



## VCNAA MEETING MINUTES

Approved January 11, 2022

November 9, 2022  
1:00 P.M. – 4:00 P.M.

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

### VERMONT COMMISSION ON NATIVE AMERICAN AFFAIRS



[vcnaa.vermont.gov](http://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; Hillary Hoffman; Patrick Lamphere

**Absent:** Beverly Little-Thunder; Jon Bosley

**Guests:** Jess Robinson (Vermont Division for Historic Preservation); Maggie Gendron (Deputy Secretary – Agency of Natural Resources); Elodie Reed (Vermont Public); Shalini Suryanarayana (Vermont Office of Racial Equity); Chief Shirly Hook (Koasek); Chief Joanne Crawford (Missisquoi); Kiana Burks (WCAX); Lindsey Barron (Department of Children and Families); Marshall Rich (Indian Child Welfare Act Coordinator)

Meeting called to order at 1:11 pm

The Commissioners and guests introduced themselves.

### 1. Changes to the Agenda

There were no changes to agenda.

### 2. Approval of the October Meeting Minutes

Rich Holschuh requested that Joanne Crawford be added to the attendance list. There were no other changes suggested by the commissioners. Commissioners voted to approve the minutes with that single change by consensus.

### OLD BUSINESS

#### 1. Meetings with Governor & legislators - items of discussion, attendees (10 min)

Rich Holschuh stated that the meeting date with Governor Phil Scott and staff has not yet been specified, but he will be contacting them in the next month to formally schedule a

date. Rich Holschuh suggested that the agenda items for the meeting should be formalized soon, and he suggested that four VCNAA members (so that there is not a quorum), and the leaders of the four recognized State tribes should attend. Doug Bent stated that he would like to represent the Koasek. After asking Patrick Lamphere if he would like to attend, it was decided that Jeff Benay would represent the Missisquoi. Rich Holschuh stated that Jon Bosley had earlier agreed to represent the Nulhegan. Rich Holschuh will represent the Elnu.

Rich Holschuh asked the commissioners if there were any particular agenda items they thought should be addressed. Deb Reger suggested that getting clarification on what lands classify for tax exempt status would be beneficial. After discussion, Rich stated that other potential agenda items will be discussed at a later date by the attendees.

## **2. University of Vermont Provost Office update, Land Acknowledgement (5 min)**

Rich Holschuh stated following the meeting with UVM's Provost Office, UVM adopted a land acknowledgment (through the Office for Diversity and Inclusion) that was posted publicly, and also had public events surrounding Indigenous Peoples' Day. He then stated that the meeting, and those steps afterward, were movements in the right direction, but that there is more work to do. Commissioners agreed.

Jeff Benay stated that some Abenaki students have recently expressed interest to him in attending UVM. While he wasn't at that point in a position to offer an opinion to those students as to whether they should attend or not, he wondered what other commissioners thought about Abenaki youth from State-recognized tribes attending UVM. Jeff Benay then stated that, as of the meeting date, the Missisquoi "Summer Happening" is not occurring in 2023. He explained that the parent advisory board for that event is currently not in favor of it occurring next summer, given the current climate at UVM. Doug Bent stated that he too has a youth from his tribe (Koasek) that wants to attend, but that the tribe is also unsure about the current climate at UVM. He minimally would like a formal apology from the school.

Deb Reger stated that while she thinks the issues with UVM are important, there are a lot of colleges and universities in Wabanaki territory that have active Native studies programs, student initiatives, etc. She suggested that the Abenaki should think about connecting with those other programs and not wait around for specific actions from UVM.

Jeff Benay stated that he totally understood the need to foster connections with other institutions of higher learning, but that there is a long, often productive history between the Abenaki and UVM, and that a lot of hard work has been invested over the years into establishing those connections. He also noted that there are scholarships specifically available to the Abenaki at UVM, which was also a hard-fought initiative and is materially significant to a lot of potential students.

Melody Walker Mackin stated that while the overtures from the administration are encouraging, the same faculty that sponsored the conference will still be there teaching the same classes and beliefs and that academic freedom ensures that they don't have to change any of their stances. Hillary Hoffman stated if the Vermont truth and reconciliation process is still being negotiated with the legislature, then perhaps that process would also include UVM reckoning with their past harms as part of that process.

### **3. Land Access Opportunity Board member, updates (10 min)**

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. Rich Holschuh stated 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. As noted in the previous meeting, the statute empowering the Board stated that the VCNAA appoints one member. The commissioners noted that the decision about a member appointment is still pending, but that a rotating slate of representatives is a likely possibility.

### **4. Appointment of Racial Injustice Statistics Advisory Council member (10 min)**

VCNAA also tasked with appointing a member to the Racial Injustice Advisory Council, but Rich Holschuh noted that the appointee needs to also fulfill certain other criteria that most of the commissioners did not feel they possessed. At the previous meeting, several commissioners agreed to reach out to members of their respective communities who they felt met the additional criteria. The commissioners then explained that several of their possible choices could either not participate or hadn't responded.

After some discussion, Shalini Suryanarayana from the Vermont Office of Racial Equity stated that there was a perceived need to expeditiously staff the board in order to demonstrate interest to the legislature. Given that, she wondered if there could be an interim appointment. Melody Walker Mackin agreed to be interim appointment if the meetings were held remotely. Shalini Suryanarayana stated that she believed they were. The Commission all voted in the affirmative via consensus for Melody to have the interim appointment. They also agreed to develop a wider list of potential regular council members and reach out to those people.

### **5. Seventh Generation curriculum grant committee report (10 min)**

Jeff Benay stated that the curriculum grant committee as currently constituted included Jeff Benay, Melody Walker Mackin, Vera Sheehan, and Jen DeSorgher. Jeff Benay and Melody Walker Mackin then summarized what was discussed at their first meeting. First, they agreed that Abenaki people will write the curriculum, and that it should be principally reviewed by the Abenaki community as well. They agreed that there should

also be representation from each of the four recognized tribes. They also discussed the format of the curriculum, and decided that, among other things, it should primarily be digital but that print components would be sent to the tribes. Toward that end, they discussed hiring a consultant to assist with the digital content and in the creation of a robust and user-friendly website. They agreed that they should pull together, and significantly rely on, existing resources where possible so as not to duplicate effort. Finally, they discussed the best ways to disseminate the content to schools once completed.

**6. Vermont Dept. for Children and Families/Family Services Division new position for Indian Child Welfare Act - Lindsay Barron 2 pm arrival (15 min)**

Lindsay Barron from the Vermont Department of Children and Families (DCF) introduced the newly hired State Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA) coordinator Marshall Rich, whom she noted had formally started his job only hours earlier. They were both greeted. After some discussion about the state of ICWA given the current Federal Supreme Court case challenging it, Lindsey Barron summarized the possibilities for the Act depending upon the Supreme Court ruling. She stated that DCF understood that with the Supreme Court case pending in the last few months, it was important to better codify their procedures, fill the ICWA coordinator vacancy, and then better explore ways to partner or ally with the State Abenaki and other Native people in Vermont.

Jeff Benay then brought up the past collaboration with DCF and the Missisquoi tribe. He felt that DCF's preferential placement of Abenaki children with foster families from their tribes should be the best practice across the State. Jeff Benay then stated that he is glad that Marshall Rich was on-board to facilitate connections and discussions in the future. Rich Holschuh stated that while ICWA applies specifically to Federally recognized tribes, the spirit of the Act should ideally be extended to State recognized tribes and others, as has been done in the past in Vermont and in other states. Lindsey Barron stated that as an immediate next step she and/or Marshall would connect with representatives from each of the four State-recognized tribes to facilitate discussion.

**7. 2022 legislative recognition award – Rep. Katherine Sims 3 pm (15 min)**

After introductions, Doug Bent presented a plaque award to Katherine Sims in recognition of her service to the Abenaki community. She thanked the commission.

**8. Native Caucus and upcoming legislative session – priorities, attendees (10 min)**

After the award, the discussion among the commissioners and Rep. Sims turned to Native ad hoc caucus and upcoming legislative session priorities. Rich Holschuh discussed the original intent of the Native ad hoc caucus from the Native perspective. Rep. Sims also noted that one of the goals was to bring legislators into the ad hoc group to discuss specific initiatives and meet the representatives of the Vermont and wider indigenous community. The commissioners then briefly discussed the option to invite State senators to the ad hoc caucus and the need to articulate priorities in the near-future.

## **NEW BUSINESS**

### **1. Appointment of Environmental Justice Advisory Council**

Maggie Gendron (Deputy Secretary of the Agency of Natural Resources) came to discuss the Agency's Environmental Justice Advisory Council and VCNAA's appointment of a member to that body. She briefly outlined the goals of the advisory council and stated that its ultimate success would be measured by the impact it has on peoples' lives in Vermont. Deb Reger stated that she reached out to several members of the four recognized tribes, but no what she contacted could commit.

Nevertheless, she felt that although it might take a little time, the commissioners should strive to reach out more broadly in order to get more tribal members active. Jeff Benay asked about reimbursement. He stated that it was not a personal indictment of anyone in particular, but it is a significant impediment to participation when people are only reimbursed token amounts, and are asked to make significant investments of their time. Rich said that until a permanent candidate is chosen, he is willing to serve on the council.

### **2. Announcements**

- Deb Reger stated that the Native American Music Awards are being held on November 19.
- Patrick Lamphere asked if the issue of a territorial map could be readdressed in the future, and the commission agreed.

The meeting was adjourned at 3:37 PM.