



Approved October 12, 2022

VCNAA MEETING MINUTES

VERMONT  
COMMISSION  
ON  
NATIVE  
AMERICAN  
AFFAIRS

September 14, 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](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; Patrick Lamphere; Beverly Little-Thunder; Hillary Hoffman, Jon Bosley; Deb Reger

**Absent:** none

**Guests:** Jess Robinson (VDHP); Chief Shirly Hook (Koasek); Elodie Reed (VPR); Ken Picard (Seven Days); Kiana Burks (WCAX); Abe Goodrich (WCAX); Shalini Suryanarayana, (Vermont Office of Racial Equity); Aaron Marcus (ANR); Erica Rose; Paul Cillo (Public Assets Institute); Eric Hoffman (VHFA); Erica Hemple (UVM); Charlotte Cadow (UVM); Emily O’Hara (VT Dept. of Public Safety); Joanne Crawford (Missisquoi); Rosemary White Shield (CSG Justice Center)

Meeting called to order at 1:04 pm.

The Commissioners and guests introduced themselves.

**1. Overview of Commissioner Responsibilities**

The overview of Commissioner responsibilities was tabled until October because of a scheduling conflict.

**2. Changes to the Agenda**

There were no changes to the agenda

**3. Approval of the June Meeting Minutes**

Jeff Benay moved to approve the June meeting minutes without alteration. Doug Bent seconded the motion. All other commissioners voted in the affirmative.

**4. Election of Officers**

After some preliminary discussion, Doug Bent nominated Rich Holschuh for chair. Jeff Benay stated that the position of chair has become time and labor intensive in recent years. He asked Rich if he was willing and able to take on that level of work. Rich Holschuh stated that he was both able and willing. Jeff Benay then seconded the nomination. Beverly Little Thunder stated that in previous years, the Commission has followed guidelines wherein the chair would be a person of indigenous descent. She then stated that Rich Holschuh had previously indicated that he did not have indigenous ancestry. Rich Holschuh stated that in the forum to which Beverly Little-Thunder was referring, he stated that he did not have ancestry within three generations, but that he did have Native ancestry. He then formerly affirmed it in front of the Commission. A vote was then taken: Jeff Benay, Melody Walker Mackin, Doug Bent, Patrick Lamphere, and Hilary Hoffman voted in the affirmative. Rich Holschuh was named chair.

Melody Walker Mackin nominated Doug Bent for chair. Jeff Benay seconded the motion. A vote was taken: Jeff Benay, Deb Reger, Patrick Lamphere, Melody Walker Mackin, Hillary Hoffman, and Rich Holschuh voted in the affirmative. Doug Bent was named vice-chair.

Beverly Little-Thunder nominated Melody for secretary. Doug Bent seconded the motion. A vote was taken: Jeff Benay, Deb Reger, Patrick Lamphere, Doug Bent, Beverly Little-Thunder, Hillary Hoffman, and Rich Holschuh voted in the affirmative. Melody Walker Mackin was named secretary.

## **5. Consensus Voting Procedures**

After discussion of the notion of consensus voting as it pertains to the Commission, Beverly Little-Thunder made a motion to continue to use the consensus model where appropriate, but that there should be time constraints. Rich seconded the motion. All voted in the affirmative.

## **6. Updated Contact/Mailing Lists**

Jess Robinson stated that updated contact and mailing lists are completed and Cynthia Davis will be contacting each of the Commissioners to verify their preferred public contact method.

## **7. Policies and Procedures**

Jeff Benay briefly noted that in his interpretation, policies are codified rules that require by-laws or statutory language, while procedures are simply informal rules the Commission may periodically adopt, abandon or amend.

## **8. Meeting Schedule**

After some discussion about alternative times and locations for the monthly VCNA meeting, it was determined that the schedule, time, and location will remain the same for the time-being.

## **OLD BUSINESS**

## **1. Update on post-April 29th UVM symposium and Commission's response by letter**

Rich Holschuh stated that he had circulated a draft letter to the commissions two-days before the meeting. Copies of the letter were also on-hand at the meeting. Rich asked if commissioners had read it, and if so, he was interested in their thoughts on its content. Beverly Little-Thunder stated that she liked the content of the letter because it was stern but not personally accusatory. Deb Reger stated that while she liked the letter, she suggested that it should also suggest future actions, rather than dwell solely on past grievances.

Jeff Benay agreed, and noted that a parallel conference of some kind was widely discussed among the Abenaki and at past commission meetings and should be suggested to UVM. Beverly Little-Thunder agreed. Rich then asked for consensus to send the letter to UVM with the addition Deb suggested. All agreed except for Hillary Hoffman, who abstained because she had not yet read the letter.

## **2. VCNAA Seventh Generation Foundation Collaboration Update**

Jeff Benay stated that the Seventh Generation Foundation has devoted \$50,000 as a grant to support the creation of, and materials for, an Abenaki curriculum for K-12 schools in 2023. Jeff Benay suggested that the commission form a sub-committee for this effort. After discussion, it was agreed that Beverly Little-Thunder, Melody Walker Mackin, Vera Sheehan, and Deb Reger would serve on the sub-committee. Jeff Benay stated that districts would need to opt-in. He envisioned sending a letter from the VCNAA and Seventh Generation Foundation announcing the program and instructing the districts that they would need to opt-in to receive the materials.

## **NEW BUSINESS**

### **1. Appointment for Land Access and Opportunity Board**

Beverly Little-Thunder summarized the mission of the board and offered to serve. Rich Holschuh asked for more information about the board role, and all agreed to table the matter until the October meeting so that they could consider the position.

### **2. Appointment for Health Equity Advisory Commission Board**

After some discussion, VCNAA commissioners realized that each State-recognized tribe already had a representative on the Health Equity Advisory Commission board. They decided that an additional VCNAA board seat would not be needed.

### **3. Potential/ongoing legislative priorities for 2023 session; report on the previous session's ad hoc Native Caucus and going forward**

Rich Holschuh summarized the composition and work of the ad hoc Native Caucus, which consisted of several legislators and members of various Native communities. The caucus met weekly during the legislative session to discuss legislative priorities and to try to come to a united consensus on initiatives and strategies. He found that it was an effective method of putting forth a united front on legislative priorities. Rich Holschuh then stated that the VCNAA,

tribes, and stakeholders should consider coming to together to discuss proposed legislation for the new term, and that all commissioners are invited to join the ad hoc committee.

After some discussion, Rich Holschuh also suggested that the VCNAA should request a meeting with the Governor and certain legislators to discuss the Commission's mission and priorities. The meeting should also include interested tribal leadership. All the commissioners agreed and Beverly Little-Thunder asked if Rich would be willing to spearhead the request for a meeting. Rich agreed.

#### **4. Report on the VT Law School Morrill Land Grant Act Conference of 9/10/22**

Rich Holschuh summarized the history of the land grant college system and its impacts on Native communities whose land was sold as part of the act. He then summarized the Land Grant Conference, which was co-sponsored by the Vermont Law School and Friends of the Morrill Homestead. Hillary Hoffman added that it was a very good and informative event, but she wished more of the Native community had attended. Rich Holschuh stated that the Friends of the Morrill Homestead are interested in learning more about, and recognizing, the complex legacy of Justin Morrill in future educational and interpretive materials at the site.

#### **5. First generation home-buyers - Eric Hoffman**

Eric Hoffman of the Vermont Housing Finance Agency gave a short presentation to the commission about special finance opportunities available to the BIPOC community as part of recently passed legislation.

#### **6. Discussion of proposal for PLACE program - Erica Hample, UVM**

Erica Hample, UVM graduate student, gave a short presentation about Montpelier's PLACE program and invited the commission and the Native people they represent to attend any of the events hosted by the program.

#### **7. Black Ash inventory project - Charlotte Cadow, UVM**

Charlotte Cadow gave a presentation about her and colleagues' work to inventory black ash stands and individual trees in Vermont. She asked for Native input in the program's inventory and conservation methods.

#### **8. Vermont domestic violence response systems - Emily O'Hara, Director of Domestic Violence Response Systems**

Emily O'Hara, VT Director of Domestic Violence Response Systems, gave a presentation on Domestic Violence responses and the resources available to the Native community.

#### **9. Commission Legislator of the Year Award (postponed from May meeting)**

The Commissioners agreed to settle on a nominee at the October meeting.

#### **10. State of Vermont Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA) Position and Discussion**

Jeff Benay stated that the Vermont Department of Children and Families has historically not had enough foster placements. Given that shortage, Jeff stated that Missisquoi Abenaki worked to generate a list of responsible Native placements, which DCF would then call upon when a Native child needed a placement. He noted that it was a successful collaborative effort. Jeff recently learned that the legislature authorized the hiring of an ICWA coordinator for DCF, which he was glad about, but that despite the history he just described, no Native people have apparently been contacted about the position. Moreover, candidates were now being interviewed. Jeff Benay was seeking additional clarification about the scope of the position and how this person will liaise with the Native community.

## **11. Announcements**

- Doug Bent, Shirly Hook, and Amy Therrien will be given an animal track demonstration on September 24 at the Marsh-Billings Rockefeller National Park in Woodstock.
- Jeff Benay stated that there will be a cultural competency workshop at Missisquoi on September 24.
- Jon Bosley stated that the Nuhegan will be hosting an event at Mayo Field for Indigenous Peoples' Day
- Rich Holschuh stated that after a successful fundraising effort, the Elnu were able to purchase a parcel of land on the West River associated with petroglyphs and past Native burials.

## **12. Public Comment**

There were no public comments

The meeting was adjourned at 4:20 PM.