



VCNAA MEETING MINUTES

Approved February 8, 2023

January 11, 2023

1:00 P.M. – 4:00 P.M.

Calvin Coolidge Conference Room
6th Floor Davis Building, National Life
Montpelier, VT
and Virtually

VERMONT COMMISSION ON NATIVE AMERICAN AFFAIRS



vcnaa.vermont.gov

COMMISSION
Richard Holschuh, Chair
Douglas Bent, Vice Chair
Melody Walker Mackin, Secretary
Beverly Little-Thunder
Jeffrey Benay
Hillary Hoffmann
Patrick Lamphere
Deborah Reger
Jon Bosley

Members present: Rich Holschuh (chair); Doug Bent (vice-chair); Melody Walker Mackin (secretary); Jeff Benay; Deb Reger; Patrick Lamphere; Jon Bosley

Absent: Beverly Little-Thunder; Hillary Hoffman

Guests: Jess Robinson (Vermont Division for Historic Preservation); Madeline Gosselin Wright, Morgan Lamphere, Shalini Suryanarayana (Office of Racial Equity), Shirley Hook (Chief – Koasek of the Koas), Joanne Crawford (Chief – Missisquoi), Elodie Reed (Vermont Public), Duncan Mathewsen, Arlene Mathewsen

Meeting called to order at 1:09 pm

The Commissioners and guests introduced themselves.

Rich Holschuh stated that he wanted to affirm what he wrote in a New Year's email to the commissioners and tribes that he sought forgiveness of his own failings, and urged everyone to the best of their ability to put aside previous differences and grievances and come together.

He also wanted to acknowledge that commission meeting was being held on Abenaki land, and he acknowledged that the meeting attendees are responsible for all of the ancestors that are still with us, those that live now, and all those that will come in the future.

1. Changes to the Agenda

The commissioners agreed to move Agenda item #9 (Revisit map discussion from last year) to the first item under new business. Jeff Benay also asked to add an ICWA liaison discussion to the agenda.

2. Approval of the October Meeting Minutes

Doug Bent moved to accept the November meeting minutes without alteration. Jeff Benay seconded the motion. All present commissioners voted to approve the minutes by consensus.

OLD BUSINESS

3. Revisit oversight map discussion from last year?

Rich began the discussion by saying that, after some thought, he felt it likely wasn't an appropriate matter for the VCNAA to take up. Rather, he suggested that the State-recognized tribes should address the issue themselves. Doug Bent agreed that it was principally a tribal matter and should be discussed and resolved among the tribes, but he also stated that he and Shirly Hook felt strongly that the map and tribal boundary issue should be resolved and not be avoided. Deb Reger asked if there was anything that the VCNAA could do to assist the tribes? Jeff Benay stated that the only role he could envision for the VCNAA would be to enlist a mediator to assist inter-tribal discussion. Rich Holschuh offered a motion that he would draft a letter to the tribal leadership stating that the mapping and boundary issues should be left to the tribes. Doug Bent seconded the motion. All present commissioners voted in the affirmative.

4. ICWA Liaison Status Update

Jeff Benay asked the commissioners and attendees if anyone had had any contact with Marshall Rich (ICWA liaison with Vermont Department of Children and Families) since he was introduced to the VCNAA in October. Joanne Crawford stated that she had attended a meeting that included Lindsey Barron and Marshall Rich. They stated to her at that time that it was their intention to meet with the tribal leadership of the four State-recognized tribes, but they were still developing policies and procedures around the new position. Jeff Benay stated that he was somewhat dismayed by that, given that it has been three months since his hire date. Jon Bosley made a motion to draft an email to Lindsey Barron asking about the status of the ICWA liaison, what steps they are taking, and what they are planning to do in the future to engage the State-recognized Abenaki tribes. Rich Holschuh seconded the motion. All present commissioners voted in the affirmative.

5. Ongoing Discussion of expanding Community Participation, Representation

Rich Holschuh started the discussion by stating that it should be a goal of the VCNAA to expand tribal community participation, public participation, and expanded representation. Jeff Benay stated that the VCNAA commissioners that represent tribes should be reporting the content of VCNAA meetings and the initiatives of the commission to their tribal leadership or councils, and ideally the tribes should be guiding the commissioners toward the initiatives and topics they want addressed.

Deb Reger stated that she wants to make a short film about the VCNAA that she can use to promote the work of the commission and raise awareness of indigenous people in Vermont. She also wanted to create a short blurb highlighting the VCNAA that she could distribute to other media outlets, etc.

Morgan Lamphere stated that he felt that it was not necessarily safe to be an Abenaki in the present-day and that is likely why some people who would otherwise participate in community initiatives don't do so. Jon Bosley stated that he agreed that safety was an issue. He stated that people are very polarized right now about any number of issues, and calling attention to oneself as Abenaki or indigenous in the public can invite attacks, unwanted scrutiny, harassment, etc. He agreed that it is an impediment to active tribal involvement by many citizens.

Jeff Benay stated that there is millions of dollars of Federal money being offered to equity initiatives in the current environment. In Vermont, there is money available to help historically underserved communities, and that that is essentially the Abenaki. He stated that school education is also important, as is recognizing and honoring indigenous students in schools.

6. Status of scheduling meetings with Governor Scott and legislators

Rich Holschuh began by stating that the Native ad hoc legislative caucus has had several meetings, and that the group includes select legislators. The group discussed the idea of having a Native community meeting day at the Statehouse where Abenaki tribal members and members of other Indigenous groups could talk to legislators about their communities, cultures, concerns, etc. Unfortunately, he noted that the presentation area is reserved a year in advance and is already booked for 2023. He has placed a reservation for the area for 2024, but there is a lottery for spots. Rich Holschuh also noted there is the option of hiring a paid lobbyist to advance Native interests, but he intuited that that is not something about which most of the Native community would be in favor, even if there was money for it. He noted that there was also the possibility to sponsor a breakfast, but there is no guarantee that legislators would attend, and the event would also cost considerable money.

Deb Reger stated that they should also plan for an event outside of the Statehouse. Rich Holschuh agreed. He stated that the VCNAA should start planning an event or gathering for warmer weather this year. After some discussion about the messaging of a potential event, Jeff Benay stated that while perceptions are important, there will always be sides and opinions about the Abenaki. He felt that now is not a time to be timid. He stated that the media and the enemies of the Abenaki will always spin any public event toward their particular ends, but that is not a reason to not come together.

Rich Holschuh stated that with regard to the meeting with the Governor, he has been in constant contact with the Governor's office, but has still yet to confirm a meeting date. His representatives indicated that there were hopeful that a meeting could be scheduled for late January or the beginning of February.

7. Native Caucus 2023 session start - met on 12/13/22 & 1/10/23

As Rich Holschuh mentioned earlier, the Native ad hoc legislative caucus met on 12/13/22 and 1/10/23. Once again, the caucus is organized and facilitated by Rep. Katherine Sims (Orleans – Caledonia). Rich Holschuh reiterated that all commissioners, chiefs, and tribal members are invited to participate, but he noted that VCNAA commissioners need to ensure that there is not a quorum participating in any given meeting. He noted that the Native ad hoc legislative caucus not only discusses proposed legislation, but also how past legislation and other actions have affected the Abenaki tribes and indigenous people, either positively or negatively. Rich Holschuh stated that the legislators are looking for support for the VCNAA, especially since they are being asked to serve on a number of ancillary boards and commissions.

8. UVM Provost office liaison report: Provost Prelock will join at Feb 8th meeting

Rich Holschuh noted that Provost Prelock will be coming the February 8th VCNAA meeting to address the recent actions and activities at UVM. Rich Holschuh stated that it is his understanding that she is coming to explain the University's position on the State-recognized Abenaki and outline the University's actions and intentions going forward. He also believed that Sherwood Smith (Director for the Center for Cultural Pluralism) and Amer Ahmed (Vice Provost for Diversity, Equity and Inclusion) would be in attendance.

Deb Reger asked if the idea of a State-recognized Abenaki conference was still being discussed or entertained. Rich Holschuh stated that that can certainly be a topic of discussion at the meeting next month. Doug Bent stated that he remains slightly concerned that UVM has not offered any specific actions or public statements regarding the State-recognized Abenaki since the last meeting. Jeff Benay stated that he understood Doug Bent's concerns, but that he truly believes Rich Holschuh is doing the best that he can under the circumstances, and doesn't know what else can be done under the circumstances. Rich Holschuh noted all communication flows through the Provost's office. Direct communication with the UVM's president is not currently on offer.

Jeff Benay noted that the Missisquoi Abenaki had a 37-year relationship with UVM, but that the 38th annual Summer Happening is not taking place at UVM in 2023. Instead, he stated that Missisquoi are exploring hosting a similar event at the Vermont State Colleges.

Rich asked commissioners to send to him questions or topics they would like addressed at the meeting next month. He stated that he will collate and organize them before the next meeting.

9. Act 182 (2022) Land Access & Opportunity Board report (Jon Bosley)

The Land Access and Opportunity Board was empowered by the legislature to look at the feasibility of becoming a grant-making board, which would provide resources for BIPOC communities to access housing and funds for housing. The board was also tasked with

looking at current Vermont rules and statutes related to land and housing access to make them more inclusive and equitable. Jon Bosley was chosen to serve as the VCNAA representative to the Board. Rich Holschuh will serve as an alternate when Jon can't attend. Both commissioners noted that it is a very open and welcoming body. Jon Bosley stated that the board is scheduled to give a sunrise report to the legislature soon, outlining the progress and intentions of the board. He noted that the Board is in its formative stages, and that they are currently trying to acquire counsel to negotiate the various laws and regulations surrounding housing and land acquisition and ownership. They are also looking to hire legal counsel.

10. Stacey Gould (Missisquoi) appt to Racial Justice Statistics Advisory Council, Melody Walker Mackin had agreed to be interim

Rich Holschuh noted that the Racial Justice Statistics Advisory Council is tasked with looking at State statistical modeling and how it might marginalize certain underrepresented groups. He noted that the VCNAA is statutorily tasked with appointing a member to the Council. Stacey Gould (Missisquoi) has agreed to be the VCNAA and indigenous representative to the board, replacing Melody Walker Mackin as the interim appointee. Deb Reger moved to formally appoint Stacey Gould to the position. Melody seconded the motion. All present commissioners voted in the affirmative. Rich Holschuh stated that will provide Stacey Gould's contact details to Shalini Suryanarayana (Office of Racial Equity).

11. Act 154 (2022) Environmental Justice Advisory Council report (Rich Holschuh)

Rich Holschuh is VCNAA's representative on this council. They have not yet met. He had nothing else to report.

12. Seventh Generation Curriculum Grant Committee report (Jeff Benay)

Rich Holschuh stated that the Curriculum Committee has been formed. He asked Jeff Benay to provide an update. Jeff Benay stated that they have good representation from all four State-recognized tribes. They are planning a recurring schedule of two virtual and followed in-person meeting, each placed approximately two weeks apart. He stated that they are planning to have a dedicated website with links to other entities and information. Melody Walker Mackin noted that they are looking to get as much tribal community participation as possible during the process.

13. Act 174/H.880 (2020) "VT State Park - Abenaki names" progress, upcoming priorities, inclusion policies (such as recent Lazy Lady Island VT Fish & Wildlife acquisition)

Rich Holschuh noted that Sweet Pond State Park in Guilford is the first to have its sign contain Abenaki wording. He reminded the meeting attendees that the naming process is open, but is facilitated through the VCNAA by statute. Rich Holschuh stated that the first sign drew a lot of attention and commentary, the vast majority of which was positive. He further noted that the few negative comments were largely about the accuracy of the

translation. He noted that several commenters who questioned the accuracy were asked previously for their interpretive help, but they didn't provide any. Finally, several commissioners noted that a good upcoming candidate for a name change would be Lazy Lady Island, given that the State had just acquired it.

NEW BUSINESS

1. Legislative priorities for 2023, proposed State House Native Awareness Day

Rich Holschuh stated that the Abenaki legislative priorities for the session were still evolving, but that it may be a session to reflect on maintain support for recently passed legislation.

2. Proposed visit by Dr. Fred Wiseman for VT Indigenous Heritage Center update

Rich Holschuh stated that Fred Wiseman has periodically over the years given a presentation about his work and about the Alnobaiwi organization to the VCNAA. Rich Holschuh stated that Fred Wiseman has requested time to do so again at an upcoming meeting. Jeff Benay stated that he thinks there is value in hearing him speak and in understanding his current initiatives. Deb Reger stated that the Commission should understand his intentions. She also suggested that the presentation should be no more than 30 minutes long and in a format that can be shared digitally outside of the meeting as well. The Commissioners agreed.

3. Announcements

- Elnu – Rich Holschuh stated that the Elnu have assumed stewardship of the land adjacent to the petroglyph site, and will be able take residence at the on-site building in May when the existing lease expires. He noted that the land will be open for everyone for respectful purposes.
- Nulhegan – Jon Bosley had no updates
- Koasek – Doug Bent stated that there are a number of younger tribal members that will be assisting in the community garden this summer.
- Missisquoi – Joanne Crawford stated that the Missisquoi tribe is working with the departments of labor and health to have a Missisquoi tribal career fair for potential health care workers. Jeff Benay also noted that the Missisquoi tribe has been granted \$50,000 in the community development block grant funding to renovate the rear part of the Missisquoi Abenaki Self-Help building. It will provide for renovations to the food pantry.

4. Public Comment

There was no public comment.

The meeting was adjourned at 3:47 PM.