



VERMONT  
COMMISSION  
ON  
NATIVE  
AMERICAN  
AFFAIRS

VCNAA MEETING MINUTES

DRAFT UNTIL APPROVED

March 8, 2023

1:00 P.M. – 3:30 P.M.

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



vcnaa.vermont.gov

COMMISSION  
Richard Holschuh, Chair  
Douglas Bent, Vice Chair  
Melody Walker Mackin, Secretary  
Jeffrey Benay  
Hillary Hoffmann  
Patrick Lamphere  
Deborah Reger  
Open Seat  
Open Seat

**Members present:** Patrick Lamphere, online; Deb Reger, online; Doug Bent, Vice-Chair, online; Rich Holschuh, Chair in person; Jeff Benay, in person; Melody Mackin, Secretary, online

**Absent:** Hillary Hoffman

**Guests: (Online)** Melissa Heitkamp - UVM Social Work; Madeleine Gosselin Wright - Nulhegan citizen; Morgan Lamphere - Missisquoi citizen; Chief Shirly Hook - Koasek Abenaki; Lucy Drummond - Grad student, UVM; Kana Zink - VT Dept of Health; Christopher Roy - Anthropologist, Temple University; Kate Frederick - VT Law & Graduate School; Jane Barber – author; Videoconference du Conseil des Odanak; Florence Benedict (Odanak Council); Suzie Obomsawin (Asst General Manager, Odanak Council); Alain

Obomsawin (Odanak Council); Nina Smolyar - Grad student, UVM; Kristian Brevik - Rubenstein School, UVM; Aaron Marcus - VT Agency of Natural Resources

**(In-Person)** Dr. Fred Wiseman - Presenter, Missisquoi citizen; Chief Roger Longtoe - Elnu Abenaki; Chief Don Stevens - Nulhegan Abenaki; Dave Littlefield (VP cameraman); Richard Witting - Grad student, UVM; Elodie Reed (VP reporter); Jess Robinson - State Archaeologist, VDHP; Laura Trieschmann - SHPO, VDHP; Dan Coutu - Nulhegan citizen; Deanna Edwards, Nulhegan citizen; Jacques Watso (Odanak Council); Yves Landry (?) (Wôlinak); Daniel Nolette (General Manager, Odanak Council); Chief Rick Obomsawin (Odanak Abenaki); Mali Obomsawin (Odanak citizen); Lakotah Sanborn (Penobscot citizen); Nickie Sekera

Meeting called to order at 1:02 pm

1. **Introductions:**

The commission members and guests introduced themselves, online and in-person. Commissioner Deb Reger requested a motion to amend the agenda to limit introductory time at the beginning of the meeting and use a sign-in sheet. Chair Rich Holschuh said procedural business can be taken up under new business.

## 2. **Changes to the agenda**

- Reprised motion (to be added under New Business) by Deb Reger to utilize sign-in sheet in future and Doug Bent seconded. Vote was taken and consensus achieved. Motion to be considered under New Business.
- Chair moved Dr. Fred Wiseman present first as a guest of the commission to honor his time. Jeff seconded. No discussion. Vote was taken and consensus achieved.
- Guest Mali Obomsawin asked if former Commissioner Beverly Little-Thunder's resignation will be discussed. Per the previous meeting, Mali asked if Odanak could speak. Chair said discussion and comments would be considered later as per agenda.

## 3. **Approve February 2023 meeting minutes**

- Doug Bent - Thanked Jess Robinson for taking minutes. Observed Odanak used commission to push their agenda against the Abenaki of Vermont. Would like to see statement by Mr. Isaak Lachapelle-Gill removed from the minutes.
- Jess Robinson - Believes that commission can correct inaccuracies but if a request was made the comment may stand. Will seek clarification from ACCD Counsel Max Krieger.
- Jeff Benay - Would like to table this particular request.
- Deb Reger - Moved to amend the minutes to concur with Doug Bent suggestion. Commission can edit minutes up to a year later. Guests do not write the agenda and minutes, but are welcome to attend.
- Guest Jacques Watso - Meeting minutes should reflect what occurred at a meeting.
- Chair - Will seek council about amending minutes. Consensus vote to consult counsel. No other discussion.
- Chair suggested we now move Fred Wiseman presentation to the front of the meeting. Jeff seconded. No discussion. Vote: Consensus.

## 4. **Dr. Frederick Wiseman Presentation**

- American Abenaki museum - needs a new home since last November. Displayed artwork distinctive to this region in the collection. There are a few leads for property. Consent from tribes and most NGO's has been received. This initiative used to be a major initiative of the commission and could be again.
- Something of Value is being reviewed for publication.
- Steve MacComber of Kahnawake asked Fred to redo the Seven Sisters to include his work.
- Working on a book about recognition.

- New trainings are completed for many partners. Fred has created 14 semester-long courses for American Abenaki Education.
- Workshops - Created 8, 1 day workshops on seeds. Created about 60 hours of video for the community. Abenaki year curriculum 80% done.
- His work is completely decolonized - only documented material from the American Abenaki experience.
- Abenaki year curriculum will be finished within the next 8-10 months.
- Abenaki wellness disparity research is almost complete featuring intergenerational trauma, trauma responses, and ethnic legitimacy from Howard Dean's War until today.
- Working on a booklet for designing for wellness.
- Assisting medicine person of another nation to bring back Seven Nations and overall Great Council Fire. Translated book on Seven Fires with the help of others and is providing illustrations for Jean Pierre's book. Kahnawake's chief is consulting on Seven Fires History and Wampum protocols with Fred.
- Last Saturday a wampum maker asked to get back in touch with Fred and would like to bring back their wampum connection. Wabanaki Confederacy initiatives - resuming training for leaders and museums in Maine.
- Chair asked with whom Fred was doing the wellness trainings - Kana Zink and (Chief) Joanne Crawford at VT Dept of Health is sponsoring them.
- Deb Reger wanted to know when the exhibit is opening - Fred: moved out exhibits at Ethan Allen Homestead and integrated with rest of collection to accession and photograph. Will be opening another location.
- Fred: Theoretical siting - Along I89 between Richmond and Williamstown is the best location as it is central for everyone. Materials all have to be registered and set up for installation.
- Doug Bent - Thanked Fred for presentation
- Jeff Benay - Asked about testing trauma and mitigation strategies
- Fred: Series of ways this can be handled. Identity confusion and mourning for loss of culture is part of this. The underlying structure of "who they are" is attacked and how do you repair that? Solution is grounding in their local culture. Use material from recognition petitions that traces back to VT locations. Using heritage forensics to understand which items are specifically American Abenaki.
- Fred: open to questions from guests.
- Chief Rick O'bomsawin: They like to call them the Seven Churches. Also working with Kahnawake. No where has it been established that Abenaki people attended. Looking forward to further research. Hoping this time they can separate from Wabanaki Confederacy regarding the Seven Fires. Upon wellness concerns, asked about modern buildings. Wouldn't any building of today's standards be part of the colonizer's building?
- Fred: Thinking about Seven Nations - included all Cape Breton to shadows of Rockies. Included Wabanaki Confederacy. Capital at Kahnawake for Seven Nations. In terms of wellness organizations here don't have the money for a new building. Everything must be retrofit. Perhaps schoolhouse light fixtures as preferable over drop ceilings.

- Chief Rick: Suggest to look at traditional style rather than schoolhouse style.
- Fred: Longhouse at Kahnawake is the ideal but without cash it is hard.
- Mali O'Bomsawin: What are the Abenaki names associated with collection items?
- Fred: We have names and provenance with items. Items generally earlier than the items at Odanak Museum and look different.
- Mali: Wants a list of the names.
- Fred: Will get together everything in about 8 months; 15 people working on the items. Gave past materials to Odanak Abenakis Museum and Museum will receive the information learned from local sources.
- Mali: Wants to know who is writing American Abenaki Curriculum.
- Fred: Working with people in bands. Does not want to co-opt anything from Odanak or North of border so it is local tradition. Main element is what is being done today.
- Would love to help Odanak but does not feel welcome anymore. Used to go up often and in 2016 went up with seeds for planting. Not sure what happened to them. Wants to honor Odanak and separate items to make sure cultural appropriation is not occurring. Sees his job as establishing what is in VT.
- Chief Rick: Cannot discuss Abenaki history in the State of Vermont without Odanak. Culture, history, way of life in the language, and when it is changed it rewrites history. You cannot change history and we are having a hard time. Not here to say who is and who isn't Abenaki. Stated, "My culture and my language and way of life and history is important to the history. You cannot change it." Wants to know family and how people are related. Wants to know what Abenaki families we descend from so they can welcome the families. Native ancestry and blood are two different things. "You can only water down a glass of milk so much before you have water." This is still unsundered Abenaki territory. Governor has promised Odanak a meeting. Will continue to push him.
- Jeff: The years with Elie Joubert and Cecile Wawaonlet teaching language at Missisquoi - was that a good relationship?
- Chief Rick: Language should be shared. But it needs to be the proper language. Elie was a good man. Abenaki language has 7 dialects and then translation to English and French. Stated, "We are a resource, use us. We should have been asked and we have speakers."
- Jeff: Is it fair to ask when Homer St. Francis' name and memory was brought through the weeds, was that OK on April 29th at UVM?
- Chief Rick: Everyone is their own person. He remembers Homer and how they never got along. Many things were different at that time and things have changed.
- Chief Don Stevens: I have no hard feelings. We have our own history too. We are all kin. We always try to uplift. Some people in your tribe are not uplifting us. I will never deny your history and we can work together and be in a good way. We all have our stories and our people and culture. I don't need someone to deny my heritage because I will never do it to them. Do not step on others to bring people together. My hand is open and I hope we can work together.

- Chief Roger Sheehan: We are related but we are not one people. There are many Abenaki people that never made it to Odanak. They made it all over the world. Many people of different nations made it to the reserve. Not everyone went over the border.
- Chief Rick: How did people not maintain contact?
- Chief Roger: We have been in contact. Don't use the colonizer's way of doing things.
- Chief Rick: Wants to find the link of how we are related
- Chief Don: We have community and we have travelled together.
- Chief Rick: Blood versus ancestry versus recognition is all different. Recognition is for loans, grants, and programs. Recognition of your family and your heart and your blood is who you are.
- Fred: Wrapping it up, I have no interest in people. Our collective legacy are the materials.
- Mali: Wants collective discussion.
- Fred: Agrees.
- Jacques Watso: We don't have to go through your process to see if it is good or not valid.
- Chief Don: You don't have to tear something down to lift something up. If you want a reasonable conversation we will have one. This is not the place.
- Chief Rick: Made a formal invitation from the Odanak Council to meet with state tribal leadership.

### **Old Business:**

#### **1. State House Native Awareness, Card Room confirmation 3/12/2024**

- Chair explained the use of the Card Room in State House requires a year advanced scheduling and we applied for that. The Commission has been granted March 12, 2024.

#### **2. Native Legislative Caucus 2023 discussions, bills, testimony**

- Chair explained there is a working group of legislators, Commissioners, and leadership to discuss items of current concern, items that have already passed, and monitoring other items of legislation. Early flood of potential bills in the House and some stick, many don't. Looking for amendment for Tobacco 21 bill. Raising smoking age to 21 passed 2 years ago but no exception made for Native ceremonial uses; possible amendment was withdrawn in deference to promised enforcement discretion. Selective enforcement does not "cut it" as it the law is effectively on the books. Expected to move successfully through committee at some point.
- Chief Rick: Expert on tobacco. Tobacco for ceremonial use is not meant for use in cigarettes. Really need to watch how you word things. Offered help with that legislation.
- No further discussion.

#### **3. Status of scheduling meeting with Governor Scott**

- Chair: Meeting with Gov. Phil Scott happening after this current meeting.

4. **Act 182 Land Access and Opportunity Board Report**

- Chair: Land Access and Opportunity Board still in early stages and intended to expand access to land for anyone that has been marginalized. Broad mandate and work is ongoing. Jon Bosley has stepped down from seat. For anyone that wants to attend or serve, let Rich know.
- No further discussion

5. **Act 142 Racial Justice Statistics Advisory Council**

- Chair: Stacey Gould of Missisquoi is representing for the Commission. No report yet.

6. **Act 154 Environmental Justice Advisory Council**

- Chair Holschuh is serving as the representative from the Commission. They will have their first organizational meeting this Friday, 3/10. Kate from VT Law School answered Dan Coutu's question about what environmental justice means. She replied it is the intersection between civil rights and environmental law.

7. **Act 174 VT State Park Abenaki Signage additions**

- Chair Holschuh explained the VT State Park initiative to add Abenaki place references is just getting out of the gate, with the first example recently in place. Rich wrote to Chief Rick and Daniel Nolette at Odanak for ongoing input. They want to work together on that. Chief Rick wants to make sure the language is preserved and spoken correctly.

8. **Act 128 Truth & Reconciliation Commission**

- Chair explained there wasn't a whole lot of information yet, still in formative stages.

9. **Act 152 School Athletic Mascots**

- Chair explained that this act addresses use of inappropriate mascots in the educational system. It has been getting a lot of press lately to put it mildly. It has taken on a life of its own and seems to have drifted from original intent.
- Jeff Benay - Issue is that they didn't contact local communities. This will now go back to the local school board, although this was already an informed decision. The Board has met with local Abenaki community citizens for years.
- Chief Roger - People are upset about the Leland & Gray Rebels in Townshend near Jamaica and people do not know their own history. The mascot refers to the American Revolution, not the Civil War. Further, tribes worked with the school in Missisquoi and they did their due diligence.
- Jeff - Animals are highly suggestive and many perspectives are at play and they should not get swept up in this effort. This tendency will reduce these discussions to political

opinions rather than actual harm because (in the case of Missisquoi) it has real meanings for Native people.

#### 10. **Seventh Generation Curriculum Grant Committee**

- Jeff explained the curriculum research. Getting together with field readers with the opportunity to include as many stakeholders as possible. Time consuming process but it will be important to take the time to do it right and achieve community support. Pleased with where it is at.
- No further discussion.

#### **New Business:**

1. Presentation by Dr. Frederick Wiseman occurred at the beginning of the meeting

#### 2. **Introduction process motion from earlier taken up, discussed, and public comment**

- Chair: We can take up earlier motion (Doug moved, Deb seconded) to amend introduction process from spoken to sign in sheet as was previous policy, with extra consideration for online participants.
- Jess Robinson: A spreadsheet of online attendees can be generated from Chat too.
- Deb Reger: A sign up sheet is easier and it will limit grandstanding of attendees.
- Mali O'Bomsawin: Would like to discuss resignation of Beverly Little-Thunder. Wants to know if the resignation goes into the minutes of the Commission.
- Chair: Resignation was only made to public media, not received officially. DHP has asked them to follow up with official notice. Resignation needs to go to DHP and Governor's office. Requests attention return to motion on floor. Shall we return to a sign-in sheet for attendees?
- Deb: Minutes are not a newspaper. It is a record of the public meeting but not required to repeat word for word everything said at a meeting. People can share public opinions but the primary purpose of the meeting is for Commission actions. We are charged to represent Vermont Native communities in relations with the State rather than individual opinions. Jeff Benay: We are representing with the State and Jess Robinson has done a good job with the minutes previously. There is no editorializing needed or included.
- Motion voted upon - carried by consensus

Jeff: Motion to adjourn. Doug second.

Adjourned