 26, 2009

Tuesday Aquinnah will try again to hold a thrice-postponed special town meeting. The warrant includes a reworked proposal to create a seasonal, outdoor performing arts center on town owned land at the Gay Head cliffs that has raised the concern of the Wampanoag Tribe of Gay Head (Aquinnah).

Aquinnah is the Island's smallest town, but it is not the most efficient when it comes to disposing of town meeting business. Tuesday night is the fourth time town leaders have scheduled a special town meeting that was originally set for October 21.

The October date was moved to November 13, then February 2 because the town was unable to reach a quorum. The February meeting was rescheduled to April 7 when questions arose about some of the language that appeared in the warrant.

This week Jeff Burgoyne, Aquinnah town administrator, said the April date was advanced one month at the request of proponents of an outdoor performing arts center. If voters give the go ahead the developers want to have as much time as possible to begin the permitting process, said Mr. Burgoyne.

The meeting will begin at 7 pm in the old town hall.

The 14-article warrant includes a redraft of an article that asked voters to authorize the board of selectmen "to lease a portion of the Aquinnah Circle for purposes of constructing a performing arts staging structure."

The new language puts the town in compliance with public bidding procedures. It asks the selectmen "to solicit proposals to lease a portion of the Aquinnah Circle" and makes any lease contingent on approval by a special town meeting vote to be held in conjunction with the annual town meeting on May 12.

The circle is regularly used for events that include the annual Wampanoag Pow Wow and gathering of classic hot rods. This summer it was also the scene of a summer music festival in support of local radio station WVVY.

The proposal for an outdoor performing arts center comes from Ted Cammann and James Glavin of Aquinnah. Mr. Cammann is a producer of live musical events and Mr. Glavin is the owner of Deca Construction.

The men have created a 13-page brochure that describes the proposal in detail. Under the

heading of concept the men said: "Our goal is to adopt the natural topography of the circle at the cliffs as the site for a seasonal, outdoor facility to host a series of events... This spot offers this town a singular opportunity to enable the presentation of diverse, multi-cultural artistic and entertainment offerings surrounded by unsurpassed natural vistas."

What would be created they said, "is a truly unique and universally appealing venue for concerts, children's programs, fundraisers for nonprofits, town events, tribal functions and the like."

They plan to use the land's natural topography to provide a natural amphitheater. The stage would be placed in the lower section so that the audience would be looking out in the direction of Nomans Land Island. Initially, a temporary covered stage would be built to get the program up and running.

There would be no cost to the town, the men said. But there will be risk for the investors. "The recent failures of most of the competing Island music venues tells a tale of woe we do not seek to echo," they wrote. "This is not a business for the timid. This shall not be a stroll on easy street." The men said the proposal only makes sense with a long-term lease.

One possible regulatory hurdle is the Martha's Vineyard Commission, the Island's powerful land use regulatory body. The entire town of Aquinnah is designated a district of critical planning concern (DCPC) as is Moshup Trail.

Both districts were created, according to the MVC, "to protect the scenic character of the district from undue visual intrusion and to maintain and promote its rural character and culture." Any construction would likely trigger a referral to the MVC as a development of regional impact.

The Wampanoag Tribe of Gay Head (Aquinnah) also has a keen interest in the proposal. The circle is adjacent to the Gay Head Cliffs, a National Natural Landmark, held in trust by the Federal government for the Tribe.

More than a century ago tribal members set up shops along the path used by visitors to gain a view of the cliffs. A paved walkway now leads to a fenced-in lookout. The Tribe currently leases five of the eight town-owned lots along the walkway. Tribal members lease the other three.

In a letter dated January 6 addressed to the board of selectmen prior to the February meeting date, Bettina Washington, Tribal historic preservation officer (THPO), expressed concern about any proposal that would adversely affect the Tribe but stopped short of saying the Tribe was against the specific lease proposal. "This location is of paramount historical, traditional and cultural significance to the Aquinnah Wampanoag people," she wrote. "This is our ancient homeland and this site is an extraordinary piece of cultural history for our people, from ancient times until the present. Any proposal that will profoundly adverse and negatively impact this culturally significant and spiritually sensitive Wampanoag ceremonial site will be vigorously opposed."

She added, "Our shared contemporary history makes this a shared concern and shared treasure for us all. We look forward to working with the town to ensure the proper preservation of such an important cultural and spiritual vista."

On Tuesday, The Martha's Vineyard Times emailed a series of questions regarding the Tribe's position to Cheryl Andrews-Maltais, Wampanoag chairman, in keeping with her policy that all questions from The Martha's Vineyard Times be submitted in writing.

Tobias Vanderhoop, Tribal administrator, responded in an email. He said Ms. Maltais was not in the office this week but that he would pass on The Martha's Vineyard Times email when she returned next week.

In a subsequent email received yesterday, Mr. Vanderhoop said that Ms. Washington has met with the project proponents and submitted comment to the town. He said Ms. Washington's comments "represent the position of the Tribe on this matter. The chairwoman has seen the artist's rendition and strongly supports the THPO's position."

In other special town meeting business, voters will be asked to petition the state legislature to grant the selectmen authority to issue one-day beer and wine licenses to non-profit and/or civic organizations; to approve \$8,500 to purchase and install a new furnace for the town offices building; and transfer \$50,000 from the stabilization fund to be used as another financing source in the general fund for fiscal year 2009.

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