

VERMONT  
COMMISSION  
ON  
NATIVE  
AMERICAN  
AFFAIRS



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Jennifer Morton-Dow



VERMONT  
VCNAA February 14, 2018  
Meeting Minutes

**Members Present:** Melody Brook, Chair; Carol McGranaghan, Vice Chair; Andrea Brett, Secretary; Carol Irons, Paul Fassler, Cheryl O'Neil, Rich Holschuh, Jennifer Morton-Dow, and Eugene Rich.

**Guests:** Philip Brett, Mac Mattison, John Moody, Kymelya Sari, Seven Days; Representative Diana Gonzalez, Representative Brian Cina, Charlie Delaney Megeso, Jess Robinson, VDHP

The meeting was brought to order by Melody Brook at 1:04 pm at 1 National Life Drive, Montpelier, in the Montpelier conference room.

### 1. Changes to Agenda

Melody Brook noted that Representative Brian Cina (Chittenden-6-4) and Representative Diana Gonzalez (Chittenden 6-7) were attending the meeting to discuss Indigenous Peoples Day legislation in between commitments at the statehouse. It was agreed to alter the agenda to accommodate them when they arrived.

### 2. Approve January 10, 2018 Minutes

Eugene Rich moved to accept the January 10, 2018 meeting minutes with one change. The motion was seconded by Cheryl O'Neil. The minutes were accepted by consensus.

## OLD BUSINESS

### 1. Action Plan

#### a. Abenaki Cultural Regeneration Project

Carol Irons stated that during the Abenaki Revitalization follow-up weekend for previous attendees, she intends to concentrate on the symbolism and beliefs that underlie many Native practices. She hopes to discuss things such as sweat lodges, energy fields, power animals, medicines, and how they integrate into many daily routines

#### b. Tribal Inter-Communication

Eugene Rich noted that the Missisquoi tribe now has total control of their website and its content. They are interested in placing links to the other three State recognized tribes' websites, with the tribes' approval. He also suggested that the other tribes do the same. Mr. Rich also noted that the Missisquoi tribe has had a large increase in applications for tribal membership since their last large-scale mailing effort. Mr. Rich was very pleased with the response.

Paul Fassler inquired whether the VCNAA Facebook page has links to the tribes' websites. Rich Holschuh stated that he believed it did but would confirm after the meeting. If not, he stated that he would place them on the page.

Finally, Mr. Rich noted that the Missisquoi tribe is participating in a "Bring back the Native" initiative – spearheaded by Mr. Rich and Fred Wiseman, Ph.D. Mr. Rich explained that it is an attempt to learn and then utilize in everyday life documented local indigenous practices and ceremonies. Workshops are currently taking place on Tuesday evenings. Mr. Rich stated that except for lessons about Abenaki spirituality, it is their intention to open the workshops to the general public.

### **c. Native Traditions Conference**

There were no updates regarding this event.

### **d. Indigenous People's Day – New initiatives, Planning an observance, Other localities, and Strategies for the next legislative session**

Representatives Cina and Gonzalez arrived and introduced themselves to the commissioners and the public attendees. Representative Cina noted that he invited Representative Gonzalez to attend the meeting because she sits on the House indigenous affairs committee and is a co-sponsor of H. 488. Representative Gonzalez also stated that she wanted to attend to summarize discussions occurring in the House and Senate regarding their respective Indigenous Peoples Day bills. One major concern was that replacing Columbus Day with Indigenous Peoples Day would be punitive to people that appreciate Columbus Day. Representative Gonzalez suggested that advocating for replacement might sabotage their larger efforts. She asked the commissioners and the tribes they represent how they would like to approach that issue. Jennifer Morton-Dow stated that making Indigenous Peoples Day concurrent with Columbus Day or having Indigenous Peoples Day on another day would be a capitulation. She stated that Columbus Day is problematic, and Columbus as a historical figure is problematic. Andrea Brett stated that she too doesn't like Columbus Day. She stated that she still remembers being told as a child that the Abenaki were no longer in Vermont. However, she stated that she didn't want to sabotage the entire effort. Rich Holschuh stated that he also didn't like the idea of sharing the day or having Indigenous Peoples day on another day. He stated that part of the point of replacing Columbus Day with Indigenous Peoples Day, is to use the change as a teaching opportunity about Native Americans and as a recognition of the historic and current injustices perpetrated against them. Melody Brook mentioned that if it had to be another day she would like it to be in June. Representative Gonzalez then stated that there is a lot of resistance about the change in the Senate, and it might be appropriate to get stakeholders in the Columbus Day celebration together with Indigenous Peoples Day proponents to try and reach a consensus. Mr. Holschuh stated that he would like to give testimony to try to attempt to reframe it, but the Senate has not sought testimony or invited him or others to the committee to speak. Representative Gonzalez suggested there should be a concerted effort to have various native and non-native stakeholders (and particularly constituents of the representatives) write letters to the members of the committee. Representative Cina said that they should also contact the representatives in the areas of the tribes. Mr. Holschuh volunteered to draft a letter to

disseminate to people in order for them to complete and send to members of the committee.

#### **e. Systems Work Updates**

Jennifer Morton-Dow stated that she is making connections locally and in other regions to become educated about Native birthing practices in order to contribute that knowledge to Melody's broader effort to create an educational kit.

Melody Brook stated that she attended the Equal Rights Amendment ceremony at the Statehouse earlier in the day. Mrs. Brook suggested that the VCNAA consider how indigenous peoples can be integrated into the bill language and in the broader ethos of the legislation.

#### **f. Elected Official**

Rich Holschuh stated that he has not yet communicated with Donald Soctoma regarding his strategies for a Native Liaison in State government. Mr. Holschuh also stated that he understands that there is a proposed bill establishing a Native Liaison officer in committee, but he doesn't think it will proceed in its current form.

## **2. Status Report**

### **a. CT River Hydro Re-Licensing**

Rich Holschuh stated that there is nothing new or substantive to report this month.

### **b. VT Public Utilities Commission – Vermont Yankee**

Rich Holschuh stated that all parties are trying to reach a deal for the sale of the plant to Northstar. Mr. Holschuh stated that there is a good chance that the sale will occur.

## **NEW BUSINESS**

### **1. NH Commission Follow-Up and Joint Statement Brain Storm**

Several commissioners expressed their opinion that the joint meeting was a good experience. Melody Brook stated that the commissioners talked with each other and learned about each other's initiatives and challenges. Mrs. Brook then asked the commissioners if there were any initiatives that the VCNAA might like to work on with the New Hampshire Commission on Native American Affairs. Carol McGranaghan suggested that they work to craft a joint position on Native American mascot. Paul Fassler suggested that they invite the New Hampshire commission to a VCNAA meeting before the end of the year.

### **2. Sacred Site Protection**

Melody Brook was contacted by a woman that was concerned about a series of rock cairns in southern Vermont that may be destroyed by an impending lumbering operation. Jess stated that if Mrs. Brook can give him more details and a location, he would investigate it. John Moody and Rich Holschuh stated that they were going to visit the site as well.

### **3. Endangered Alphabets Project**

Melody Brook stated that artist Tim Brooks made another piece and wants to donate it to an Abenaki group. Melody also said that the commission needed to decide on a day and time for the Endangered Alphabets Project Statehouse installation.

### **4. Charlie Delaney**

Charlie Delaney was asked to attend the VCNA meeting to discuss his and group's position on the Indigenous Peoples Day proposed legislation. He provided some of the background behind his involvement with the legislation and stated that he currently favors H. 488. Mr. Delaney admitted that he has been guilty of poor communication in the past but stated that he also feels his statements and positions have often been misconstrued or misinterpreted.

Mr. Delaney then stated that he has formed a non-profit organization committed to Native American advocacy. He urged the commission to record their knowledge about traditional spiritual places, use them, and then document them with the state. Melody stated that the commission was looking forward to working with his and his organization in the future.

### **5. Public Comment**

There were no public comments.

### **6. Announcements**

There were no announcements.

The meeting was adjourned at 3:50 P.M.