

VERMONT  
COMMISSION  
ON  
NATIVE  
AMERICAN  
AFFAIRS



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



VCNAA November 8, 2017  
Meeting Minutes

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

**Members Absent:** Jennifer Morton-Dow

**Guests:** Philip Brett; Mac Mattison; Veronique Hamel; Joelen Mulvaney; Jess Robinson, VDHP

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

**1. Changes to Agenda**

It was agreed to move a discussion about future meeting procedures to Action Plan item A.

**2. Approve October 11, 2017 Minutes**

The Commission agreed to approve the minutes with one noted change.

**OLD BUSINESS**

**1. Action Plan**

**a. Meeting Structure and Procedures**

Andrea Brett suggested that there should be a defined comment period for members of the public and that it should be enforced.

Others agreed and noted that interruptions from the public have sometimes caused disruptions to the meeting. It was suggested that the comment period be reserved for the end of the meeting, but that it could potentially be extended beyond the traditional ten-minute allotment. Rich Holschuh suggested that guests' attendance be acknowledged at the beginning of the meeting, and the commission agreed. It was also suggested that if there was a need for a member of the public to voice their comments prior to the end of the meeting, the request should be considered by the commission on a case-by-case basis.

**b. Abenaki Cultural Regeneration Project**

Carol Irons stated that there while the details were yet to be finalized, she was considering hosting a three-day, advanced follow-up for previous attendees of the cultural regeneration retreat, while also having an introductory camp for newcomers in August. She stressed, however, that grants, or other funding sources needed to be secured before

the retreats can be formally scheduled.

**c. Tribal Inter-Communication**

Eugene Rich noted that inter-tribal communication continues to be a challenge. He proposed developing an electronic bulletin board, but was convinced by members of his tribe that VCNAA's Facebook page largely served the same purpose. Mr. Rich stated that a recent mailing to members of the St. Francis/Sokoki Missisquoi tribe cost a considerable sum of money to print and ship, and therefore regular correspondence using that medium is not feasible. Mr. Rich noted that his various efforts to get tribal members to engage with social media and other forms of electronic communication have received almost no response, however.

Melody Brook suggested inviting council members and chiefs from each of the four recognized tribes to a VCNAA meeting. Carol McGranaghan added that holding a meeting in the evening might enable tribal members who work to attend.

**d. Native Traditions Conference**

Carol Irons stated that Lucy Cannon-Neel is still heading the effort to host the conference. Ms. Irons stated Mrs. Cannon-Neel is still looking to secure a funding source.

**e. Indigenous Peoples Day – Strategies for the Next Legislative Session**

Rich Holschuh stated that he has again reached out to Charles Delaney and the group with whom he is associated with to discuss issues surrounding Indigenous Peoples Day, but has received no response. It was suggested that Mr. Holschuh reach out to Rep. Brian Cina (Burlington) to discuss active or pending legislation prior to the upcoming legislative session.

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

Melody Brook stated that she has begun working to prepare documentation and an associated kit for those potentially interested in practicing a traditional Abenaki birth ceremony. Mrs. Brook then stated that the remainder of her comments could be reserved for the Goals and New Directions portion of the meeting.

**g. Elected Official**

Donald Soctomah (Passamaquoddy) is collating materials and insights on the processes of getting an elected official representing the Abenaki in Vermont into the state legislature or in an equivalent position. Mrs. Brook stated that Dr. Soctomah and others succeeded in having a non-voting Native representative emplaced within Maine's State legislature.

**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 except for making the acquaintance of the Commissioner of

Housing and Community Development, Katie Buckley, there is nothing new or substantive to report this month.

## **NEW BUSINESS**

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

Various ideas and possibilities for future initiatives were discussed during this portion of the meeting, including:

- a) roadside signage that honors the Abenaki or notes historic events or places that concern the Abenaki
- b) supporting a state-level equal rights amendment initiative that is being spearheaded by another group
- c) participating in a Department of Education initiative to bring Native American perspectives and teaching into K-12 schools
- d) Actively promoting events through VCNAA's Facebook page and other media,
- e) Working with the ECHO Lake Aquarium and Science Center to provide input and potentially co-sponsor a Native Heritage festival in 2018
- f) Write a recommendation for Jesse Lawyer (an Abenaki chef specializing in indigenous cuisine), who is seeking an internship with Sean Sherman, a master chef and founder of the "decolonizing diet" initiative.

### **2. Secretary Report: Lake Champlain Resource Room Request, VT Ethnic Studies Curriculum, Etc.**

Andrea Brett stated that the ECHO Lake Aquarium and Science Center is looking to update their resource room and wants to include a drawer about *Odzihozo* (or Rock Dunder, a small island in Burlington Bay). Mrs. Brett stated that ECHO wants to ensure that the content is respectful, and that the language is appropriate. They asked whether VCNAA or member tribes could view, approve, and/or edit the wording and content of the drawer.

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

Paul Fassler passed out a draft statement on Native American mascots and logos for consideration by the commissioners. The commissioners agreed to evaluate the content for approval or editing by the next meeting. It was stated by several commissioners that the overall goal should be education about and recognition of the past assaults on Native Americans, rather than on erasure and division.

### **4. Public Comment**

Veronique Hamel traveled from Québec to propose conducting participatory research with the Abenaki on an initiative of their choosing or on a range of suggested topics for her Master of Arts in cultural anthropology from Concordia University. The commissioners were excited with her enthusiasm and agreed to follow up with her to ensure that her proposal is submitted in a timely manner.

### **5. Announcements**

- a) Mr. Holschuh stated that Tim Brooks, professor at Champlain College, and colleagues have been working to make an original, English language type font based upon Abenaki

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VCNAA November 8, 2017 minutes

Page 4

iconographic symbols and artistic motifs.

- b) Melody Brook stated that Fred Wiseman is having the first of two books detailing his Seeds of Renewal project published very shortly. He is also working with Sterling College to ensure that the Native cultigens collected as part of the project will be grown and preserved in an appropriate manner. She also stated that Dr. Wiseman is interested in presenting a summary of the Seeds of Renewal program to VCNAA in the new year.
- c) Last weekend in Putney, the Vermont Vision for a Multicultural future held a symposium at Landmark College regarding the promotion of openness and equal opportunity in the state. The hosts contacted Don Stevens and Roger Longtoe about the possibility of offering an opening statement, but neither could attend. In their stead, Rich Holschuh sent a written statement to be read at the beginning of the conference.
- d) Several commissioners noted that there is a film being produced about the Vermont Eugenics program by students from Emerson College in Boston, which should be completed and distributed next year.
- e) Melody Brook read a summary of the Vermont Abenaki Artists' Association recent events and accomplishments prepared by Vera Longtoe Sheehan. The commissioners were grateful that she took the time to prepare that document for the commissioners.
- f) Rich Holschuh stated that the Vermont Land Trust is becoming more formally involved in the preservation of the land parcel adjacent to the West River Petroglyphs in Brattleboro, but that this does not yet ensure its preservation.

The meeting was adjourned at 3:38 PM.