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VERMONT

VCNAA March 10th, 2021
Meeting Minutes

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

Members Absent: None

Guests: Catie Bartone, Joanne Crawford, Elizabeth Frascoia, Maia Gilmour, Bradley Greenough, Kristi Herzer, Aaron Marcus, Deb Reger, Jess Robinson (VDHP), Jessica Savage, Ethan Swift

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 she agreed to accommodate Aaron Marcus and representatives from the Vermont Agency of Natural Resources (ANR) at 2:30 pm. Carol McGranaghan also stated that she would like to briefly update the commission about the symposium Xusana Davis is organizing. Jeff Benay also requested that an item be added to the agenda discussing Indigenous Peoples' Day.

2. Recognition of Guests

The guests and commissioners introduced themselves and were welcomed.

3. Approve Minutes

Jeff Benay moved to accept the February 10, 2021 meeting minutes without alteration. All other commissions voted in the affirmative. Carol Irons then moved to accept the February 26, 2021 meeting minutes without alteration. Jennifer Morton seconded. All other commissioners voted in the affirmative, except for Jeff Benay, who abstained.

Old Business

1. Abenaki Place Names for State Parks

Carol McGranaghan stated that she is having only partial success with finding names for many State park names because Abenaki naming conventions did not correspond to arbitrary places but rather to natural features that may or may not be included within the boundaries of a particular State park. Rebecca Roy, Interpretive Program Director of the Vermont State Parks, then showed several State park sign ideas and how Abenaki names could potentially be integrated into them. After some discussion, the commissioners agreed that the Abenaki place names should be placed above the crossbar on Civilian Conservation Corp signage. Given space constraints on the signage, they also discussed secondary signage and follow-up context that could be available at the park's contact station.

2. Truth and Reconciliation Legislation Discussion

After a brief discussion of the sub-committee charged with addressing the issue of a Truth and Reconciliation commission, it was agreed that Doug Bent, Melody Brook (should she agree to participate), Carol Irons, Jeff Benay, Lucy Neel, Hillary Hoffman, and Jennifer Morton would constitute the sub-committee. Afterward, the commissioners briefly discussed the Legislature's proposed eugenics apology resolution and how the proposed Truth and Reconciliation commission is meant to follow that apology as a way to articulate tangible reparations in the future. Jeff Benay reminded the commissioners that resolutions are non-binding. Carol McGranaghan stated that while she knows that the apology is a hollow gesture in and of itself, she trusts that there is a critical mass of legislators that understand that the apology is only an initial step. She further stated that while they had problems with the proposed Truth and Reconciliation commission legislative language and the processes by which it was drafted, the sub-committee is meant to address this issue with better suggestions to give to the legislature in the coming months.

3. School Mascots Bill

Hillary Hoffman presented her draft legislation regarding school mascots. It reads as follows: "A public school, the University of Vermont, or any college within the Vermont State System may not use or adopt a name, symbol, or image that depicts or refers to a Native American tribe, individual, custom, or tradition and that is used as a mascot, nickname, logo, letterhead, or team name of the school." Commissioners then discussed whether the language was too specific and might potentially prohibit mascots and symbols that a reasonable person would agree are not problematic. It was suggested that perhaps the language should be changed to specify that derogatory or offensive imagery should be prohibited. Some additional discussion ensued before Carol McGranaghan made a motion to table the discussion until the next meeting. Andrea Brett seconded. All commissioners voted in the affirmative.

New Business

4. Aaron Marcus – Environmental Panel Discussion

Aaron Marcus introduced several of their colleagues from the Agency of Natural Resources (ANR) to the commission. Afterward, Aaron Marcus stated there was an upcoming environmental panel discussion hosted by ANR and they wished to extend an invite to two commissioners to provide Native perspectives on the environment and land use, although they stressed that they were free to speak on any topic of import to the indigenous community. Since ANR had a number of representatives attending the meeting, Carol McGranaghan took the opportunity to ask each of them in turn why they felt it was important to have Indigenous people speak to the agency. Each provided answers to the commissioners. Afterward, the commissioners agreed that Beverly Little-Thunder and Jennifer Morton would attend the panel on behalf of the VCNAA.

Next, Alison Thomas from ANR stated that the agency was hosting children's conservation camps this summer and they wanted to make sure that Native youth were aware of the camps and that they were welcome to attend. ANR also want to make sure that they the camps' administrators were educated about relevant Native teachings and that they can reference authentic voices when educating children.

5. Name Changes to Vermont Brooks

The commissioners agreed to table this discussion until the April meeting.

6. Governor's Institutes of Vermont

Elizabeth Frascoia from the Governor's Institute of Vermont came to the VCNAA to summarize the mission and scope of the Governor's institutes and to invite Native youth to participate in these programs. She stated that in addition to expansive learning opportunities in a virtual environment, attendees gain mentors, social connections, foster new career possibilities, and gain new skills. She stated that the programs are normally open to 9-11 graders, but this year 12th graders are also invited to participate. The commissioners thanked Elizabeth Frascoia for her presentation and time.

7. Xusana Davis Symposium

Carol McGranaghan stated that per the discussion in the previous meeting, she endorsed the symposium letter on behalf of the VCNAA.

8. Indigenous Peoples' Day

Jeff Benay stated that Missisquoi school administrators reached out to him to discuss Indigenous Peoples' Day and the possibility of children taking the day off from school in order to observe it. Mr. Benay stated that he would ask his fellow commissioners their opinions before responding, and now wanted to hear their opinions. After some discussion, the commissioners agreed that a day off would probably not result in proper observances. Instead, they suggested that children participate in observances during the school day. Mr. Benay stated that he would relay that message to the school.

9. Guide to College & Scholarships for Abenaki students

Jeff Benay stated that the scholarship guide previously sent to the commissioners was simply for information purposes at this point. Once the COVID pandemic is over, however, Jeff Benay stated that he would be very interested in bringing legislators together, showing them the guide or an expanded version of it, and discussing opportunities for Native students. As an example, he stated that this year marks the 35th year that high school students at Missisquoi will travel to UVM to tour the campus, see the college environment, and understand the potential opportunities for the future after graduation. Commissioners then discussed the future of the commission and the means and methods for expanding their education and outreach to legislators and the public.

10. Abenaki Sculpture

The commissioners agreed to table this discussion until the April meeting.

11. Announcements

There were no public announcements.

12. Public Comment

There were not public comments.

The meeting was adjourned 4:15 PM.