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For Second Time, Aquinnah Voters Reject Budget Override; A Difficult Year Ahead

By JULIA WELLS

Voters in Aquinnah spoke - and loudly - for the second time in four weeks yesterday, rejecting a \$130,000 general override to Proposition 2 1/2 by a decisive margin in a special town election.

The final count was 75-56 against the override to the state-mandated tax cap. There was only one question on the ballot. The vote echoed a special election last month, when voters rejected a \$260,000 override by three votes. The final count then was 40-37.

The election yesterday saw a much healthier turnout - some 35 per cent of 372 voters cast ballots.

Aquinnah selectmen must now take up the difficult task of guiding the town through the fiscal year with virtually no extra money. Selectmen managed to adopt a level funded budget before July 1 by adjusting revenue projections and making some cuts, especially in the town police department budget. The level-funded budget allowed the town to keep the town hall open, but as of today level funding means no cost of living raise for town employees, no funding for the Martha's Vineyard Shellfish Group and no summer camp for town children.

The \$130,000 override would have paid for those things.

Board chairman Carl Widdiss and selectman Michael Hebert did not return telephone calls from the Gazette after the ballots were counted last night.

One member of the town planning board who has begun to speak out about fiscal matters, including past due bills from the Wampanoag Tribe of Gay Head (Aquinnah) to the town, did speak.

Peter Temple called the election results a mandate.

"With a margin that large, the townspeople of Aquinnah have given the selectmen a mandate to live up to their broken promises of ten years ago and raise the revenues necessary to cover our financial problems," Mr. Temple said.

Aquinnah is home to the only federally recognized Indian tribe in the commonwealth, and town-tribe relations are now somewhat strained.

The special election concludes the Aquinnah town meeting, which began in May. The general override was needed this year because after years of using free cash to stay under the state-mandated tax cap, this year the town found itself with no free cash.

The problem was compounded by an increase in regional assessments, including a large

increase in the town's share of the Martha's Vineyard Regional High School budget due to a jump in the number of students attending the high school from Aquinnah.

At the special election last month voters did agree to override Proposition 2 1/2 to pay for a package of emergency services.

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