

VERMONT
COMMISSION
ON
NATIVE
AMERICAN
AFFAIRS



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



VCNAA MEETING MINUTES

Approved at February 9, 2022 Meeting

January 12, 2022

1:00PM-4:00PM

One National Life Drive

Dewey Building, Conference Room 206

Montpelier, VT

and GoTo Virtual Meeting

Members present: Carol McGranaghan, Chair; Carol Irons, Vice-Chair; Hillary Hoffmann, Secretary; Doug Bent; Lucy Neel; Patrick Lamphere; Jeff Benay

Absent: Beverly Little-Thunder, Hillary Hoffman

Guests: Jess Robinson, Vermont State Archaeologist; Jesse Bruchac; Jon Bosley; Rep. Brian Cina (Chittenden 6-4); Aaron Marcus (VT Fish & Wildlife)

1. Commission members and guests introduced themselves.
2. No changes to the agenda
3. Approval of November 2021 meeting minutes: Lucy Neel made the motion to approve the November meeting minutes without alteration. Carol Irons seconded the motion. All commissioners voted in the affirmative.

4. Housekeeping

Because of the new year, Jess took the opportunity to remind the commission about public record and voting procedures while participating in virtual/hybrid meetings. Carol McGranaghan then read the three guiding principles informally adopted by the commission the previous year and asked the commissioners if they still found them relevant or if they would like to see modifications. The commissioners all agreed that the principles were still relevant and would continue to follow them without alteration.

Jeff Benay then asked the commissioners why they would have chosen to be on the commission. Each commissioner took a turn to speak and listed reasons why they felt it was important to serve.

5. Election of Officers:

After some preliminary discussion, Jeff Benay nominated Carol McGranaghan to be president for 2022. Doug Bent seconded the motion. There were no other nominations. All voted in the affirmative.

Jeff Benay nominated Carol Irons as vice-chair. Carol McGranaghan seconded the motion. There were no other nominations. All voted in the affirmative.

The Commissioners agreed to postpone election of a secretary until Hillary Hoffman could attend the meeting.

OLD BUSINESS

1. Truth and Reconciliation (Accountability)

Discussion postponed until later in the meeting.

2. List of Resources for Schools to use for Abenaki Curriculum

Carol McGranaghan asked the commissioners for advice and resources to recommend for schools to use to develop and bolster the Abenaki curriculum. There was a discussion about resources that would be appropriate and current. Jeff Benay then stated that with recovery monies available for education, there is potential to have funding through the Department of Education or elsewhere to support the development of an Abenaki curriculum.

Carol McGranaghan agreed but stated that the current task should be limited to developing as comprehensive a list as possible as a deliverable for the next meeting. While no or extremely limited cost should ultimately be the goal of any Statewide curriculum, the commissioners agreed that in the interim, all Abenaki-based curricula or programs should be placed on the resources list.

3. Funding for the VCNAA

The commissioners discussed a pending legislative proposal that would provide some funding to the commission for projects that the commission developed or sponsored. Carol McGranaghan was thankful for Rep. Tom Stevens' advocacy of this initiative but did not know the likelihood that it would pass.

Jeff Benay asked about the potential within this legislation or elsewhere for hiring a paid director or similar position that would work on behalf of the Native community, the Abenaki, and the VCNAA. Jeff Benay mentioned that the Vermont Commission on Woman is a good model that could be directly applied to the VCNAA. Jeff Benay also mentioned that there was other introduced legislation that would do precisely what he suggested, but apparently without input from the VCNAA. After some discussion, Jeff Benay made a motion authorizing Carol McGranaghan to reach out to Rep. Stevens to understand what the introduced legislation entails and if anyone from the public asked the legislator for its introduction. Doug Bent seconded the motion. All other commissioners voted in the affirmative.

4. Funding for Sacred Sites

The commissioners discussed a pending legislative proposal that would provide tax-exempt status to certain sites sacred to the Abenaki if they are on land held by the Abenaki. Carol Irons raised concerns with the legislation. While she acknowledged the good intent, she stated that it has the potential to generate a lot of controversy and negative attentions. She stated that if the legislation moves forward, it would be incumbent upon the VCNAA and tribes to make sure the language is precise and that the list of potential properties be very limited in number and scope. Patrick Lamphere stated that publicly disclosing these locations would also potentially make them susceptible to vandalism or desecration. The commissioners then discussed potential alternatives to tax-exempt status, such as easements or land held in trust.

5. Ban on Ethic Mascots

The commissioners discussed a pending legislative proposal that would prohibit the use or adoption of any ethic mascot or the symbology thereof. The commissioners discussed the recent reversal of the Rutland school board's decision and the reinstatement of the "Raiders" name. Carol McGranaghan stated that it appears that leaving it to school boards is not working and apparently not binding. All the commissioners expressed their hope that the legislation would pass.

6. Tax Exempt Land for Abenaki -Draft Letter of Support for VCNAA and Chiefs

Carol McGranaghan stated that she was requesting that she draft a letter of support for this legislation. Carol Irons stated that she has concerns about this proposed legislation as well, both because of the potential negative perception it might engender and because it a just circumstance the State would not be assessing the Abenaki for land that was once theirs. Carol McGranaghan stated that the Abenaki are not sovereign and are bound by all the laws and regulations of the State.

New Business

1 .Rep. Brian Cina and Jesse Bruchac attended the meeting to discuss proposed legislation Brian Cina introduced that would promote and provide funds for Abenaki language learning. Brian Cina explained that during the pandemic he realized that online Abenaki language classes built a growing community of learners largely due to the ease of the learning experience. From there, Brian Cina talked with Jesse Bruchac and thought with increased funds, it would be a good opportunity to sponsor Abenaki language curriculum.

The proposed legislation would sponsor language immersion program scholarships at the Middlebury language school and eventually broader classes. Jesse Bruchac stated that there is a need for language teachers to perpetuate and grow fluency and use of the language among the Abenaki and with friends and allies.

Jeff Benay asked about the lack of VCNAA involvement with the bill creation process, but he was nevertheless thankful for a very comprehensive bill.

Jeff B mentioned that when Jesse was originally taught, Mrs. Ouillette was brought from Odenak to facilitate a learning effort by Jeff Benay for the Missisquoi people to learn the language. He also stated that hat this effort was fully endorsed by the instructor and the Odenak community at large.

Carol McGranaghan asked Brian Cina and Jesse Bruchac what they were requesting from the commission? They stated that they would appreciate a letter of support, preferably with signatures from all of the chiefs as well, although both understood that that was potentially asking a lot. Carol McGranaghan asked the commission if they endorsed the creation of the letter and its circulation for signature. All the commissioners agreed.

2. Race-Shifting Discussion

Due to a lack of time to adequately address the subject, this topic was tabled until the next meeting.

3. Truth and Reconciliation (accountability)

Due to a lack of time to adequately address the subject, this topic was tabled until the next meeting.

4. Announcements

No announcements

5. Public Comment

No public comments

6. Adjournment

Carol McGranaghan made a motion to adjourn the meeting at 4:05 PM