



VERMONT  
COMMISSION  
| ON  
NATIVE AMERICAN  
AFFAIRS

VCNAA MEETING MINUTES

DRAFT UNTIL APPROVED

April 13, 2022

In-person Dewey Building and  
GoTo Virtual Meeting



[vcnaa.vermont.gov](http://vcnaa.vermont.gov)

COMMISSION  
Carol McGranaghan, Chair  
Carol Irons, Vice Chair  
Hillary Hoffmann, Secretary  
Patrick Lamphere  
Beverly Little-Thunder  
Lucy Neel  
Douglas Bent  
Jeffrey Benay

**Members present:** Carol McGranaghan, Chair; Carol Irons, Vice-Chair; Doug Bent; Jeff Benay; Patrick Lamphere

**Absent:** Hillary Hoffmann, Secretary; Beverly Little-Thunder; Lucy Neel

**Guests:** Jess Robinson, Vermont State Archaeologist; Aaron Marcus (VT Fish & Wildlife); Savannah Ferreira (VT Fish & Wildlife); Ben Doyle (Preservation Trust of Vermont); Rich Holschuh (Atowi); Paul Cillo (Public Assets Institute); Jennifer Bryne

**1. Introductions**

Commission members and guests introduced themselves.

**2. Changes to the Agenda**

- Item 7 on the agenda was tabled until the May meeting because Hillary Hoffman was unable to attend.

**3. Approval of February Meeting Minutes**

Jeff Benay made the motion to approve the March meeting minutes without alteration. Carol Irons seconded the motion. All commissioners voted in the affirmative.

**4. Housekeeping**

Carol McGranaghan stated that the June meeting would be in Huntington at Beverly Little-Thunder's outdoor pavilion again this year. Doug Bent offered to have the May meeting at the Koasek gardens in Braintree. After some discussion, the Commissioners agreed. As such, the final two meetings of the year will be off-site, in-person meetings only.

**OLD BUSINESS**

**5. Tax Exempt Land for Abenaki - Update**

Carol McGranaghan stated that H. 556 - An act relating to exempting property owned by Vermont-recognized Native American tribes from property tax - passed through both chambers of the Legislature. Carol McGranaghan stated that it is now on the Governor's desk, and she heard he is inclined to sign it. In any case, she stated that the Governor has ten days to respond one way

or the other, or the bill becomes law with his silence. Rich Holschuh stated that although it is incremental, it is an important step that is not time-limited. The legislation allows tax exemption on future land acquisitions. Carol McGranaghan and Doug Bent agreed.

**6. Other legislative updates - Ban on School Mascots; VCNAA funding; Truth and Reconciliation Commission; Hunting/trapping Tags; Abenaki Language Scholarship**

Doug Bent summarized the current status of the proposed Truth and Reconciliation Commission legislation (H. 96). He stated that much of the discussion in the House prior to the vote centered on funding and costs. Carol McGranaghan also stated that some legislators were interested in expanded the scope of affected groups, about which several VCNAA commissioners were not in favor. Carol McGranaghan stated that she was hopeful that the Chiefs of the four State-recognized tribes would make themselves available next week to testify.

Doug Bent stated that the proposed trapping/hunting legislation appeared to be on track to pass in the Senate, but he otherwise had no update.

Carol McGranaghan stated that VCNAA funding, through legislation or direct budgeting through a Senate committee, does not seem likely this legislative session. She stated that there is renewed scrutiny on the State budget and that direct funding no longer seems feasible.

Doug Bent stated the proposed Mascot legislation (S, 139) has passed the Senate and has been referred to the House Committee on Education.

Doug Bent stated that the Abenaki Language Bill (H. 645) is no longer to be considered this legislative session.

The Commissioners then turned to proposed legislation that would open State land to gatherings, plant harvesting, etc. for the State-recognized Abenaki (H. 618). Carol McGranaghan stated that she assumes the legislation would be similar to the agreement that the Nulhegan have with the Vermont Agency of Natural Resources. Carol McGranaghan and Doug Bent both had concerns. Carol McGranaghan stated that as far as she knew, there would still be restrictions on activities, limits to gathering sizes, etc. Moreover, Carol Irons and several other Commissioners had concerns that legislators would be less amenable to passing legislation giving land to the Abenaki if this legislation passed, because they could argue that State land was now open to them. Carol McGranaghan made a motion to draft a letter from the VCNAA to Rep. John O'Brien (the legislator that introduced the bill) enumerating their concerns about the legislation as written, and also about the potential implications of the legislation for future land sovereignty. Carol Irons seconded the motion. All Commissioners voted in the affirmative.

## **NEW BUSINESS**

**7. Land Grab Symposium at Vermont Law School**

Tabled until the May meeting.

**8. Letter of support for keeping schools open on Indigenous Peoples' Day**

Jeff Benay started the discussion by stating that when he was asked by the Missisquoi schools if the children should have a day off for Indigenous Peoples' Day, he let the administrators know he strongly advocated for having them stay in school, but that the day should be centered on

education about Abenaki and Indigenous issues. Stacey Gould, Missisquoi tribal citizen and Alburgh school board vice-chair, then joined the conversation. She asked the VCNAA for a letter of support wherein they endorsed her school district staying in school for Indigenous Peoples' Day in order that they might be educated about the Abenaki. Jeff Benay stated that the VCNAA have spearhead an effort in concert with the tribes to advocate for State-wide Abenaki and Indigenous education on Indigenous Peoples' Day.

Carol Irons then stated that many teachers and educators were likely willing to do this, but that they needed appropriate educational materials in order to effectively teach about Abenaki and Indigenous history and issues. Jeff Benay then suggested that they gather a core group of texts, pulled from the list gathered by the VCNAA for the larger curriculum effort, and send a letter to every school district advocating for school-based education about the Abenaki and other Native groups on Indigenous Peoples' Day. Jeff Benay then stated that if they formally agreed to that arrangement, Jeff Benay would provide a set of texts to the schools within the district on behalf of the VCNAA.

Carol Irons made a motion to authorize Jeff Benay to put together a materials packet for distribution to schools in Vermont and to authorize the drafting of a letter supporting the notion of keeping schools open for the education of children about the Abenaki on that day. The educational packet would be sent to all schools that formally agreed to stay open and educate children on those topics. Carol McGranaghan seconded the motion. All commissioners voted in the affirmative.

#### **9. Invitation to speak at Resilient Vermont 2022 - Simon Pearish**

Carol McGranaghan stated Simon Pearish could not attend the meeting, but that he wanted to extend an invitation to someone from the VCNAA to speak at this year's resilient Vermont conference.

#### **10. Partnership with Dead Creek Visitor Center (VT Fish & Wildlife) - Rose Watts**

Rose Watts (VT Fish and Wildlife) from the Dead Creek Wildlife Refuge came to the VCNAA meeting to offer the Dead Creek Wildlife Refuge's visitor center to the VCNAA and the tribes they represent for gatherings or to partner with the Refuge on future collaborative programming. Rose Watts gave a brief history and explanation of the visitor's center. She then extended an open invitation for event ideas on use of the space and the Refuge lands.

Carol McGranaghan suggested that perhaps the VCNAA could have an event associated with the hopeful signing of the Abenaki Heritage Week proclamation by the Governor. Carol McGranaghan asked if Rose's contact information could be placed in the minutes for reference by interested individuals She agreed. Her information is as follows:

rose.watts@vermont.gov, 802-373-0263

#### **11. Savannah Ferreira - Hemlock Conservation Plan**

Savannah Ferreira, Forest Health Specialist with VT Fish and Wildlife, gave a presentation about the State's Hemlock Conservation Plan. She stated that she was soliciting community input and was particularly interested in Native input on prioritizing which Hemlock stands to preserve. Carol McGranaghan stated that she would provide several contacts to Savannah. The Commissioners thanked her for her insightful presentation.

## **12. Announcements**

- Jess Robinson stated that any VCNAA commissioner that wanted to attend the Downtown and Historic Preservation Conference on June 9<sup>th</sup> in St. Johnsbury would have their entrance fee paid for by VDHP.
- Doug Bent reminded the Commissioners and attendees about the upcoming three-weekend span of Abenaki-related events at the Lost Nation theatre in May.

## **13. Public Comment**

- Aaron Marcus stated that there is a volunteer fungal conservation committee in the Vermont Agency of Natural Resources that would welcome public and Native participation.
- Jeff Benay stated that he was at UVM recently and was approached by several members of the faculty and staff about the upcoming Abenaki Odanak conference/event. He stated that they expressed their support for the Vermont Abenaki and were generally unsupportive of the conference/event in its current form.

## **14. Adjournment**

Jeff Benay made a motion to adjourn, Carol Irons seconded the motion. All Commissioners voted in the affirmative. The meeting was adjourned at 3:47 PM.