

VERMONT  
COMMISSION  
ON  
NATIVE AMERICAN  
AFFAIRS

VCNAA MEETING MINUTES

Approved June 15, 2022

May 11, 2022

1:00 P.M. – 4:00 P.M.

Koasek Tribal Gardens

Allen Bent Road, Braintree, VT



[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:** Chief Shirly Hook, Koasek; Chief Richard Menard, Missisquoi; Roger Longtoe Sheehan, Elnu; Chief Don Stevens, Nulhegan; Laura Bassell; Elodie Reed, VPR; Maggie Erickson, High Mowing Seeds; Jenn Detweiler, High Mowing Seeds; Jennifer Bryne, White River Natural Resources Conservation District; Ben Gray, Native American Students Association at VLS; Deb Reger, Moccasin Trails; Linda Sheehan; Louise Lamphere; Shalini Suryanarayana, Office of Racial Equity; Rich Holschuh (Atowi);

Meeting called to order at 1:00 pm.

Jeff Moved to approve April minutes, Carol Iron seconded. April minutes approved.

Jennifer Bryne volunteered to take minutes.

Chief Shirly Hook - Welcomed everyone to Koasek Tribal Guards

#### OLD BUSINESS

##### 1. Executive Session starting 1:10:

Abenaki Territory Map discussion with Commissioners and the 4 Chiefs: Elnu, Koasek, Nulhegan, Missisquoi

Executive Session adjourned 2:30

No consensus, no action

##### 2. Truth and Reconciliation bill update - Doug Bent

Rich Holschuh said it has passed both chambers and is waiting to come onto the floor.

Chief Don asked that the Chiefs will be involved in the selection of representatives to serve on the Truth and Reconciliation commission. Carol M said she hopes this meeting will be the beginning of a more open line of community between VCNAA and the

Chiefs, as that has been lacking and needs to be change. Future discussion needed with VCNAA and Chiefs to select representative to serve on Truth & Reconciliation Council

### **3. School mascot legislation update - Carol M**

Carol M stated it is on the Governor's desk and expected to be signed with no issues.

### **4. UVM Odanak presentation**

Carol M stated VCNAA had written to UVM Prof. Massell prior to the event and were assured by him that it would only be a presentation of the history of the Odanak, with the possibility of discussing the recognition of the VT tribes. What was presented was not what VCNAA was led to believe.

Doug Bent said he feels there needs to be a strong response by the VCNAA to UVM about the event. It is the impression that UVM had sponsored the event and Prof Massell agreed with all of what was said by continually nodding his head.

Jeff Benay said he had been approached by several UVM folks who were appalled by the presentation. We (VNCAA) could have reached out to the administration at UVM, but we felt "let them have their say and have a public dialogue". This was not a dialogue. It was a public mugging, a character assassination. There was no opportunity for discussion. The perception is that UVM was complicit in this attack against the Abenaki. This was not educational, it was a weapon. Another UVM professor was quoted as saying the organizing professor (professor of Canadian studies) was "duplicitous from the start"

Chief Don stated Odanak presenters were using their truth to suppress someone else. We are ok with education, but not suppression. It was completely insensitive, especially when responding to the hypocrisy given UVM's history with eugenics, using it "for educational purposes". There were so many wrongs on so many levels

Concerns were expressed about the effect this is having on the youth, especially those who attend UVM.

Jeff stated that 40-50 years ago there was a 70% high school drop-out rate among Abenaki children in Missisquoi. They were treated terribly, called welfare bums. We have worked for 40 years to get to this point. Now we were celebrating when Missisquoi students were accepted to UVM and this happened.

Chiefs are getting calls from Abenaki students asking "are we safe here?" while UVM wonders why they don't have Abenaki identifying students on their roles. Students are afraid to identify due to the legacy of eugenics, erasure, and now this.

Chief Longtoe stated the students in attendance who were cheering had no idea what was going on. That when you only hear one side you think, "He's the real Indian!" Odanak people were better at getting out to the media and spreading hate to other Abenaki". They were not considering the impact on the kids here.

Jeff Benay - Abenaki at UVM - parents and kids asking if they are safe at UVM. Chief Stevens says they are hearing the same from Nulhegan students at UVM and are not identifying as Abenaki because they don't feel safe.

Consensus was VCNAA needs to write a letter of disapproval for what UVM did and the event they sponsored. Doug Bent made the motion to have Carol M draft the letter - Jeff seconded. Motion carried. Carol M asked if the Chiefs wanted to sign the letter as well. VCNAA and Chiefs agreed all should sign.

## **NEW BUSINESS**

### **1. High Mowing Seeds - Maggie Erickson and Jen Detweiler**

Both are in sales and on the social mission committee. They wanted to present in order to form relationships and partnerships, hoping to expand on work with the Abenaki community.

Chief Don Stevens thanked them for having indigenous seeds available and working with the NOFA program

### **2. Natural Resources Conservation District - Jennifer Byrne**

Conservation Districts can help land stewards/landowners/farmers access state and federal financial assistance for conservation work, such as fencing, watering systems, agroforestry practices, forestry work, riparian buffer plantings, etc. There are 14 Conservation Districts in VT which serve all residents of their districts, supposed to help residents give input into environmental laws & policies, especially relating to soil, water, natural resources.

Offer to host 5 meetings with Conservation Districts and tribes in the summer. Jennifer passed around a contact list to be updated by Chiefs. There are many Federal and State programs to help with land stewardship in agriculture and forestry, small scale farming, green houses and large scale projects as well.

### **3. Indigenous Peoples Day - efforts to keep schools open - Jeff Benay**

In April's VCNAA meeting we discussed sending out a packet of information, but funding was an issue. A foundation gave \$50,000 to provide support in the effort to keep all public schools open on Indigenous Peoples Day and to encourage education on Abenaki history and culture. Those who agreed to stay open and provide an educational opportunity that day will be sent a packet of curriculum materials

Superintendents who were asked have said a lot of people like the 3 day weekend and were hesitant to stay open.

Jeff said he had wanted to meet with folks before writing the letter of support to superintendents, principals and the Agency of Education, offering materials and suggesting a day of education.

Carol Irons stated teachers need the appropriate materials to educate with, not the stereotypical ones that are typically used. Next steps: VCNA need to discuss and decide what resources should be included

- 4. VLS Symposium - Morrill Land Grant Act** - postponed until June meeting, as Hillary Hoffmann was not present

Rich Holschu stated they have secured presenters for September.

- 5. Office of Racial Equity - Shalini Suryanarayana**

Started working with Xusana Davis in the Office of Racial Equality. They are putting together a selection committee panel for selective equity grants. Invitation for nominees from the tribes to the committee.

Carol Irons made motion to adjourn. Carol M seconded. Vote to adjourn. Adjourned at 4 pm

Next meeting, June 15th at Beverly Little Thunder's in Huntington