

VERMONT  
COMMISSION  
ON  
NATIVE  
AMERICAN  
AFFAIRS



vcnaa.vermont.gov

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



VCNAA April 14<sup>th</sup>, 2021  
Meeting Minutes

**Members Present:** Carol McGranaghan (Chair), Carol Irons (Vice Chair), Jeff Benay, Doug Bent, Andrea Brett, Lucy Neel, Jennifer Morton

**Members Absent:** Hilary Hoffman (Secretary), Beverly Little Thunder

**Guests:** Jennifer Byrne, Paul Costello, Joanne Crawford, Caroline Gordon, Eric Hagen, Nick Kramer, Aaron Marcus, Jess Robinson (VDHP), Rebecca Roy

The meeting was brought to order by Carol McGranaghan at 1:05 pm virtually through the GoToMeeting platform. Following initial greetings, Jess Robinson briefly discussed the processes by which the meeting should be conducted in a virtual environment.

### 1. Changes to Agenda

Carol McGranaghan stated that Kate Pond will not be attending the meeting today. Her item will be removed from the agenda. Carol McGranaghan also stated that she agreed to accommodate Paul Costello and the Council on Rural Development

### 2. Recognition of Guests

The guests and commissioners introduced themselves and were welcomed.

### 3. Approve Minutes

Lucy Neel made a motion to accept the March 2021 meeting minutes without alteration. Jennifer Morton seconded the motion. All other commissions voted in the affirmative.

## OLD BUSINESS

### 1. Truth and Reconciliation – Subgroup Composition, further Discussion

Carol Irons first provided some background on Abenaki prophecies and history prior to and after European contact and the injustices perpetrated upon Indigenous groups into the modern era. She then stated that the situation for Indigenous groups in Vermont was at an inflection point. She stated that they had an historic opportunity for truth and

reconciliation that might not come around again. To that end, Carol Irons stated that instead of one dedicated sub-committee that would be limited to warned meetings, she suggested that the VCNAA organize a number of committees that should address different issues related to truth and reconciliation and that could meet more regularly between meetings.

After some discussion, it was decided that Doug Bent and Carol Irons would be on a land committee, Lucy Neel and Jeff Benay would be on an education committee, Andrea Brett and Hillary Hoffman would be on a legal committee, and Andrea Brett and Jennifer Morton would be on a community center committee. Jeff Benay stated that while he was interested in being on the education committee, he could not enter into an initiative until he had informed and received approval from the Missisquoi Tribal Council. He also stated that while he understood the desire for a community center, the Missisquoi had their own center that was a locus of activity for the Missisquoi community. Similarly, Lucy Neel stated that the Nulhegan have a community center in Groton that has recently approval to be Native-centered food shelf.

Finally, Andrea Brett stated that the tribal chiefs should be involved in the process from the start. She suggested that a meeting with the tribal chiefs might heal past grievances and help to form a unified platform on the truth and reconciliation issue. Carol McGranaghan suggested that the commission have an in-person meeting in May. Doug Bent offered the Koasek community garden as a location, Carol McGranaghan stated that she would confirm with the commission's council about the logistics of the meeting, but that the commission should plan to have the meeting there.

## **2. Name Changes to Other Places (Indian Brook and Negro Brook)**

Tabled until next meeting.

## **3. Governor's Institutes of Vermont**

Tabled until next meeting.

## **NEW BUSINESS**

### **1. Vermont Council on Rural Development**

Paul Costello and Nick Kramer from the Vermont Council on Rural Development (VCRD) came to the commission to inform them that VCRD is hosting a large summit in May on its future. Acknowledging that the Abenaki were the first people on the land, the VCRD is very interested in listening to and understanding their perspectives. Given that there was not a lot of time during the commission meeting for detailed comments, Nick Kramer stated that they could provide feedback online at: [www.futureofvermont.org](http://www.futureofvermont.org).

## **2. Eric Hagen**

At the request of Andrea Brett, the commission accommodated Eric Hagen from the Vermont Alliance for Half-Earth. He is writing a book about conservation stories and the mistakes revealed or lessons learned from them. He wanted to make sure that the Abenaki were invited to participate or provide commentary as traditional stewards of the land. He was also interested in placing a land acknowledgement at the beginning of the book. After some discussion, the commission agreed that Andrea's story, previously provided to Eric Hagen, should be published with commentary as long as Andrea is in agreement. More broadly, Carol McGranaghan and Carol Irons both stated that he will likely never get everyone in the Abenaki community to agree on any particular issue or initiative, but that he should proceed and be prepared for criticism. Given that a land acknowledgement discussion was forthcoming in the meeting, Carol McGranaghan suggested that he use the acknowledgement they will be discussing.

## **3. Truth and Reconciliation Class at Vermont Law School**

Tabled until next meeting.

## **4. Land Acknowledgement Statement**

In response to a large number of requests for land acknowledgement language, Carol McGranaghan drafted a land acknowledgement statement she wanted the commission to consider and comment on. It reads as follows:

We are gathered today at (insert place). We wish to acknowledge that we are on the unceded territory of the original inhabitants of N'Dkinna (en-dah-kee-nah), the Abenaki. These people of the Dawnland are the traditional land caretakers. Their relationship to the land calls us to learn to be better caretakers of the land ourselves. We pay our respects to their ancestors who were here for all time, their elders, and their relations, past, present and emerging. We honor with gratitude this land and all it gives us.

Everyone liked the statement and commented on its power and brevity. The commissioners agreed that the statement should be submitted to the tribes with a note indicating that this was the language that the VCNAA would provide when land acknowledgement language was requested from them going forward. Each tribe should feel free to use or disregard it as appropriate.

## **5. Thank You Letter to rep. Tom Stevens**

After some initial discussion, Carol Irons made a motion that the commission should draft a letter thanking Tom Stevens for his work on the eugenics apology resolution. Doug Bent seconded the motion. All voted in the affirmative. Carol Irons asked the commissioners to provide prompt edits or comments when it was sent to them.

## **6. Abenaki Sculpture**

Tabled until next meeting.

## **7. Recognition Plaques**

Jeff Benay stated that there are a number of people that do work benefitting the commission or the Vermont Abenaki and Indigenous people in general that deserve recognition. He remarked that at one point the previous iteration of the VCNAA awarded annual plaques to a select, deserving individual, and he suggested that the VCNAA revive the practice. Doug Bent thought that it was a great idea. Jeff Benay stated that there should be a process where commissioners offer up candidates to the chair. Afterward, there would be a vote on the best candidate. Carol McGranaghan made a motion to adopt a process for designating a recipient for an annual recognition plaque. Andrea Brett seconded the motion. All voted in the affirmative. The issue will be followed up in a subsequent meeting.

## **8. Prince Edward Island Truth and Reconciliation Commission**

Jeff Benay stated that he was approached by a representative of Prince Edward Island's Truth and Reconciliation process. The representative stated that the Island recently approved monetary reparations to Indigenous boarding school attendees depending upon the traumas they experienced there. This representative was interested in sponsoring a \$1,000 dollar scholarship for Abenaki high-school students that could be applied to the pursuit of an advanced degree, military, technical school, or community work. Carol Irons thought that it was a great idea. Jeff Benay stated that because everything related to high school graduation planning this year was still very fluid, the best idea might be to invite this representative to attend the next meeting so that they could discuss the possibility more thoroughly. All the commissioners agreed.

## **9. Payment for Ecosystem Services – Working Group Report**

Caroline Gordon, legislative coordinator of the payment for ecosystem services working group, stated that the group has a mandate to look at water quality and carbon sequestration. Having stated that, one of their concerns is that the group will look narrowly at these issues and potential remedies and not look holistically or consider the ideas of stakeholders such as the Abenaki. Therefore, Caroline Gordon and Jennifer Byrne stated that they would be happy to regularly report on the work of the group and deliver the commission's concerns or opinions back to the group. Carol McGranaghan stated that they would also be welcome at future meetings and that perhaps they should also talk with Native agriculturalists to get their expert opinions.

## **10. Bear Hunting and Trapping Bills in the Legislature**

Carol McGranaghan stated that she was approached by a person that requested that the commission endorse proposed legislation banning leg-hold traps and dogs when hunting bears. After some discussion, the consensus was that the commission should not get involved in this matter.

## **11. Announcements**

Jeff Benay stated that UVM is now offering a \$10,000 toward Native education and support.

Doug Bent stated that Amy Hook-Therrien was featured on the most recent cover of Image magazine for her work as an Abenaki artist.

## **12. Public Comment**

Aaron Marcus stated that the Vermont Agency of Natural Resources is hiring an environmental justice coordinator. He encouraged qualified Native candidates who are interested to apply.

**The meeting was adjourned 3:57 PM.**