

VERMONT
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ON
NATIVE
AMERICAN
AFFAIRS



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VCNAA June 13, 2018
Meeting Minutes

Members Present: Melody Brook, Chair; Carol McGranaghan, Vice Chair; Andrea Brett, Secretary; Carol Irons, Eugene Rich, and Paul Fassler

Members Absent: Rich Holschuh, Jennifer Morton-Dow, and Cheryl O'Neil

Guests: Jess Robinson, VDHP, Deb Reger, Angela Smith-Dieng, VT Dept. of Disabilities, Aging, and Independent Living; Monica Hutt, VT Dept. of Disabilities, Aging, and Independent Living; Fred Wiseman, Seeds of Renewal, Philip Brett, and John Moody

The meeting was brought to order by Melody Brook at 1:05 pm at 1 National Life Drive, Montpelier, in the Calvin Coolidge conference room.

1. Changes to Agenda

Melody Brook suggested that to accommodate Angela Smith-Dieng and Monica Hutt from the VT Dept. of Disabilities, Aging, and Independent Living, their allotted time should be moved to the meeting's first action item. Mrs. Brook also noted that guest John Moody requested to make his public comments early in the meeting because he could not stay for the duration. These changes were agreed by consensus.

2. Approve May 9, 2018 Minutes

The commission agreed to approve the previous meeting's minutes as written by consensus.

1. VT Council on Disabilities, Aging, and Independent Living (DAIL)

Angela Smith-Dieng and Monica Hutt from the VT Council on Disabilities, Aging, and Independent Living (DAIL) introduced themselves and explained that they asked to speak the commission about the Older Americans Act. The Older Americans Act seeks to provide for the needs of the growing elderly population. Federal legislation requires that DAIL submit a report in 2019 detailing needed services for older Vermonters. DAIL wanted to ensure that in as much as possible it was addressing any specific needs that the commission, tribes, and individual older natives might have.

Carol Irons stated there has been in the past a reluctance of older Native people to come forward and identify themselves as Abenaki for fear of retribution or discrimination. Carol stated that she has worked in various health and welfare capacities in the Northeast Kingdom and experienced this sentiment firsthand.

Eugene Rich stated that they recently had a “Voices against Violence” two-day seminar up at Missisquoi that could be a model way to bring people together and engage with Native elders.

Melody mentioned that typically among Native Americans, elders are greatly respected as culture bearers and as keepers of wisdom. As such, efforts to assist them in their daily lives should be generally welcome. She also mentioned that former commissioner Lucy Cannon-Neel works with elder VA members during illness or when they cross-over, and she could certainly use assistance in that endeavor.

Melody suggested reaching out to the four chiefs and passing along any relevant information to them.

2. Public Comment

John Moody stated that the town of Hartford is moving forward with the recognition of Indigenous Peoples Day. Due to a groundswell of support from the townspeople, it appears that it will be positively voted on at the next Town Meeting day.

Mr. Moody also stated that Mascoma Savings Bank has abandoned its regionally inappropriate silhouette image of a Native American in all its signage.

Finally, Mr. Moody suggested that several archaeological sites excavated over the past few years along the Otter Creek and Bald Mountain have been contentious among certain Abenakis with whom he communicates. He did not elaborate.

OLD BUSINESS

1. Action Plan

a. Abenaki Cultural Regeneration Project

Carol Irons stated that training for previous attendees will occur on the last week in August and will focus on storytelling. Funds to host a larger event have still not been forthcoming.

b. Tribal Inter-Communication

This item was tabled until September.

c. Indigenous People’s Day – New initiatives, Planning an Observance, Other localities, and Strategies for the next legislative session.

This item was tabled until September.

d. Elected Official

Although this item was largely tabled due to Rich Holschuh’s inability to attend the meeting, Melody Brook noted that Rich was sent some pertinent information regarding the indigenous elected official position in Maine, including the person’s salary. This information and the broader discussion of a Vermont elected official will be brought up again in September.

e. Sacred Site Protection

Commissioners tabled their discussion of sacred site protection until September. Nevertheless, Melody Brook and Eugene Rich asked Jess Robinson to summarize the partial mass slope failure along Monument Road in Highgate for the commission, and what VDHP is doing to try to address the situation. Afterward, they both thanked Jess and VDHP as a whole, and noted that they were asked to write a letter to FEMA attesting to the importance of the area to contemporary Abenakis.

2. Status Report

a. CT River Hydro Re-Licensing

This item was tabled until September

b. VT Public Utilities Commission – Vermont Yankee

This item was tabled until September.

NEW BUSINESS

1. State House Exhibit of Gifted Items

Melody Brook noted that the tribal items previously gifted to the Statehouse have finally been relocated. Carol Irons is going to photograph them at their current location and then send the photographs to the statehouse curator in preparation for their eventual exhibition.

2. Cultural Center

Guest Fred Wiseman provided some history and context on the concept of a Vermont Abenaki cultural center. Dr. Wiseman noted that one of the initial goals of the Quadricentennial celebration was the establishment of a combined Franco-American, Native American cultural center. After a flurry of initial activity, however, Dr. Wiseman stated that many of the stakeholders realized that the cost, maintenance, and staff costs of a brick-and-mortar center would be prohibitive at that time and the idea was dropped. Dr. Wiseman suggested that the idea of some sort of Native center was still a critical idea to consider, and suggested that:

- a) it would have to be in a neutral location
- b) it would have to be available to all of the recognized tribes
- c) it should nurture and be a repository for Native memory
- d) and that it should provide educational training

Dr. Wiseman also suggested that the idea of a brick-and-mortar center could be decolonized and natural areas, medicine woods, crop fields, and other anthropogenically altered spaces could be considered as locations instead.

Dr. Wiseman noted that he still has thousands of historic items to donate to a center if one was going to come to fruition.

Melody Brook stated that Don Stevens and the other chiefs contend that the creation of a Native cultural center is the number one thing that everyone should be working towards, and Fred Wiseman mentioned that a cultural center is probably the single-most important thing that the tribes can do to maintain their heritage.

Paul Fassler noted that if this is going to go forward as an action item for the VCNA, roles need to be delegated to specific individuals. Melody Brook summarized the discussion by stating that the VCNA should work on a feasibility study that identifies potential funding sources, which could be disseminated to the tribal leaders to evaluate and/or carry on.

3. Blessing of the Fields

Eugene Rich noted that this event proved to be a quintessential example of the tribes getting together and having good communications between one another. Mr. Rich stated that it was a very powerful experience.

4. Announcements

The Abenaki Heritage Weekend is taking place at the Lake Champlain Maritime Museum during the upcoming weekend. Many stated that they were attending.

The meeting was adjourned at 3:07 PM.