

VERMONT
COMMISSION
ON
NATIVE
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AFFAIRS



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Carol Irons, Vice Chair
Andrea Brett, Secretary
Eugene Rich
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Hillary Hoffman
Beverly Little-Thunder



VCNAA November 12th, 2020
Meeting Minutes

Members Present: Carol McGranaghan (Chair), Carol Irons (Vice Chair), Andrea Brett (Secretary), Hillary Hoffman, Beverly Little Thunder, Jennifer Morton

Members Absent: Lucy Cannon-Neel

Guests: Rep. Brian Cina (Chienden 6-4), Adin Buchanan, Joanne Crawford, Paul Fassler, Aly Johnson-Kurts, Jess Robinson (VDHP), Rebecca Roy

The meeting was brought to order by Carol McGranaghan at 1:18 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 had yet to reach out to Karen Freeman and Mark Martin so that item should be removed from the agenda. She also stated that Rep. Cina had time constraints, so the commission also agreed to accommodate his schedule.

2. Recognition of Guests

The guests and commissioners introduced themselves and were welcomed.

3. Approve September and October Minutes

Because there was not a quorum, the commission could not previously vote to approve the September minutes. As such, Carol McGranaghan asked the commission to review and potentially approve both the September and October minutes. After review, Carol Irons moved to accept both the September and October minutes without revision, and Jennifer Morton seconded. All commissioners voted in the affirmative.

OLD BUSINESS

1. Appointment Updates

Commissioners asked Jess Robinson to provide a brief update on the status of commission openings. Dr. Robinson stated that the Governor's Commission office

approved Carol McGranaghan, Carol Irons, and Lucy Cannon-Neel for two-year terms. The Division for Historic Preservation has yet to see or hear about any recent applications being submitted to Commissions office, however. Several commissioners commented that the backlog in commission appointments is not limited to the VCNAA, but rather is true across State government.

2. Legislation Updates – Rep. Brian Cina

Representative Brian Cina (Chittenden 6-4) joined the meeting. He stated that he was hopeful that the commission and tribal leadership could come together to support a united legislative agenda. He stated that given the pandemic and its implications, and anticipated revenue and budget shortfalls, there would likely be limited opportunities for Native-centered legislation to be considered in the upcoming session. As such, he recommended that the stakeholders focus on two pieces of legislation discussed previously: legislation establishing a truth and reconciliation commission, which he admitted was a long-shot in the current climate, and legislation memorializing religious freedom for Native people in Vermont. Rep. Cina stated that he is more hopeful about the prospects for the latter legislation, particularly if there is tribal and public support and advocacy for it and the legislation is clearly defined. Regarding a truth and reconciliation commission, Hillary Hoffman asked that the Commission move to create a sub-committee to research truth and reconciliation commissions, such as the one established in Maine, and how one might function in Vermont. The sub-committee would report back to the commission in January. Beverly Little Thunder seconded the motion. All voted in the affirmative. Jennifer Morton, Beverly Little Thunder, Hillary Hoffman and Andrea Brett agreed to be on the sub-committee.

Rep. Cina mentioned that several legislators are still interested in putting forth a resolution apologizing for Vermont's past eugenics policies. He stated that he informed those legislators that many in the Native community viewed an apology without acknowledging the broader implications of colonialism as hollow or as tokenism. He stated that some legislators understood that perspective and others seemed to want to move forward regardless.

Beverly Little-Thunder stated she would also like to work toward legislation or statewide policies that establish a Native American curriculum for K-12 schools; one that is informed by the Vermont Native community. She stated that the State has to move beyond dressing up as pilgrims and Indians around thanksgiving and toward more substantive education about Native people in Vermont and elsewhere. Discussion about aspects of Native life and potential projects followed thereafter.

Before leaving the meeting, Rep. Cina asked that the commission vote to continue the process of introducing the two pieces of legislation discussed previously. Andrea Brett made the motion. Hillary Hoffman seconded the motion. All voted in the affirmative.

3. H. 880 – Signage Legislation – Rebecca Roy

Rebecca Roy, Vermont State Parks Interpretive Program Administrator, joined the meeting to discuss H. 880 – an Act related to Abenaki place names on Vermont signs, which recently passed the Vermont legislature and was signed by the Governor. Rebecca Roy stated that she was very excited about the passage of the legislation, and to work with the Abenaki. She also stated that in addition to welcome signage, there were also trail signs, interpretive signage, brochures and other media where Abenaki placenames could potentially be incorporated in the future.

4. Commission Guidelines

Carol Irons began by mentioning that during the previous meeting, she also forgot to state that a guiding principal in past commissions was that, when not constrained by statute, the commission would work to gain consensus (or unanimity) in decisions. She stated that this principal should be added to the three she previously articulated:

1. The Chair will be a person of Indigenous heritage in recognition of the fact that the land of Vermont is Abenaki country. This is also to ensure that Commission activities and projects retain an Indigenous focus rather than Euroamerican.
2. The Commission will not officially endorse or support, by letter or funds, any group or project that is not specifically a Commission project in order to retain public neutrality.
3. It is expected that if a Commission decision is being requested that directly favors one group/tribe/affiliation, and that a Commission member is also a member of the favored group, this be recognized as a conflict of interest and the member recuse himself/herself.
4. When possible, decisions are made following the consensus model.

Carol asked the commission to vote to adopt these as guiding principals for the commission. Beverly Little Thunder made a motion to adopt these principals. Andrea Brett seconded the motion. All voted in the affirmative. Jess Robinson stated he would check on the legality of posting these guidelines on the VCNAA website.

NEW BUSINESS

1. Mascots

Carol McGranaghan stated that, as many have seen in the press and in emails sent to the commission, there is a large controversy in Rutland about the “raiders” mascot and symbolism. Given that various entities have asked the commission to comment on this issue, and on the issue of Native-based mascots generally, Carol McGranaghan stated that she felt that the commission should develop a short, two-sentence statement on the issue;

essentially stating that the commission is not in favor of mascots, logos, or symbols that evoke Native American names, history or material culture. Discussion followed thereafter as to the exact wording. Hillary Hoffman volunteered to write the statement down and send it to the commission for dissemination to inquiring parties. Carol Irons made the motion, Beverly Little Thunder seconded it, and all voted in the affirmative.

2. Kate Pond Sculpture

Carol McGranaghan stated that unfortunately neither Kate Pond nor Jeff Benay could attend the meeting. Briefly, however, she stated that she had been informed by Jeff Benay that Kate Pond was interested in creating a sculpture near to the existing sculpture of Samuel de Champlain in Grand Isle to address the Native presence in the Champlain Valley at the time of Champlain's first voyage up the Lake in 1609. Although they would address this issue with Kate Pond in a later meeting, Carol McGranaghan suggested that the commissions think about the proposal.

3. Announcements

- a) Adin Buchanan joined the meeting to state that they are a board member of an organization called Earthwalk that sponsored nature walks and connections to the outdoors. They stated that they wanted to move beyond Eurocentric models and understandings and would appreciate any input or knowledge the commission or the tribes they represent could impart. Adin Buchanan also stated that they would welcome any Native person that would be willing to volunteer to be on the Earthwalk board.
- b) Aly Johnson Kurts joined the meeting as the director of Change the Story Vermont. They stated that their organization was considering partnering in another national organization in an effort to document the impact of the pandemic on woman. They stated that should their organization partner in this effort, they would like to make sure that Native women's voices were heard and understood.

Jennifer Morton moved to adjourn the meeting. Carol Irons seconded the motion. All commissioners voted in the affirmative.

The meeting was adjourned 3:34 PM.