

VERMONT
COMMISSION
ON
NATIVE
AMERICAN
AFFAIRS



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Carol Irons, Vice Chair
Hillary Hoffmann, Secretary
Andrea Brett
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Beverly Little-Thunder
Lucy Neel
Douglas Bent
Jeffrey Benay



VCNAA MEETING MINUTES

DRAFT UNTIL APPROVED

November 10, 2021

Vermont Archeology Heritage Center
60 Washington Street
Barre, Vermont
and GoTo Virtual Meeting

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

Absent: Beverly Little-Thunder; Jeff Benay

Guests: Jess Robinson, Vermont State Archaeologist; Cynthia Davis, Administrative Services Coordinator; Rep. Tiff Bluemle (Burlington); Rep. John Killacky (South Burlington); Joanne Crawford; Rebecca Roy (VT State Parks); Ollie Cultrara (VT Agency of Agriculture); Aaron Marcus (VT Fish & Wildlife); Patrick Lamphere; Andrea Brett; Matt Levin (VT Early Childhood Advocacy Alliance Executive Director); Jaden Hill

1. Commission members and guests introduced themselves. Cynthia Davis has been assigned to the position formerly held by Jenni Lavoie to support the administrative tasks of the commission in collaboration with Dr. Jess Robinson.

2. Max Krieger provided an update to the VCNAA about the Vermont open meeting laws and the special requirements for new commissioners, as well as updated requirements for hybrid meetings. For hybrid meetings, votes need to be taken by roll call process. Any questions related to opening meeting laws and special requirements for new commissioners can be directed to Max Krieger by email at Maxwell.krieger@vermont.gov. Dr. Robinson will be forwarding the supporting documentation and necessary forms from Mr. Krieger to the commission.

3. Changes to the agenda: Because Matt Levin had to leave by 3:10, Carol McGranaghan asked to move his agenda item up so he could present before he had to leave.

Under New Business: Carol McGranaghan asked to have a discussion regarding the current process for VCNAA appointments.

4. Approval of June 2021 meeting minutes: Because most of the Commissioners present had not read the minutes from June, Carol McGranaghan proposed postponing the vote on approving until the next meeting.

5. Housekeeping: Carol McGranaghan noted she would like to list the VCNAA accomplishments starting when she was first appointed in October 2016. She also noted she was elected Vice-Chair in 2017 and has served as Chair from 2018 to the present.

2017

- Carol Irons and Paul Fassler worked together on establishing an Abenaki Cultural Regeneration Camp
- The Proclamation for Indigenous Peoples' Day was ordered by Gov Scott

2018

- A week-long Abenaki Cultural Regeneration Camp was held for 7 Abenaki adults, most of whom have continued to teach Abenaki culture to others
- The Proclamation for Indigenous Peoples' Day was ordered by Gov Scott

2019

- The Abenaki recognition display was installed in the State House.
- Indigenous Peoples' Day was passed into law, replacing Columbus Day in Vermont
- Abenaki Heritage Week was declared by Gov Scott
- Carol McGranaghan and Carol Iron met with the Dept of Health and Liquor Control to address concerns regarding the
- Tobacco 21 law and to make them aware tobacco is sacred and used in a spiritual use by Indigenous people.

2020

- Carol Irons, Lucy Neel and Carol McGranaghan gave the opening devotional to the House, while Jesse and Joseph Bruchac gave the opening devotional to the Senate
- Free Fishing and Hunting Licenses for Abenaki were established. The VCNAA members gave testimony/witness; wrote letters of support for the House and Senate signed by VCNAA and all five Chiefs of the recognized tribes.
- Bill for Abenaki names to be added to State Parks passed. This prompted other entities to start the same process.
- Bills were introduced that would have made sacred sites tax free and outlined religious freedom for Indigenous people

2021

- The apology for the Eugenics Survey was passed by the House and Senate. Members provided testimony and participated in discussions
- Members participated in discussions regarding ethnic school mascots. Two were removed. Only one remains in Vermont

Carol McGranaghan stated she is proud of the momentum VCNAA has gained in making Abenaki and Indigenous Vermonters more visible and requested the Commissioners think about what projects they can work on in the up-coming year to keep that energy going.

OLD BUSINESS

1. Truth and Reconciliation Summer recap.

The VCNAA met with the International Center for Truth and Justice Representative Virginie Ladisch for a two-day workshop. Hillary Hoffmann discussed the ICTJ organization, mission, and training.

Carol McGranaghan gave a list of what the group representing Abenaki in Truth and Accountability need to achieve. This includes:

1. finding the truth from the Abenaki perspective
2. identify causes of why it happened
3. find the balance between symbolism and actions
4. find a political voice
5. create a roadmap for reform
6. anchor the process in continued funding (funding will be an issue).

This group will need to reach those who were directly affected. Descendants of those identified in the eugenics survey are still directly affected by the loss of the connection to culture and community. There needs to be better education about Abenaki in Vermont K-12 schools. It will be a time intensive project that is important to start. The VCNAA decided the title of this group should be the Abenaki Truth Gathering and Accountability Council.

Abenaki are different from other BIPOC groups – history is different, accountability is needed in different ways for each group. Abenaki have been affected for a much longer period, were dispossessed of their homeland and land possession, and suffered from varied forms of ethnocide including genocide, assimilation, cultural/language suppression.

VCNAA met with four of the five Chiefs of the recognized tribes in May. Having no land base was identified as a primary impediment to tribal sovereignty in Vermont. Without land, it is difficult to have a center where Elders can teach young people about their culture, teach language and traditional crafts, or provide traditional and modern health care. Both health care and education are also concerns. History about Abenaki needs to be included in Vermont school curriculums.

Carol Irons raised the issue regarding the history of Abenaki in Vermont being different from other BIPOC groups. Why are all groups considered “OTHER” lumped together in one bill? Different groups have different needs. This land (in Vermont) is Abenaki land. Education of Abenaki children is ad hoc, not organized, not funded, and private. Public schools are not required to provide education in K-12 schools about Abenaki history and culture. Education needs to be developmentally appropriate and age appropriate.

Hillary Hoffmann mentioned that education in Vermont seems focused on everything starting with European arrival and nothing about the original people is included.

Joanne Crawford discussed the Abenaki health care crisis including chronic disease, substance use/abuse, depression, and suicide, all of which are results of intergenerational trauma caused by colonization.

John Killacky requested more information about ICTJ.

Carol McGranaghan stated she had provided a notebook to Representative Tom Stevens that Virginie Ladisch of ICTJ had given the attendees at the workshop, so he would be more informed of their mission. Carol McGranaghan asked if the other Commissioners were alright with providing copies of the notebook to the Representatives John Killacky and Tiff Bluemle. They agreed to share, so Carol McGranaghan will follow up with the ICTJ and inquire if there are any concerns about sharing the contents with legislators.

Rep. Bluemle stated the legislative working group has assumed the different groups may seek different processes and results. She asked if there was value to Abenaki to participating in a larger group/commission that represents all different BIPOC communities. Carol McGranaghan said her understanding was the bill would be introduced to form the commission as one bill and then truth and reconciliation would proceed separately. Rep. Bluemle explained it would be wildly inappropriate for the legislature to determine or design the Truth and Reconciliation Commissions for the BIPOC groups. The BIPOC groups should be the ones to do so. Hillary Hoffmann stated that the scope of this bill is very large, and the potential downside is that the Truth and Reconciliation Commission may become overwhelmed as it commences. Rep. Bluemle clarified that the bill is to create a commission to address discrimination and racism. Legislature needs to know more about what the Abenaki community needs and wants from this process. Reconciliation might not be the right word for indigenous people in Vermont. VNCAA has identified several things that might grow out of a truth-seeking process.

Joanne Crawford said the tribes should decide who is on the commission that is being considered. Rep. Killacky asked how unaffiliated Abenaki will be represented. There is the fear is that this will just be a study, which will involve traumas for the victims of these human rights violations. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission would be liaison to legislature. Consultants/counselors would be the ones to gather the truth statements/testimony of the victims/descendants.

Carol McGranaghan said there is a fear that Abenaki “would be lumped together and lost” once again as their voice is not loud and often not heard. Carol Irons added that “Abenaki are wary of this process because of historical wrongs. Anytime an arm of the state chooses who should speak for Abenaki, it creates/exacerbates lateral violence and impacts of colonization. Colonization complicates and impacts Abenaki business all of the time. Abenaki have discomfort with bureaucratic process because it doesn’t tend to go well for indigenous people. How groups are composed to start with is incredibly important to Abenaki people.”

Rep. Killacky said this model will be different. Legislature does not want to have the Housing/Military Affairs committee determine membership on the commission. Rep. Tiff Bluemle said the legislature likes to define things, but that is not appropriate here. She then asked whether the State be involved. Legislative leadership feels that the state “has a lot of work to do.” Involvement leads to accountability. Bills’ sponsors believe strongly that the broader public

won't be brought along in learning about Vermonters who have been marginalized and discriminated against without some state involvement.

Rep. Killacky wants to share the draft bill with the Commission, social equity caucus, and other impacted groups.

Doug Bent stressed that communication is key. "It's great to have representatives from the legislature here at the Commission's meeting to provide information and receive information. It is important to continue a 'dialogue' in this way."

Rep. Killacky said this bill is a follow-on to the eugenics apology because the committee felt that an apology without action was a hollow apology. It does not negate the full impact of oppression; it is just a starting point for the larger conversation/process.

Both Representatives asked if there were bills the VCNAA would like to have drafted. They need to have these new bills introduced by December 1.

Carol McGranaghan thanked the Representatives for joining the meeting and participating in the Truth and Reconciliation discussion. She invited them to attend future meetings as well.

Carol McGranaghan gave a list for bills that she feels the VCNAA should have introduced this year:

- Ethnic School Mascots ban - Hillary Hoffmann and Carol McGranaghan will work on a draft to present
- State funding for VCNAA projects
- Abenaki tribal land ownership
 - Application process for VCNAA applicants
 - Land bill modification - Hillary Hoffmann and Carol McGranaghan will work on a draft to present
- Develop a system to give land to Abenaki tribes - sovereign so tax-free
- Sacred sites legislation - postpone for now. Carol Irons stated sacred sites need to be defined a little more clearly before going forward with this. Patrick Lamphere said the Abenaki tribes need to clarify what is meant by "sacred sites"
- Statewide Abenaki education/curriculum mandate
 - Carol Iron stated Anne Squire has done Abenaki curriculum design for K-12 and suggested contacting her for that.

Rep. Killacky asked the Commission to send a list of proposed bills to the legislature.

2. Abenaki Basket making project:

- Tabled as Jessica Rubin was not present

3. Burlington City Council Resolution:

- Andrea Brett reported on the Burlington resolution regarding the Abenaki Truth and Reconciliation in Chittenden County. The resolution has changed significantly since VCNAA met in June. Tribes are consulting with Burlington City Council about mechanisms for reconciliation. Free parking is no longer part of the reconciliation.

Carol Iron asked for clarification about the resolution. Andrea Brett explained that Burlington is trying to do the same thing as the state, but at a more local and focused level, focused on Abenaki specifically.

Andrea Brett has drafted a preamble to the Truth and Reconciliation and still needs input and feedback from the VCNAA members.

Carol McGranaghan asked if the Commissioners would consider appointing Andrea Brett to continue drafting the Truth and Reconciliation preamble.

- The five Commission members present consented: Carol McGranaghan, Carol Iron, Doug Bent, Hillary Hoffmann, and Lucy Neel).

4. School mascots legislation:

- Carol McGranaghan stated that the ethnic school mascots continue to be an issue, with some school board members receiving death threats. She feels legislation needs to be passed to take the situation out of local control and prevent the ongoing controversy. Two out of the three remaining towns have removed their ethnic mascots at this point.

New Business:

1. Health Equity Advisory Commission - Appointment of VCNAA representative.

- Carol McGranaghan said Xusana Davis had requested the Commission name a liaison to the Health Equity Advisory Commission. Cahir had proposed Lucy Neel for that position, but this item and discussion were postponed since Lucy Neel had left the meeting and there was no longer a quorum

2. VT Early Childhood Advocacy Alliance

- Matt Leven from the Vermont Early Childhood gave an overview of this organization. It is a lobbying organization attempting to right past wrongs. This coalition was put together to help and support those who work on statewide public policy affecting young children. Addressing issues on health, safety, food, economic security, education. They offer advocacy support to organizations seeking to have greater input on policy/processes, including Hunger Free Vermont and Let's Grow Kids. They also support the clients in advocating for their needs before the legislature using a formal process to review proposals to develop legislative agenda. Mini grant applications for each organization and proposals are due in September. Matt Leven has helped Koasek get funding for their projects.

3. Statewide legislation for Abenaki Curriculum

- Previously discussed.

4. Native American Rights Fund Land Repatriation Project (NARF)

- Hillary Hoffman explained what NARF does and the way it facilitated the land transfer that Andrea wrote to VCNAA about.

5. Abenaki Place Names

- Rebecca Roy said Carol McGranaghan provided a long list of Abenaki words that have been included in their brochures and signage. There are 55 state parks for which six Abenaki names have been provided so far. As parks signs are replaced, if Abenaki names are available, they are added along with the English names. It was recommended that Aaron Marcus might help with the project as he has been taking an Abenaki language course.

Aaron Marcus mentioned that Jesse Bruchac had visited the Agency of Natural Resources to give some context behind the Abenaki place name signs. The VCNAA thanked Rebecca Roy and Aaron Marcus for their alliance with the Commission and Abenaki Vermonters more broadly.

6. Announcements

- Carol Irons has written a brief history of Vermont from the Abenaki perspective and is having copies of printed. She will share it with the Commissioners as soon as the copies are available. She wrote it to help educate Abenaki and others on Abenaki history from the Abenaki perspective and feels it will help answer questions regarding this history.

7. Public Comment

- Jaden Hill expressed gratitude for the VCNAA's invitation to join the meeting.

8. Adjournment

- Carol McGranaghan made a motion to adjourn the meeting at 3:27/Carol Irons seconded. The meeting was adjourned.