

VERMONT  
COMMISSION  
ON  
NATIVE  
AMERICAN  
AFFAIRS



VCNAA January 10, 2018  
Meeting Minutes



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COMMISSION  
Melody Brook, Chair  
Carol McGranaghan, Vice Chair  
Andrea Brett, Secretary  
Carol Irons  
Cheryl O'Neil  
Paul Fassler  
Rich Holschuh  
Eugene Rich  
Jennifer Morton-Dow

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

**Members Absent:** Andrea Brett, Secretary

**Guests:** Philip Brett, Mac Mattison, Fred Wiseman, John Moody, Larissa Dillon, Duncan Matthewson, Rep. Brian Cina, Katie Buckley, DHCD Commissioner; Dale Azaria, DHCD General Counsel; Jess Robinson, VDHP

The meeting was brought to order by Melody Brook at 1:02 pm at 1 National Life Drive, Montpelier, in the Montpelier conference room.

**1. Commissioner Introduction**

Given the significant number of guests at the meeting, the commissioners opted to introduce themselves.

**2. Changes to Agenda**

Melody Brook noted that Representative Brian Cina (Chittenden-6-4) was attending the meeting at 1:45 P.M. to discuss introduced Indigenous Peoples Day legislation in between commitments at the statehouse. It was agreed to alter the agenda to accommodate him.

The commissioners also agreed to move Commissioner Katie Buckley's introductory statement to the beginning of the meeting so that she could attend other meetings later in the afternoon.

**3. Approve November 8, 2017 Minutes**

Paul Fassler moved to accept the November 8, 2017 meeting minutes without alteration. The motion was seconded by Jennifer Morton-Dow. The minutes were accepted by consensus.

**4. Recognition of Guests**

Commissioners welcomed the assembled guests and asked that they introduce themselves. Thereafter, Department of Housing and Community Development Commissioner Katie Buckley introduced herself to the commissioners, expressed gratitude at the invitation, and asked the VCNAA if there were anything with which she might be able to assist. The commissioners had no immediate concerns, but expressed their gratitude at Commissioner Buckley's attendance.

Commissioner Buckley stated that the offer of assistance was open should they require it in the future.

## **5. Code of Ethics / Conflict of Interest**

Dale Azaria briefly summarized the recent changes to the executive code of ethics, and how these changes and additions might affect the commissioners and their roles in the VCNAA.

### **OLD BUSINESS**

#### **1. Action Plan**

##### **a. Abenaki Cultural Regeneration Project**

Carol Irons stated that she has decided to hold an Abenaki Revitalization Follow-up weekend for previous attendees. New teachers and a venue have been secured, and seven previous attendees have already agreed to attend. Mrs. Irons stated that if grant money could be secured in time, she has also made plans to host a larger revitalization retreat for newcomers in August.

##### **b. Tribal Inter-Communication**

Eugene Rich stated that the Missisquoi Abenaki are looking to make their website more interactive for members. Various additions have been proposed, including a blog, but the tribe recognizes that any public or tribal comments would have to be moderated.

Several commissioners also mentioned that the forthcoming joint meeting with the New Hampshire Native American Affairs Commission was a significant advance in inter-tribal communication. Melody Brook also noted that the meeting coincides with the first day of the Forgiveness Moon in the Abenaki traditional calendar. She hoped that this was auspicious timing.

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

Melody Brook and Carol Irons noted that Lucy Cannon-Neel is still awaiting notice of funding for this event.

##### **d. Systems Work Updates – Birth Ceremony, Thirteen Month Calendar, etc.**

Melody Brook has been discussing an initiative with Native colleagues entitled “Bring your Native back”.

Eugene Rich noted that their webmaster and Facebook page moderator has suggested looking at the Abenaki indigenous calendar and posting announcements and educational summaries related to the events on it. Mr. Rich likes the idea and stated that it would likely start with the Missisquoi but could be expanded to other tribes if it proved successful and the other tribes were interested.

Melody Brook stated that she was still working on gathering knowledge in order to create a comprehensive Abenaki birthing ceremony manual and materials. Fred Wiseman suggested that she contact the Center for Integrated Herbalism in Montpelier for advice on plant materials. John Moody noted that the archives at Missisquoi contained approximately 20 interviews with mothers and other informants related to indigenous births. Mr. Moody also suggested that there are several Abenaki midwives still operating in Vermont.

#### **e. Elected Official**

Rich Holschuh stated that he is receiving information from Donald Soctoma (Penobscot) and others about how Maine gained an indigenous representative in that State's legislature. Mr. Rich further stated that he contacted that Vermont state Senate about the idea of an indigenous representative, but has not yet received any response. Ultimately, Mr. Rich stated that his hope is that there could be an representative that liaises with the State legislature and the public in a full-time capacity.

#### **f. Vermont Center for Rural Studies**

Melody Brook stated that representatives from the Vermont Center for Rural Studies are working on developing a comprehensive state happiness index. They conveyed to her that they are interested in learning how they might better represent the Abenaki indigenous population in their evaluations. Mrs. Brook stated that she would follow up with them.

### **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 there is going to be a significant meeting in two weeks in Montpelier related to Vermont Yankee relicensing, which he will attend sans counsel on behalf of the El Nu. Mr. Holschuh also stated that the Missisquoi representative will be unable to attend the meeting.

### **3. New Hampshire and Vermont Joint Commission Meeting & Agenda**

Commissioners suggested that they ask the NH Commissioners if they were interested in working to create a joint statement on Native mascots.

## **NEW BUSINESS**

### **1. Goals and New Directions Follow-up**

- a. Melody Brook announced that commissioner Eugene Rich is the newly-elected chief of the Missisquoi tribe. He was congratulated.
- b. Several commissioners noted that there has been a recent controversy about a mural in Burlington that many believe excluded Natives. Melody Brook stated that representatives from the tribes are attending an upcoming meeting about plans and content for another mural that better represents indigenous people.
- c. Melody Brook stated that she, Fred Wiseman, and Jess Robinson, are working with Camp Hochelega to prepare materials that accurately reflect the ancient and modern Native American presence in Vermont.
- d. Melody Brook noted that artist Tim Brooks has included Abenaki in his Endangered Alphabets project, and is going to donate the Abenaki piece to the State. Mrs. Brook is hoping to have a temporary display of Abenaki material culture in the Statehouse.

### **2. Indigenous Peoples Day and other Legislation – Strategies for the Next Legislative Session**

**Representative Brian Cina** (Chittenden-6-4) arrived to discuss the legislation related to Indigenous Peoples Day and the exemption of Abenaki sacred sites from Vermont State property taxes.

H. 488 and S. 83 are the House and Senate proposed bills that would declare the second day of October Indigenous Peoples Day. As these bills are written, Indigenous Peoples Day would not replace Columbus Day. Representative Cina noted that the Governor's yearly proclamations have received very positive press and that there is a likelihood that this legislation could be advanced. Representative Cina suggested that if the commissioners' and tribal members' time is limited, it would be best to concentrate on the Senate Bill, but concentrating on both bills would be the safest strategy. He further suggested that writing letters and being available for testimony are the most effective ways to persuade legislators of the importance of this legislation to the Abenaki community.

H. 478 is legislation introduced by Representative Cina and sponsored by several other legislators that would exempt Abenaki sacred sites from state property taxes. Representative Cina suggested that the VCNA and tribes write letters collectively or individually attesting to the importance of this legislation. They should also submit a list of potential and compelling properties to him so that he might better understand the potential scope of the exemption.

### **3. Secretary Report: Vermont Abenaki Artist's Association Update**

There was no secretary update this month.

#### **4. Native American Mascot Position – Follow Up**

Paul Fassler asked for the commissioners' opinion of his draft statement on Native American Mascots, which he submitted to them last month. Eugene Rich suggested that it might not completely dovetail with the Missisquoi's position, but he would be fine with it as the position of the VCNAA. Mr. Fassler suggested that they share the statement with the New Hampshire Native American commission, and ask whether they agree with it. If so, they could be added as signatories when the statement is released. If not, the VCNAA can release it on its own.

#### **5. Chief Eugene Rich from Missisquoi**

As newly elected chief of the Missisquoi, Eugene Rich briefly summarized some of the notable recent communications his tribe has received. These included a person who wants to produce a movie about Hannah Dustin. Mr. Rich stated that he would like to get other opinions about the screenplay. Melody Brook stated that she would like to read it and Mr. Rich stated that he would send it along to her. Mr. Rich also stated that he has received emails from individuals interested in writing a book and writing a screenplay based on the Vermont Eugenics movement.

#### **6. Fred Wiseman**

Fred Wiseman gave a 30-minute presentation about his research and advocacy on the decolonization of the Abenaki and their practices. He asked for the VCNAA and the tribes they represent to assist him. Dr. Wiseman also let the VCNAA know that the Wabanaki Heritage Center documents and archives are at the VCNAA's (and the tribes they represent) disposal.

#### **7. Public Comment**

Melody Brook noted that Fred Wiseman has written two books, which are under review. Mrs. Brook congratulated him on his accomplishment.

Jess Robinson stated that Vermont Archaeology Heritage Center employee Brett Ostrum and he have completed compiling all of the fire wood and plant and animal food remains documented from Vermont precontact Native American archaeological sites. After some final quality control and proofing, the data will be available on the Vermont Archaeology Heritage Center's website.

#### **8. Announcements**

There were no additional announcements.

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