

VERMONT  
COMMISSION  
ON  
NATIVE  
AMERICAN  
AFFAIRS



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VCNAA March 11, 2020  
Meeting Minutes

**Members Present:** Carol McGranaghan (Chair), Carol Irons (Vice Chair), Andrea Brett (Secretary), Rich Holschuh, Beverly Little Thunder, Eugene Rich

**Members Absent:** Hillary Hoffman, Jennifer Morton

**Guests:** Jess Robinson (VDHP), Rep. Brian Cina (Chittenden 6-4) (by phone), Rep. Tristan Toleno (Windham 2-3), Aaron Marcus (Vermont Agency of Natural Resources Diversity and Equity Committee), Zack Porter (Conservation Law Foundation), Rory Cronin

The meeting was brought to order by Carol McGranaghan at 1:12 pm at 1 National Life Drive, Montpelier, in the Montpelier conference room.

### 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 June 12, 2019 Minutes

The commissioners voted to approve the meeting minutes without substantive changes by consensus.

## OLD BUSINESS

### 1. Legislative Updates on Commission sponsored bills and other State House Happenings - Representatives Brian Cina (Chittenden 6-4) (phone) and Tristan Toleno (Windham 2-3)

Rep. Tristan Toleno summarized the current status of the bills introduced with the input and consent of the VCNAA and the bills and resolution introduced at the request of Chief Don Stevens (Nulhegan Tribe). Rep. Toleno stated that the joint resolution concerning eugenics is evolving and legislators are considering language acknowledging ethnocide or cultural genocide. Carol Irons stated that in the committee meeting she attended,

people were largely sympathetic to the language of genocide or ethnocide but they are getting mixed messaging from various Abenaki constituents.

Rep. Toleno suggested that legislation enabling a truth and reconciliation commission regarding eugenics will likely pass out of committee on Friday. Rep. Cina stated that as far as he is concerned, the truth and reconciliation commission should address all aspects of colonization, which will certainly include effects to African Americans, but that it shouldn't forget Native Americans. He also stated that Native Americans shouldn't be pitted against other minorities. Rep. Toleno stated that the human rights commission might be a logical partner in the process.

Regarding the proposed legislation waiving hunting and fishing license fees for Abenaki tribal members, Eugene Rich stated that he is worried that there will be a deluge of tribal applications and that it will potentially generate negative feelings toward the Abenaki. Andrea Brett stated that in her opinion, waiving fees, which go directly to environmental and wildlife preservation, is not environmentally conscious.

## **2. Racial Equity Panel update on Feb 14, 2020 meeting – Carol McGranaghan**

Carol McGranaghan gave a brief update on the Racial Equity panel meeting she attended on February 14. She stated that it was a very positive experience and that Xusana Davis is very energetic and optimistic about the panel's work.

## **3. Natural Resources Diversity & Equity assistance/support with Abenaki signage - Aaron Marcus**

Carol McGranaghan stated that if the legislation passes the State of Vermont will have to consult multiple stakeholders within the Abenaki community regarding the appropriate names and spelling of significant sites. Aaron Marcus stated that a number of people within Agency of Natural Resources are enthusiastic about the potential signage changes.

## **4. Indigenous Feminist Anti-Imperialism opportunity/request - volunteer?**

Beverly Little Thunder stated that she might be willing to be a volunteer board member, but she would need to know more about the program, its mission, and what the expectations of her would be. Carol McGranaghan stated that she would connect her with Paul Fassler, who should be able to answer her questions.

## **NEW BUSINESS**

### **1. Discuss workshops for teaching Native American heritage**

Carol Irons stated that she has yet to confirm that the workshop will proceed or that the funding is secured, but that if confirmed the conference should be open to all Native Americans, regardless of tribal affiliation. She also suggested that part of the workshop

should involve educating relevant non-Native people about Native culture, including teachers and social workers.

**2. Discuss the possibility of holding press conferences for Commission and interested parties to create inclusivity on legislation**

Carol McGranaghan stated that Rep. Brian Cina had earlier suggested holding a press conference to discuss Native issues. She stated that it would be a way to signal to the general public, but also legislators and executive branch members, that the Abenaki exist. The commission members discussed the potential format and logistics surrounding the press conference and then agreed that they should follow up with Rep. Cina about how to proceed. Beverly Little Thunder stated that if a press conference was to be held, all of the members of the commission should be in attendance and all should be afforded a brief opportunity to speak.

**3. Request for information regarding will bequest - Carol McGranaghan**

Carol McGranaghan stated that she was approached by another person who would like to donate land to the Abenaki upon her death. Mrs. McGranaghan stated that the offer was very generous but that as the commission had previously discussed, there is currently no way for the Abenaki to accept land on behalf of the collective state-recognized tribes, and no means to pay the taxes. It was suggested that partnering with a non-profit organization such as a land trust might be the most appropriate option, given that the legislation dealing with these issues will not likely move out of its committee of jurisdiction.

**4. Truth and Reconciliation task force to explore the effect of eugenics on targeted populations including native Vermonters, people of color and those with disabilities. Brian Cina/Carol McGranaghan**

This agenda item was discussed earlier with Rep. Cina and Rep. Toleno

**5. Letters of Support**

Carol McGranaghan stated that she has been made aware that individuals that had previously asked for letters of support are simply waiting for her and Carol Irons to retire so that they can return to the commission and repeat their request, believing that they will find the commission more receptive. She stated that the commission had previously agreed that they would provide no letters of support for outside organizations and she therefore wanted to find a way to memorialize that decision. Jess Robinson stated that the commission would need to adopt by-laws because currently any vote that the commission makes can be undone with a subsequent vote in the future. Carol McGranaghan and Beverly Little Thunder agreed to work on a rough draft of potential by-laws for the next meeting.

**6. Announcements**

- a. Jess Robinson stated that because National Life group is reclaiming the Montpelier Room for its own use, subsequent meetings are currently scheduled to be held in the Calvin Coolidge meeting room.
- b. Eugene Rich stated that he is hosting an Abenaki campfire stories event at Lake Carmi state park this summer.
- c. In the past, Abenaki Heritage Week has been held in the first week of May. The commission discussed the possibility of reserving the Statehouse lawn for events and a press conference on May 1<sup>st</sup>.

**The meeting was adjourned at 4:15 PM.**