

Heavy Town Meeting turnout despite daunting warrant

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A daunting 126-article warrant did not keep citizens away from Town Meeting 2008, with 601 residents showing up at the high school auditorium Monday for night one, compared to 469 on the first night of Town Meeting 2007.

As is custom here, the session opened with a moment of silence while Moderator Sarah Alger recognized the loss of three islanders this year who made significant contributions to the community — Albert Brock, Alvin Topham and Alan Brown. Before voters began calling the articles they wanted to discuss or amend, outgoing Planning Board member Frank Spriggs was given a standing ovation, a plaque from the state senate and words of appreciation for his long devotion to improving island life and work on the board.

“You’ve really crossed the spectrum,” Legislative Liaison Tim Madden told Spriggs. “You’ve really given so much back. It has been a pleasure to know you.”

Outgoing Cape and Islands Representative Eric Turkington was also honored and given a Nantucket Booster Club tie with thanks from Madden and a

proclamation from the town and county in appreciation of his 20 years of service on Nantucket’s behalf.

“This island has given me more issues to fight than any other district,” said Turkington. “You certainly have set the record for Home Rule Petitions. The island is a special place.”

Alger predicted correctly when she said she was probably unrealistically optimistic that the volume of called articles would be minimal. Voters picked out 40, with several having technical amendments prior to discussion.

Though it was called and challenged, the multi-million dollar appropriation proposal for the 2 Fairgrounds public safety complex passed easily. Article 20, for approval of the airport’s bargaining agreement generated debate, with the Finance Committee objecting to its union employee increases being higher than what other unionized departments agreed to. Ultimately, the voters cast a strong voice in favor of its passage. Article 26, for appropriations from the Community Preservation Committee, was called by Alice McWade. Amendments were made reducing funding source amounts from the property tax surcharge and matching state funds and almost doubling the

amount from the undesignated reserve balance fund, but the bottom line total of \$3,245,564 remained the same.

McWade objected to a \$350,000 allocation for the Nantucket Housing Office, the funds slated for a housing resource center and two affordable housing units on town-owned property on Miller’s Lane. Noting that she has witnessed some NHO rentals empty for periods of time, that rents have increased and that some tenants have left the properties, McWade questioned the need for its own resource office, wondered why it could not be located in the planned Human Services complex. She said she preferred to see the funds go to Habitat for Humanity, which had experienced allocation reductions in the past.

Town Counsel Paul DeRensis explained that CPC allocations may not be decreased from one category to increase another, but a particular allocation can be lowered with the consent of the CPC. McWade asked to have the NHO allotment reduced to \$50,000. After responses supporting the original amount were heard from CPC Chairman Ken Beaugrand and NHO Executive Director Aaron Marcavitch, however, voters unanimously approved the Finance Committee’s

motion to adopt the article as submitted.

Yesterday morning Marcavitch explained that the \$350,000 is intended only for the construction of two affordable apartments, which, on average, cost between \$175,000 and \$250,000 to build. The design concept to include the resource center is not finalized. Marcavitch added that the Human Services office spaces will be rentals, and if the NHO can avoid paying rent and have adequate room to fit its executive director, program director, an in-house property manager, space for housing education classes and document storage under one roof it will. He also explained that turnover at NHO properties is contributable to the overall high cost of island living and people unable to find work, as well as the occasional need to repair or renovate units. The buildings are all used structures the NHO was able to acquire for its affordable housing program, and the best time to repair or upgrade them is between tenants.

“They all are full now except one which is in the lottery [process],” he said of the current stock of 24 rentals. “If someone has a question about why these are empty just give us a call.” ■

PLAYING FIELDS

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cooperation between the groups trying to move ahead with this project. We all think it’s a great idea, we all think we need them, [but] it’s a question of whether we rush into it or get it in the next few years.”

Because new natural fields require about two years to be graded, planted and grown into playable condition, according to Parks and Recreation property manager Charles Bartlett, the sooner the work can begin, the better for all the island’s athletes. Many voters with children in one sports program or another could not see a better way to spend the town’s money.

“We have spent a lot of money, more than they’re asking for these fields, to purchase open space,” said Linda Williams. “It’s about time we took some of that money and put it toward new fields. We need to start doing something for the people here and not just open space.”

Only a handful of voters besides the Finance Committee questioned the logic of Article 27. Sustainable Nantucket Executive Director Michelle

Whelan voiced her concerns about the potential hazards of artificial turf made from ground up tires and containing volatile organic compounds including arsenic, acetone, cadmium, chromium, cobalt, vanadium, lead and zinc that could leach into the island’s nearby water supply and release toxic gases on hot sunny days. Theroux corrected his original motion to include the appointment of a committee to study and review the design and make-up of artificial fields before building them.

The four fields — two natural and two artificial — are planned for 18 acres of Land Bank land at 81 Milestone Road. Debbie Culbertson suggested other island locations.

“This is a development, this is going to be a large parcel that is basically going to be stripped,” said Culbertson. “I think it’s needed for the kids, but I think we should take the time and look a little bit more around the island and find a better spot.”

Voters must approve the spending of the \$3.6 million through a Proposition 2_ override at a special election in June. The Parks and Recreation Department hopes to start on the project this fall. If the artificial turf fields committee is formed quickly enough and it chooses an

artificial surface that islanders can live with, Bartlett said that those fields could be ready for play by next spring.

With the adoption of Article 26, Parks and Recreation also got \$500,000 more toward the project from the Community Preservation Committee (CPC) in addition to the \$400,000 it received from CPC at Town Meeting in 2007. Parks and Rec is also eligible for a \$500,000 grant from the state’s Office of Energy & Environmental Affairs through its Urban Self-Help Program.

In the shadow of Article 27’s success, three key zoning articles also passed muster before Moderator Sarah Alger ended night one’s proceedings at 11 p.m. With the adoption of Article 35, voters changed 11 lots on the northwest side of Somerset Road from RC-2 to R-10. Voters also converted 12 lots along the corner of Surfside Road and Vesper Lane from R-10 to Commercial-Neighborhood, and four lots between Prospect Street and Vesper Lane from R-1 to Commercial-Neighborhood through Article 40. And voters adopted Article 30 that changed land near the airport from LUG-3 to Commercial Industrial. ■

POINT BREEZE

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after a rereading of this, that there are any problems. It is, again, a major undertaking.”

As currently detailed in McKinnon’s design, rainwater from several of the phase two building roofs will be collected, filtered and discharged into a wetland on Easton Street. An overflow catch basin installed nearby will channel any overflow into the upper of two proposed underground holding tanks. Rainwater collected from the tennis courts, a cabana, the parking garage and other roof drains will flow by gravity to a system of gravel-filled wells that are designed to allow water to percolate into the ground. Any overflow will be pumped into the lower holding tank. Rainwater runoff from the parking garage’s driveway will also flow directly to the lower tank.

When the contents of the upper and lower tanks reaches a certain level, it will be pumped through pipes heading east on Easton Street, down South Beach Street to Harborview Way and eventually connect with

a 48-inch outfall pipe on the Nantucket Yacht Club side of Children’s Beach. The lower tank will also be connected to the town’s stormwater drainpipe on Easton Street so that during heavy rains it could collect that water as well, helping to reduce street flooding.

Should Matthews secure all his permits to build phase two by the fall, when the town is scheduled to begin upgrades to its downtown stormwater collection system, he would be able to lay pipe and connect to the town’s new Children’s Beach outfall pipe when the town opens the streets for the project.

Until the concrete of the underground garage is poured, cured and set during construction of phase two, steel sheeting driven 19 feet into the ground will contain water on the site. Collection wells placed around the property at a depth of 23 feet will keep the site dry by pumping water through a filtration system and into the harbor via outflow pipes at Children’s Beach.

The steel sheeting installation would begin Nov. 1, with work suspended during Christmas Stroll, added Pesce.

After the drainage discussion, including fears that

the sheeting would be driven by pile drivers — McKinnon said vibrating drivers will be used instead — neighbors peppered Alger and the board with questions and requests. These included concerns about hours of operation, lighting and delivery vehicles using North Avenue, where residents Tom and Sarah Liddle and Betsy Adler are concerned about water running down both sides of their road and about golf cart back up beepers.

McKinnon said that the drainage system will keep water off the road. Alger said all deliveries will be to one location and golf carts only used to distribute various items around the property.

Before continuing the hearing to its April 14 meeting, the board asked that Alger and Matthews’ engineers find out if the golf carts will have back up beepers; that workers on the current phase of the project communicate better with neighbors; that all employees get shuttle bus passes; that information on the Point Breeze Web site tells guests not to bring vehicles; and that Alger provide hours of operation for all activities at the hotel and a management plan for it. ■