



VCNAA MEETING MINUTES

VERMONT
COMMISSION
ON
NATIVE
AMERICAN
AFFAIRS

October 12, 2022
1:00 P.M. – 4:00 P.M.

One National Life Drive, Dewey Building
Conference Room 206
Montpelier, VT
and Virtually



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); Melody Walker Mackin (secretary); Jeff Benay; Jon Bosley; Deb Reger

Absent: Doug Bent (vice-chair); Patrick Lamphere; Beverly Little-Thunder; Hillary Hoffman

Guests: Jess Robinson (VDHP); Chad Simmons (Vermont Housing and Finance Agency); Elodie Reed (Vermont Public); Christopher Roy; Aaron Marcus (Agency of Natural Resources); Paul Cillo (Public Assets Institute); Chief Joanne Crawford (Missisquoi); Eric Hoffman (Vermont Housing and Finance Agency); Savannah Ferreira; Jill Cresey-Gross; Trey Martin (Vermont Housing and Conservation Board)

Meeting called to order at 1:15 pm after some audio-visual difficulties.

The Commissioners and guests introduced themselves.

1. Changes to the Agenda

Jess Robinson stated that Max Krieger (Agency of Commerce and Commerce and Community Development counsel) would be attending the meeting at 3:00 PM to discuss the legal responsibilities of the commission and commissioners.

Rich Holschuh asked that an agenda item related to the Racial Injustice Statistics Advisory Council be added to the agenda given that he had just learned that it significantly involved the commission. It was agreed to be added as an item in New Business.

Deb Reger asked about time limits for agenda items. After some discussion, it was agreed that time limits would be added to future agenda items.

2. Approval of the September Meeting Minutes

After two names were recognized as being missing from the attendance list, Melody Walker Mackin made a motion to approve the September meeting minutes with that alteration. Jeff

Benay seconded the motion. All voted in the affirmative. Deb Reger also asked that future minutes dispense with most acronyms, because she felt it was hard for her and the public to understand what entities were being represented in many cases. Rich Holschuh and Jess Robinson agreed to stop using most acronyms.

OLD BUSINESS

1. Update: VCNAA - Seventh Generation Curriculum Collaboration Grant committee

Jeff Benay stated that there are several people outside of the commission that are interested in joining the grant committee, and he asked the commissioners if they agreed with additional members. The commission agreed. Jeff Benay also stated that given that the grant committee would be expected to make significant time investments toward the goal of generating an Abenaki K-12 curriculum within the proposed time frame, he was interested in reimbursing committee members' travel and some expenses. He had identified monies outside of the grant award that could be used for that purpose. He stated that money should not be a consideration for potential committee members. Regarding the administration of the grant, Jeff Benay stated that funds are being held by the Circle of Courage non-profit at Missisquoi, and the school district will administer the grant at no cost.

Deb Reger asked why the term American Abenaki was used in the grant summary sheet instead of Vermont Abenaki or just Abenaki. She stated that the terminology was confusing to her and that in her opinion the work should accurately reflect the history of the Abenaki but also be as inclusive as possible. Deb Reger also stated that it might be appropriate to bring in stories that focus on other groups but that bring light to issues relevant to the Abenaki. Jeff Benay said that is entirely appropriate to talk about those issues but that the grant committee itself should discuss those issues when they are constituted and begin work.

2. Land Access & Opportunity Board appointment, as an element of Act 182 (2022), with H.273 rolled into S.226 (Trey Martin)

Trey Martin from the Vermont Housing and Conservation Board came to the VCNAA meeting to discuss the Land Access and Opportunity Board. Created by Act 182 (2022), Trey Martin explained that the enabling statute tasks the VCNAA with appointing a member to the board. Given that at the previous meeting, commissioners expressed their concern that they did not know enough about the board and its mission, and had only just been made aware that they were part of the statute and had an appointment responsibility, Trey Martin would summarize its mission.

He stated that 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. Finally, he stated that the board was empowered to bring in people with relevant skills to represent the BIPOC community.

Trey Martin stated that the board also needs to address by January that fact that this proposed inclusivity must not be discriminatory in any way and that any proposals do not run afoul of Federal and State laws. He stated that the board must also address how the grants are going to be funded, how the resources will be distributed, and how all of the recommendations will be reported to the legislature. He also stated that eventually the board will be removed from the Vermont Housing and Conservation Board organization.

Rich Holschuh stated that it was his understanding was that the board was empowered in the Spring and began meeting in late July. Trey Martin concurred agreed, but stated that the board had primarily been interested getting to know the members and the communities they represented at previous meetings. He reiterated that a sunrise (beginning) report is due in January.

Trey Martin stated that the board is funded through State fiscal year 2023. The legislature has to make the choice, upon receipt of the board's report in January, if the board will continue to be funded after June 30. He stated that that is their choice, but the board members are anticipating that the board will continue beyond that date.

Deb Reger asked how the VCNAA could contribute to the board. Trey said that Indigenous people have lived in Vermont for over 10,000+ years, and their lived experience can provide critical insights to the board and to the legislature. Jeff Benay stated that it behooves the VCNAA to appoint a member to the board.

Jon Bosley stated that has land management background experience (forestry and current use), but that it was a significant time commitment. After some discussion, the commissioners agreed to solicit volunteers decide on a nominee or nominees at the November meeting.

3. Eric Hoffman (VHFA) VT First Generation Homebuyer Program, w/ Angela Poirier (People's Trust Company)

Eric Hoffman returned to quickly present addition information about the First Generation Homebuyers Program. He stated that another aspect of Act 182 (2022) was the creation of the First Generation Homebuyers Program. Part of the legislation also put forth a special dispensation for historically marginalized groups to ensure that they have access to the opportunities the program offers. He stated that lenders must be culturally responsive. He further stated that there is interest among lenders and realtors in working with marginalized groups (including tribal groups) to buy a home with assistance from this program. Eric Hoffman finally stated that is offering himself out as a resource and to would be more than willing to contact tribal groups directly.

4. Update: VCNAA letters to UVM administration re April 29th Symposium, and 10/4 meeting with Provost office

Rich Holschuh stated the letter was sent as authorized to to president, provost, and board of trustees at the University of Vermont shortly after the last VCNAA meeting. He stated the Provost then responded with an offer of a meeting on October 4th. Rich Holschuh stated that the meeting was attended by several VCNAA commissioners and the Chiefs of the four recognized

tribes. Jeff Benay stated that he thought that the meeting was fairly positive, and went well, although he acknowledged that there was frank discussion about the disappointment of the Vermont Abenaki surrounding the assertions and format of the conference in April. Rich Holschuh and Jeff Benay agreed that overall it was a positive first step.

5. Update: Other meetings planned by VCNAA with VT state officials

Rich Holschuh stated that he was informed that the Governor was very busy, but that there was a possibility of a meeting in late November or early December. He also stated he is planning to schedule a meeting with legislators with whom the VCNAA and tribes have worked in the past, but no date has been proposed yet.

6. Update: ad hoc Native Caucus for next legislative session

The first meeting in advance of the upcoming legislative session has not yet been scheduled.

7. Update: VT DCF/FSD new position for ICWA-related tasks

Lindsay Barron will attend the November 9 meeting to discuss this agenda item.

8. VCNAA Legislator and Community Service Recognition for 2022

Jeff Benay stated that a legislative appointee for the most Community Service Recognition award has yet to be nominated. Rich Holschuh nominated Rep. Katherine Sims, the ad hoc committee caucus organizer and the Abenaki's principal legislative liaison. Melody Walker Mackin seconded the motion. All voted in the affirmative.

9. Maxwell Krieger – Overview of Commissioner responsibilities

Maxwell Krieger, Agency of Commerce and Community Development council, came to the meeting to brief discuss the responsibilities of the commissioners, public meeting laws and rules, conflicts of interest, and other legal matters pertinent to the VCNAA. He stated that he was available to answer or advice on relevant legal matters.

NEW BUSINESS

1. Act 128 Truth and Reconciliation Commission Taskforce selection process and progress

Rich Holschuh stated that the task force selection process is now underway. He stated that the State will be taking this up in the truth and reconciliation process again in near-future, and the question at hand is who is going to be on the taskforce, and who will choose them. Toward that end, Rich Holschuh stated that there is an interim committee that is tasked with choosing representatives for the taskforce. They are looking for information about qualified nominees. He stated that he wanted to let the commission to know, but that there is no immediate task required

of the commission. Nevertheless, he stated that if anyone had a good candidate to recommend, it should be sent to Xusana Davis.

2. VCNAA appointment to Racial Justice Advisory Council

Rich Holschuh stated that he recently learned that the VCNAA has been statutorily tasked with appointing someone to the Racial Advisory Council. He stated that the appointment was four years long. He stated that the work of this council is certainly important, but it was somewhat disheartening to him that the VCNAA was not consulted or informed at all about their involvement in it prior to the drafting of the statute. The commissioners agreed to vote on a nominee for the council at the next meeting if a suitable candidate is found and able to serve.

3. Announcements

None

4. Public Comment

Melody Walker Mackin stated that Tim Brooks is able to work on curriculum materials if needed.

The meeting was adjourned at 3:59 PM.