

VERMONT
COMMISSION
ON
NATIVE
AMERICAN
AFFAIRS



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



VCNAA February 10th, 2021
Meeting Minutes

Members Present: Carol McGranaghan (Chair), Carol Irons (Vice Chair), Andrea Brett (Secretary), Jeff Benay, Doug Bent, Beverly Little Thunder, Lucy Neel

Members Absent: Jennifer Morton-Dow

Guests: Aaron Marcus, Jess Robinson (VDHP), Deb Reger

The meeting was brought to order by Carol McGranaghan at 1:12 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

There were no changes to the agenda.

2. Recognition of Guests

The guests and commissioners introduced themselves and were welcomed.

3. Approve September and October Minutes

After review, Carol McGranaghan made a motion to accept the January meeting minutes as written. Beverly Little-Thunder seconded the motion. All commissioners voted in the affirmative.

OLD BUSINESS

1. Appointment Updates

Carol McGranaghan and Jess Robinson provided brief updates from their perspectives as to how the Commission achieved a full slate of commissioners after the January meeting. Carol McGranaghan then stated that after speaking with Tori Biondolillo at the Governor's Boards and Commissions Office, she is cautiously hopeful that the appointment process will be better in the future. She also stated that Ms. Biondolillo assured her that applications to the VCNAA would be routed to VDHP expeditiously upon receipt by their office. In order to assure the timely vetting and memorandum preparation of the applicants for the two seats that will become available at the end of

August due to term limits, Dr. Robinson encouraged the Commissioners to solicit applications from those they believe might be good candidates as soon as possible.

2. Election of Officers

Given that the Commission was now complete with no vacancies and that a quorum was in attendance, Carol McGranaghan suggested that they formally elect officers. Beverly Little-Thunder nominated Carol McGranaghan to again serve as Chair. Doug Bent seconded the motion. All others voted in the affirmative. Carol McGranaghan nominated Carol Irons for Vice Chair. Beverly Little-Thunder seconded the motion. All others voted in the affirmative. Finally, after some discussion, Beverly Little-Thunder nominated Hillary Hoffman for Secretary. Lucy Neel seconded the motion. All others voted in the affirmative. The officer assignments will be reflected in the follow meeting's minutes.

3. Letter sent to Governor re: Appointments

Given that two commissioners were joining for the first time, Carol McGranaghan briefly summarized the letter the Commission wrote to the Governor in January regarding Commission vacancies and the appointment process. She recognized that their immediate concerns had been addressed by the recent appointments and discussions with Tori Biondolillo. She stated that she would share the letter with Jeff Benay and Doug Bent.

4. Legislation Updates: Native American Cultural and Religious Freedom Bill – Rep. Brian Cina

Carol McGranaghan noted that Representative Brian Cina (Chittenden 6-4) had earlier in the month forwarded the draft text of a proposed cultural and religious freedom bill to the Commission and various other stakeholders. She asked the commissioners if had reviewed the content of the bill and if they had comments or concerns. Lucy Neel stated that it was her opinion that the language as currently written is expansive and contains at least three separate bills within it. She personally also had concerns with some of the religious freedom aspects of it.

Andrea Brett had similar concerns. She also stated that because so many stakeholders or potentially interested parties were included in the email thread, the ensuing discussion contained many varied opinions and the VCNAA had no opportunity to come to a meaningful consensus on its content, even though the legislation was ostensibly drafted on their behalf. Hillary Hoffman stated that the whole process felt very rushed.

Following more discussion of the draft legislation, Carol McGranaghan suggested that the Commission ask Rep. Cina to shelve the legislation this year so they could be provided the opportunity to have meaningful discussions on its content and request alterations to it as appropriate. The Commission did not vote on the measure. Instead, they postponed motions and votes until the end of the executive session.

5. School Mascots

Carol McGranaghan stated that she is on the State Racial Equity Taskforce and the consensus in that body was that the oversight of the use of racist/derogatory/harmful mascots in schools should rest with the Agency of Education. The discussion then turned to Rutland High School, which recently changed their mascot from the “Raiders” to the “Ravens”. Lucy Neel stated that she and Jeff Benay had been in discussions with the town of Danville to change their mascot for years, but that nothing has changed. Carol McGranaghan stated that she thinks that working toward legislation prohibiting Native-centered mascots would be worth working on at some point, but that they can bring that initiative up at a later date.

6. Commission Projects for this year

Prior to the pandemic, tentative plans were in place for the VCNAA to utilize grant funds from Seventh Generation to host a Native-centered event or events with Missisquoi working as the 501c3 to facilitate the transfer and expenditure of funds. Carol Irons suggested that if this was still a possibility, then the Commission should start making plans for the fall for speakers, events, etc. Jeff Benay stated that in recent contacts with Seventh Generation, they were still committed to funding the event when conditions allowed. Discussion on this topic ensued. Jeff Benay then stated that he is currently working with grant money from Seventh Generation to facilitate Native-centered technological assistance during the pandemic. Mr. Benay stated that he believed this initiative could be adapted to the other State-recognized tribes. Mr. Benay asked the Commission how they would like to proceed. Carol Irons suggested that the Commission table the event planning for the time being given the logistics surrounding the pandemic and that Seventh Generation was currently funding a more immediate need.

Carol McGranaghan asked if the commission would be willing to form a sub-committee dedicated to researching a project surrounding the broader education of Native children. Andrea Brett stated that the group should also consider mentoring. Beverly Little-Thunder, Jeff Benay, and Lucy Neel all agreed to be on the sub-committee. Mr. Benay stated that he was going to send along a copy of the scholarship guide the Missisquoi put together for Abenaki and other indigenous youth for the Commissioners to consider and potentially adapt into a Commission project.

New Business

1. Earthwalk Project

Earthwalk is a nature-based camp for children. Beverly Little-Thunder stated that Earthwalk has been a primarily white, nature-based initiative that has in the past appropriated Native practices into their programming. Because of the pandemic, their programs have all been put on hold, but the organizers have taken this time to try to address some of their past practices and biases. They hope to solicit Native speakers, opinions, and advice as part of their renewed programming. Beverly Little-Thunder

thought that the Commission should take the opportunity to work with the group as people are able, and the commissioners agreed.

2. Abenaki Sculpture

This agenda item was tabled until the following month.

3. Symposium letter, Approval to Sign On

Carol McGranaghan stated that Xusana Davis has asked the Commission to endorse a letter organizing a forthcoming symposium. Carol McGranaghan stated that she would send the letter to Jeff Benay and Doug Bent to review.

4. Announcements

There were no announcements.

5. Public Comment

- a. Deb Reger suggested that she could compile a contacts list for those interested in Native-centered childhood initiatives. The commissioners agreed.
- b. Aaron Marcus stated that if commissioners wished to speak to the Agency of Natural Resources about issues of import to the Native community, he could try to facilitate it. He also stated that it may be possible for the VCNAA to utilize State Parks and Fish and Wildlife facilities for child-centered initiatives. He would check on that and get back to the Commission.

6. Executive Session

Andrea Brett made a motion to move the meeting into executive session. Carol Irons Seconded the motion. All others voted in the affirmative. Twenty minutes later, Beverly Little-Thunder made a motion to move out of executive session. Lucy Neel seconded the motion. All others voted in the affirmative.

Andrea Brett made a motion to ask Rep. Cina to withdraw or not submit the cultural and religious freedom legislation this session and also ask for the text of the proposed truth and reconciliation legislation before it is introduced. Carol Irons seconded the motion. All others voted in the affirmative.

Lucy Neel made a motion to adjourn the meeting. Beverly Little-Thunder seconded the motion. All commissioners voted in the affirmative.

The meeting was adjourned 4:11 PM.