

VERMONT  
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ON  
NATIVE  
AMERICAN  
AFFAIRS



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VCNAA January 13<sup>th</sup>, 2021  
Meeting Minutes

**Members Present:** Carol McGranaghan (Chair), Carol Irons (Vice Chair), Andrea Brett (Secretary), Lucy Cannon-Neel, Beverly Little Thunder, Jennifer Morton

**Members Absent:** Hillary Hoffman

**Guests:** Rep. Brian Cina (Chittenden 6-4), Christopher Bonasia, Jennifer Byrne, , Joanne Crawford, Tamsin Flanders, Caroline Gordon, Kiah Morris, Malcom, Aaron Marcus, Emma Mulvaney-Stanek (Chittenden 6-2), Jess Robinson (VDHP), Raven, Rebecca Roy, Jill Steigerwald, Deborah Velto

The meeting was brought to order by Carol McGranaghan at 1:07 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 and Jeff Benay would not be able to attend the meeting, so that agenda item should be removed. After some discussion, it was decided that the Payment for Ecosystem Services presentation would be moved to 2:00 PM, and the discussion of Native-centered mascots would be moved to 2:15 PM.

### 2. Recognition of Guests

The guests and commissioners introduced themselves and were welcomed.

### 3. Approve September and October Minutes

After review, Carol McGranaghan suggested one change to the November minutes regarding the proposed Commission guidelines. Lucy Cannon-Neel made a motion to approve the minutes with that revision. Jennifer Morton seconded the motion. All commissioners voted in the affirmative.

## OLD BUSINESS

### 1. Appointment Updates

Commissioners asked Jess Robinson to provide a brief update on the status of VCNAA openings. Dr. Robinson stated that he had received four applications from the Governor's Commissions office on December 7<sup>th</sup>. After interviewing three of the applicants (the fourth did not require an interview), Dr. Robinson submitted a memorandum summarizing the four applicants for the Governor's consideration on December 21<sup>st</sup>. He stated that he has not received any additional communication from the Governor's Commissions Office since the memorandum was submitted. Carol McGranaghan then stated that she, Carol Irons, and Lucy Cannon-Neel have not received certifications of their appointments either.

Carol McGranaghan then stated that Jeff Benay, representing the Missisquoi tribe, requested that she read a letter he wrote to her aloud during the meeting and submit the letter into the meeting minutes. It reads as follows:

“There is no word on appointments and frankly I am not OK with this. I have my local senator, Randy Brock, looking into the holdup and he said the Governor's office has not gotten back to him. At this time, I am asking the Commission on Native American Affairs to take this matter under advisement as Statute requires that recognized tribes are to be given preferential treatment when recommending members to the Commission. Both the Cowasuck and Missisquoi have referred folks for membership and only you, Carol Irons, and Lucy Neel have been appointed. Assuming that Lucy is the candidate from Nulhegan, that means both of the aforementioned groups are being denied their rightful positions on the Commission. I ask that the commission meet with the Governor as soon as possible to find out what is going on. Your work is more critical than ever before. Marginalized Vermonters are bearing the brunt of this pandemic as tenets of equity are being violated daily. It is the original Vermonters-the Abenaki- who are having to deal with the ravishes of poor health, low wages, and inadequate housing. It is precisely the Vermont Commission on Native American Affairs that is charged to deal with these concerns and it is a difficult task indeed, when you are given a less than full compliment of commissioners. Please take whatever action you deem appropriate and I look forward to hearing from you. Jeff Benay, Ed. D.”

Carol McGranaghan then asked the commission what action they should take. Carol Irons stated that she felt the situation was ridiculous as this point. While she understood the demands the pandemic was exacting on the Administration, she stated that these issues were present long-before the pandemic arose. She suggested the Commission draft a letter to the Governor expressing its concern and dismay at the situation and outlining the recent history of the appointment process. Lucy Cannon-Neel made a motion to have Carol McGranaghan draft the letter as outlined by Carol Irons. Jennifer Morton seconded the motion. All voted in the affirmative.

## **2. Legislation Updates: Native American Cultural and Religious Freedom Bill – Rep. Brian Cina**

Representative Brian Cina (Chittenden 6-4) joined the meeting and gave a walk-through of the proposed bill language. He also highlighted the changes in the language relative to

the iteration of the bill proposed in the last biennium. Carol McGranaghan stated that she had heard that there was some concern among some tribal members about which places, sites, buildings, etc., were to be designated as sacred or religious, and how those decisions would get made.

Rep. Cina stated that while he understood the Commissioners were just seeing the bill language for the first time, he requested that the Commission make a motion to continue (or not continue) with the broad aims and scope of the proposed legislation, understanding that the specific language and components of the bill could be changed in the future. Carol Irons stated that while she would like to have an opportunity to have a close reading of the bill language, she would be comfortable affirming the broad aims and scope of the legislation. Andrea made a motion to proceed as Carol Irons suggested. Beverly Little-Thunder seconded the motion. All the Commissioners voted in the affirmative. All of the commissioners then agreed to read the bill and provide language changes to Rep. Cina through Carol McGranaghan in the following two weeks.

### **3. Payment for Ecosystem Services**

White River Natural Resources Conservation District (NRCD), Rural Vermont, and Vermont Law School's Center for Agriculture and Food Systems, came to the VCNAA as members of a working group convened as part of H. 83 (2019) legislation to discuss an initiative entitled *Payment for Ecosystem Services*. During a presentation to the Commission, they summarized their plan, which aims to, among other aspects:

- Pay farmers for outcomes, not simply practices
- Encompass the whole state
- Allowing farmers to steward the land
- Increase farm viability

They requested Vermont Native input on this initiative. Carol McGranaghan asked if they could forward an introductory letter about the initiative, which she could then forward to the tribal chiefs, members, and fellow Commissioners, so that they could then disseminate the letter to Native agricultural practitioners and other interested Natives. The presenters agreed.

### **4. School Mascots**

Rep. Emma Mulvaney-Stanek (Chittenden 6-2) joined the Commission meeting to introduce Tamsin Flanders, Deborah Velto, and Caroline Gordon; founders of a local organization entitled *More than a Mascot*. As graduates of the three schools still utilizing Native-centered mascots, they stated that until recently they had been primarily concerned with promoting education around the issue and working with other stakeholders. Having recently been inspired by Maine's legislation banning Native-centered mascots from schools and other public bodies, however, they wanted to reach out to the VCNAA to see if they could help to advocate for similar legislation or if they could partner with them on any other initiative related to the issue.

Carol McGranaghan stated that while there are only a small number of schools that still use Native-centered imagery, she still feels that legislation may be appropriate so that future entities are not able to adopt similar symbols or names. Nevertheless, she noted that the State Racial Equity Taskforce is working on this issue and will shortly be making recommendations to the Agency of Education that will encompass all racist/derogatory/harmful mascots. She stated that she feels that that is likely the most appropriate avenue to address the issue. Other Commissioners agreed.

## **5. H. 880 – Signage Legislation**

Rep. Brian Cina, who has begun taking Abenaki language classes, presented the class's research on Abenaki place names in Vermont. Rebecca Roy, Vermont State Parks Interpretive Program Administrator, stated that the Department is very excited for the implementation of the legislation and have already had planning meetings to discuss how to begin rolling out the first signs next year. She outlined what the large welcome signage would and could display. She also noted that there are trail signs, interpretive signage, brochures, and other media where additional content could be presented to the public.

## **6. Commission Projects for this year**

Given the full schedule of presenters at the Commission meeting, and the time, a discussion of Commission project for the year was postponed until the February meeting.

## **New Business**

### **1. Kiah Morris - Renew New England Project**

Kiah Morris came to the Commission to introduce an initiative that she is involved with entitled Renew (New England). She stated that while the group's primary aim is to address the world's climate crisis, they are committed to do it in a way that is just to minority/indigenous/ marginalized/underserved communities. She gave a presentation outlining their aims and the scope of their concerns. Following the presentation, Andrea Brett and Beverly Little Thunder requested more information in how that can become involved in the initiative. Kiah Morris stated that she would follow up with them and the VCNAA.

### **2. Letter from the Social Equity Caucus to the Legislature**

Discussion of this item was postponed until the February meeting

### **3. Announcements**

There were no announcements

### **4. There was no public comment.**

Beverly Little Thunder made a motion to adjourn the meeting. Carol Irons seconded the motion. All commissioners voted in the affirmative.

**The meeting was adjourned 3:31 PM.**