

VERMONT
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AFFAIRS



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Lucy Neel
Douglas Bent
Jeffrey Benay



VCNAA May 12th, 2021
Meeting Minutes

Members Present: Carol McGranaghan (Chair), Carol Irons (Vice Chair), Jeff Benay, Doug Bent, Lucy Neel, Jennifer Morton, Hillary Hoffmann (Secretary), Beverly Little Thunder.

Members Absent: Andrea Brett

Guests: Chief Shirly Hook (Koasek), Co-Chief Raven (Colin) Wood (Koasek), Sagamo Roger Longtoe Sheehan (Elnu), Chief Richard Menard (Missisquoi), Pam Alexander, Linda Longtoe Sheehan, Dan Coutu (Nulhegan Tribal Council) Aaron Marcus (ANR), Rich Holschuh

The meeting was brought to order by Carol McGranaghan at 1:00 pm. Carol Irons led the participants in pipe ceremony.

1. Changes to Agenda

There were no changes to the agenda.

2. Approve Minutes

Lucy Neel noted that the cultural center is in Holland, Vermont, not Groton, Vermont. Jeff Benay noted that Item 11 should be amended to state that UVM is offering \$150,000, not \$10,000.

Carol Irons made a motion to approve the April 2021 meeting minutes with the changes noted. Beverly Little Thunder seconded the motion. All other commissioners voted in the affirmative.

OLD BUSINESS

1. Housekeeping

Carol McGranaghan had sent a draft of the thank you letter to Representative Tom Stevens for his leadership on the eugenics apology resolution. She requested the Commission present him with a plaque and the letter in person at a future meeting. She would like to have the letter read into the record and personally hand him both at that time. Carol Irons supported giving Rep. Stevens the letter at the same time as the plaque. Motion made and passed.

Carol McGranaghan asked Jeff Benay if he would like to draft something to engrave on the plaque. Jeff will draft a statement and circulate it by email for commissioners to comment and edit. It was noted that an in-person presentation would not be possible until July since State buildings are closed until then given COVID restrictions. Beverly offered to hold it at her place in Huntington for the gifting of the letter and plaque. All voted in favor of the location and the recognition awards handed out at the June meeting. Carol McGranaghan will send an invitation to Rep. Stevens on behalf of the Commission.

2. Vermont Law School class

Hillary Hoffmann will be teaching a class called Truth and Reconciliation in June at the law school. She invited those interested to contact her if they would like to contribute to the development of the class or to speak regarding the Abenaki experience and the need for Truth and Reconciliation in Vermont. Hillary clarified that the class is not designed to overlap or mirror the Commission's work on Truth and Reconciliation.

There was concern voiced about whether the Truth and Recognition process should be discussed before the Commission has had a chance to define it and that it should stay within the Abenaki community. Carol McGranaghan stated it is important for students to learn about Truth and Reconciliation in Vermont from Abenaki people. The students would not be making any decisions about what Truth and Reconciliation is for Vermont Abenaki - that would be the decision of Abenaki people. Carol Irons noted that it is important for students to understand Vermont is behind in the Truth and Reconciliation process, but is also important to have this discussion with the legislature, which may not reflect Abenaki values or priorities. She mentioned that the broader community should be educated about the Abenaki experience.

Jeff stated that Truth and Reconciliation often incorporates a discussion of very specific histories and experiences. He talked about the racism that existed, and how it affected Missisquoi. The facts should be established and agreed upon amongst the group present. Carol McGranaghan stated Abenaki should present to Hillary's class and explain the Abenaki experience in Vermont, including how their families and communities were historically impacted by state. It is important for students to understand that genocide and other state actions do not just happen in other countries, but in Vermont also. Further discussion about the process and broader effort of Truth and Reconciliation. Beverly noted that she has spoken to many groups of students about her experiences in the past. The feedback she has gotten is how valuable it is for the students to hear firsthand from indigenous people about their life experiences to inspire them to make change. She noted this might be important for students in understanding the substance and process of Truth and Reconciliation, even if it is still evolving.

3. Truth and Reconciliation

Carol McGranaghan reported that the Commission agreed on the different sub-committees to work on the various areas in the minutes noted in the April 14th meeting. Carol Irons said the goal of the smaller groups is to work on something to present for comment to the Chiefs and the tribes in each of the areas identified. She asked for input from the Chiefs on the existing plans and on what they would like to see as far as Truth and Reconciliation. The legislative process was to finalize the apology resolution first and then begin to discuss how to make it right, including through Truth and Reconciliation. It is important for Abenaki people to discuss what Truth and Reconciliation means to them since they are the original Vermont inhabitants and everything was taken from them, including land, culture, and connections to the ancestors. Carol McGranaghan asked whether the Chiefs would like to hear the ideas from the Commission or whether they would like to offer ideas. first. The Chiefs indicated they would like to hear from the Commission first.

Carol McGranaghan described the subcommittees. She described the committee on health issues and stated that Truth and Reconciliation cannot happen without a cultural center or a place where Abenaki people and other indigenous people can go to share information about health, where health services could be provided (both traditional and Western). Andrea Brett had mentioned that it was important for the cultural center to provide substance abuse counseling. A cultural center could provide resources about Abenaki people for those seeking information. It could provide a means of easing historical trauma, specifically the institutionalization and the sterilization Abenaki people went through. The resources provided would help heal the trauma. Any services should be provided without charge. Such a place would provide services for those who currently do not seek help for health conditions or related circumstances. Some concerns are: who would be eligible for services at such a center? Would all Abenaki or other indigenous persons be eligible or only those who belong to a recognized Abenaki tribe. Would there be a requirement to show proof of identification?

Carol Irons spoke regarding the land subcommittee and identified land repatriation (untaxed) as one goal of the Truth and Reconciliation process. She noted the overlap between the cultural center idea from the health committee and the land committee's goals.

Chief Roger Longtoe noted that each tribe would likely want a local cultural center and land granted without taxation rather than traveling many hours to a centralized location. Jeff Benay suggested that there could be satellite centers with a central location and individual satellite centers for each tribe. Carol McGranaghan agreed and suggested periodic meetings with all tribes at the central location. Beverly commented that there is no limit to the sky and therefore so there should not be a limit to what the Abenaki people request from the state and that colonization was limiting the people's view of what they

might be able to ask for. Beverly noted that the state took everything from the Abenaki people without asking how much they could take, - that the time is right to speak their truth and ask for what they need for reconciliation. She commented that it might take years for everything to be achieved, but that people should be brave.

Chief Roger said the Abenaki can always ask for what they want. Jeff Benay noted that there has been nothing done substantively where Vermonters have been required to go into their wallets and take out anything for the Abenaki. He discussed the lengthy history of refusal on the part of the greater, non-indigenous society to contribute or give up anything for Abenaki people, despite stated support for indigenous causes. Jeff mentioned that there is federal money for indigenous societies to implement their own health care mandates and other mandates. He also noted that it might be politically complicated for certain legislators to align with the Abenaki goals and mission, but that the Abenaki have something really good to work on right now - the time is right to begin the process. Jeff Benay mentioned that there will be opposition –from those who see Abenaki Truth and Reconciliation as entitlement but that it makes sense to coordinate a strategy for dealing with that opposition before going public with any plans. Chief Roger mentioned prices were increasing and that we might be headed into an economic depression. Given that the climate in favor of Abenaki reconciliation might change if people's priorities change due to economic hardship. Jeff Benay mentioned the financial hardships experienced by Missisquoi Abenaki which reflected the concerns Chief Roger Longtoe raised.

Dan Coutu expressed the need to educate the public and the legislature at the same time as pursuing Truth and Reconciliation. Education is the key. If people learn about Abenaki and what they have been through that sets the stage for some empathy and support so that when Abenaki people ask for things others are more willing to help. Carol McGranaghan reminded everyone that the eugenics apology was the result of years of research, testimony and drafting and noted strong support in the legislature for launching a process.

Jeff Benay recounted the history of the State recognition process when the circumstances were very different and there were no legislators who supported recognition. There was no staff who could help the legislators draft position papers. Fred Wiseman consulted with various Abenaki leaders and community members and helped develop Against the Darkness, a DVD series that captured the history of 7 generations of several Abenaki families in Vermont. Those DVDs were given to each legislator prior to the recognition vote and the ultimate vote was in favor of state recognition although it took 5-6 years. Jeff also reminded those in attendance that the land repatriation issue was not new and that the state had offered Abenaki people land in the past – in Alburgh – which was not land of any cultural significance to any of the tribes.

Carol McGranaghan emphasized the importance of Abenaki tribes and the Commission working together and stated today's conversation was just the beginning of a longer conversation and a longer process. She hopes everyone can continue to work together as had happened in the past with the hunting and fish resolution. She also noted that it was important to start working on a "wish list." Jennifer Morton stated that it was important to start somewhere because even if the wish list items aren't granted, future generations of the Commission or future generations of tribal members could keep asking for those same things until they were granted.

Doug Bent stated that land repatriation was important and identified tillable, arable land as a priority for the tribes. He suggested the state might be open to donating state land such as land within a national forest and emphasized that the land should be tax free. Doug noted that there is already a lot of state-owned land that is not taxed, so a conversion of that land to Abenaki land would not result in any loss of tax dollars to the State. Doug suggested a minimum parcel size of at least 100 acres to accommodate different educational and cultural needs.

Chief Roger stated that Elnu is working with private nonprofits to preserve sacred sites in and around Brattleboro and Bellows Falls that are important to the tribe. Tribes do not have the money to pay property taxes. Carol McGranaghan mentioned that the Commission worked with Representative Brian Cina last year on a bill aimed at protecting sacred sites and that effort was derailed by COVID. Carol Irons mentioned that burial grounds, pictographs, and other sacred ceremonial sites should be the highest priority locations to be protected, but she also clarified that not all Abenaki land is sacred simply because a ceremony was performed there. Work needs to be done which would identify which sites are truly sacred because they are culturally important as opposed to being a place where a ceremony took place. Carol Irons also mentioned that there are many people not citizens of a recognized tribe who would like to access sacred sites and participate in efforts to revitalize Abenaki traditions and culture., The central cultural center would be a place that welcomed all Abenaki people. No one tribe would own it. Chief Roger Longtoe re-emphasized that satellite centers would be important because not all tribes are the same and they aren't experiencing the same issues. They have their own cultures, their own governmental structure, and their own history and values. Beverly Little Thunder mentioned that in California, tribes don't really have reservations but operate somewhat like the satellite structure which the Commission and Chiefs had discussed. She noted in California as in Vermont, the tribes are very small and have different priorities, similar to the Abenaki tribes here. Beverly reminded everyone to look outside Vermont for patterns that might be useful. Lucy Neel agreed that there are other models Abenaki can use in Vermont and mentioned education as one example. Aaron Marcus mentioned that Vermont acquires land every year to protect wildlife habitat which might be another avenue to pursue.

Lucy Neel introduced the education subcommittee's work and turned the floor over to Jeff Benay. Jeff began with a statement that committee drafted which reads: "We intend to deal with the facts, thus distinguishing truth from lies. We will promote the belief that only by confronting the past may we be successful in the transition from conflict, resentments, and tension, to healing and peace. Ours will be an investigation of the patterns of injury over time, that have left the Abenaki in a precarious situation, where we implore the State of Vermont to support the process of truth-telling, whereby genuine tenets of equity and educational opportunity may be realized." Jeff noted Abenaki people first sought to bring Abenaki curriculum to the k-12 schools in the 1970s, but the misconception then was there were no Abenaki left in Vermont. Currently there is nothing in mandate about Abenaki people and their history being taught to kids in k-12 schools and is only taught in those schools who have money to buy special materials for teaching about Abenaki. A grassroots effort was made to introduce Abenaki curriculum materials and Missisquoi attempted to do this in the local school system with limited success. At that time proponents encountered racism and socioeconomic discrimination from the administration as well as the school employees which continue today. The racism and stereotypes about indigenous people in Vermont may present themselves again in the conversations about Truth and Reconciliation. He stated that the education committee would like to request that the state include mandatory curriculum materials on Abenaki people in K-12 schools. With respect to post-secondary education, the education subcommittee believes UVM owes a special duty to Abenaki students in light of the role that Henry Perkins played in the state-sponsored eugenics program of the early twentieth century. Lucy Neel added that she believes the State is open to listening to requests about Abenaki curriculum, unlike it had been in the past. Lucy mentioned K-12 teachers should be educated on how to teach Abenaki history. Perhaps workshops for teachers should be part of the proposal to the legislature. Jeff mentioned a standardized curriculum for Abenaki education for K-12 schools needs to be developed. Carol McGranaghan said that there should be input from all who currently teach and have developed curriculums to have input and agreement on the content. She noted the past efforts to bring Abenaki curriculum into the schools have been somewhat disconnected and not uniform, even if very effective. Jeff mentioned there is a course on conversational Abenaki that has been developed and will be offered at Missisquoi Union High School and it would be something kids all around Vermont would benefit from.

NEW BUSINESS

1. Announcements

None

2. Public Comment

None

Carol McGranaghan thanked the Chiefs and everyone for attending. She invited the Chiefs to attend the June VCNAA to continue the discussion on Truth and Reconciliation.

3. Executive Session

The Commission briefly entered an executive session at 4:02 pm. They exited the executive session at 4:06 pm.

The meeting was adjourned 4:07 PM.