

VERMONT
COMMISSION
ON
NATIVE
AMERICAN
AFFAIRS



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Paul Fassler
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VCNAA May 8, 2019
Meeting Minutes

Members Present: Carol McGranaghan (Chair), Jennifer Morton, Carol Irons (Vice Chair), Andrea Brett (Secretary), Paul Fassler, Cheryl Frobose, Rich Holschuh,

Members Absent: Eugene Rich

Guests: Jess Robinson (VDHP), Joanne Crawford (VT Department of Health), Lane Fury, John Moody

The meeting was brought to order by Carol McGranaghan at 1:03 pm at 1 National Life Drive, Montpelier, in the Montpelier conference room.

1. Changes to Agenda

Commissioners agreed to accommodate Rep. Brian Cina whenever he arrived due to his busy legislative schedule.

2. Approve April 10, 2019 Minutes

Paul Fassler moved to adopt the minutes without amendment. Andrea Brett seconded the motion. All other commissioner concurred.

3. Recognition of Guests

The guests were briefly recognized and welcomed to the meeting.

OLD BUSINESS

1. Representative Brian Cina (Chittenden 6-4) updates

Representative Cina came to the VCNAA commission meeting to talk about the recent passage of the Indigenous Peoples' Day legislation. Carol McGranaghan stated that while it was a bit hurtful not to have the Governor sign the legislation into law publicly, it was a wonderful accomplishment accompanied by a week of wonderful events.

Carol Irons further stated that it is a political process and that the Governor had multiple constituencies to appease or contend with. Ultimately she felt that he went out of his way for Native Americans in Vermont and that the commissioners should thank him for that.

Rich Holschuh agreed and stated that the Governor signed it when he didn't have to, and that the best thing the commission can do is to thank him for his work and move forward with additional initiatives.

Rep. Cina summarized what he felt was the consensus view of the commissioners, and then proposed that another celebration occur on Indigenous Peoples' Day. It was suggested that the governor may be persuaded to attend that event. The commissioners stated that they would begin planning for the event.

Rep. Cina then moved onto pending tobacco legislation that would make it illegal for anyone under 21 to purchase tobacco products. Rep. Cina proposed an amendment that would exempt tobacco use age limit for spiritual purposes, but he was met with significant incredulity among many of his fellow law makers. Ultimately, as a compromise, Rep. Cina agreed to withdraw his amendment with the provision that the Department of Health reach out to the VCNAA and tribes so that the stakeholders in this matter can potentially come to an agreement. He stressed that the Department of Health was under no obligation to take action based upon their concerns, but they will at least be obligated engage and listen to the VCNAA and tribes.

Finally, the commissioners and Rep. Cina discussed potentially introducing a State-level religious freedom act that would include sacred sites and sacred objects, potentially including tobacco. Carol Irons stated that as a prelude to this legislation, the tribes needed to come together and talk about which sacred sites should be recognized and the protocols around their use, appreciation, and protection.

Representative Cina said that he will put in a request to the legislative council to draft the bill language and then he and the VCNAA can further refine it from there

Finally, Carol McGranaghan read aloud a letter addressed to Rep. Brian Cina and asked that it be formerly entered into the minutes:

May 8, 2019

Representative Brian Cina
12 1/2 Isham Street
Burlington, VT 05401

Dear Brian:

I am writing in behalf of the Vermont Commission on Native American Affairs (VCNAA) to express our sincere thanks for all of your work and persistence in supporting and advocating for the Abenaki and other Indigenous groups in Vermont.

It is largely due to your efforts that the Indigenous Peoples' Day holiday is now law and will be celebrated state-wide. This not only helps give visibility to our People as a viable population whose cultures, ceremonies, and spiritual connections need to be considered in future laws and statutes, but also highlights the fact that we are here and have always been here.

We would also like to thank you for your vigilance, oversight and insight regarding bills that are being discussed. When bills which can affect our community, our cultural and our spiritual practices are introduced without input from Abenaki or other Indigenous people living here, there is often little awareness of how they may impact these minority groups. You have called these to the VCNAA's attention and asked how you can help to change and/or rectify adversely worded proposed bills. You are a true and strong ally.

In recognition for all you have done and continue to do for our People, ktsi wliwni.

Carol A McGranaghan

2. Commission Seat Application Review

Jess stated that he had been informed that Joanne Crawford was to be appointed to the commission to fill the vacancy left by Melody Brook. Joanne had yet to receive her confirmation letter yet, however. Jess also stated that Beverly Little Feather's application had been received by the Governor's Office on Commissions as well. Jess stated that he would begin interviewing candidates when a sufficient number of applicants applied. He also alerted Jennifer Morton and Andrea Brett that they had to resubmit applications even though their spots will be retained as long as they wish to continue to serve for another two-year term.

3. Abenaki Cultural Regeneration Project

Carol Irons stated that she and her colleagues unfortunately got turned down for all the grants for which they applied. They have received enough donations, however, to run the three-day program in June at the Northwoods Stewardship Center. It will be geared toward adults. Mrs. Irons stated that the program will concentrate on plant lore, preservation, history, and spiritual practices.

4. Abenaki Statehouse Display

All of the commissioners were elated that the Abenaki permanent exhibit is in at the statehouse. There may also be an opportunity to have Abenaki crafts in the gift shop.

Tribal Inter-Communication

Rich Holschuh state the VCNAA and Missisquoi Facebook pages are still very active and continue to gain engagement and followers. Mr. Holschuh stated that the VCNAA Facebook page has 650 likes and approximately 700 followers.

5. Indigenous Peoples' Day

Because the Governor signed the legislation privately, the plans for a signing celebration were no longer applicable. The commissioners agreed to leave this item on the agenda to plan for a celebration on Indigenous Peoples' Day itself. The topic will be taken up next month.

6. Status Report

a. CT River Hydro Re-Licensing

Rich Holschuh stated that there is nothing new to report this month.

b. VT Public Utilities Commission – Vermont Yankee

Rich Holschuh stated that there is nothing new to report this month.

7. Native American Support for Inmates

Commissioners still need to follow up on this item.

NEW BUSINESS

1. Abenaki Recognition and Culture Week Events

Carol McGranaghan summarized the events at the statehouse on May 1st. All the commissioners who were in attendance agreed that it was a wonderful event and were pleased that all of the four recognized tribes were represented. Several commissioners noted that the singing, drumming, and dancing were very fun and projected a celebratory atmosphere to all attendees. Carol McGranaghan stated that David Schutz, the Statehouse curator, is potentially interested in making it an annual event.

2. Children's Mental Health Awareness Day

Joanne Crawford came to the commission to raise awareness of the prevalence of suicide among Native American youth, both nationally and in Vermont. According to a survey conducted by the Center for Native American Youth at the Aspen Institute, more than one third of American Indians/Alaska Natives suicides occurred among youths aged 10 – 24. According to a 2017 VT Youth Risk Behavior Survey, 10% of American Indian/Alaska Native middle school students in Vermont have attempted suicide. Joanne

Crawford talked about steps tribes and individuals can take to prevent youth suicide, and passed out a flyer that listed some strategies and additional resources.

3. Combined New Hampshire/ Vermont Native American Commission Meeting

A joint New Hampshire/Vermont commission meeting has been tentatively scheduled for July 23rd from 1:00 – 3:00 PM at Dartmouth. Most commissioners said that they would be able to attend.

4. Narragansett Territorial Encroachment

Carol McGranaghan stated that Chief Don Stevens had asked her to raise this issue with the commission, but that she was unaware of the circumstances surrounding it. Rich Holschuh stated that he was somewhat familiar with Chief Stevens' concerns. In short, he was worried about the Narragansett inserting themselves into local regulatory decision making and that this may lead to or be a part of land claims.

Jess Robinson then described to the commissioners the Federal processes involving Federal tribal input, and how these have changed over the past twenty years. There was discussion about various aspects of these processes and how it effects or enables the Narragansett. Finally, Paul Fassler noted that while this information was interesting to the commissioners, it is outside of the VCNAA statutory remit and that these concerns should be addressed at the tribal or multi-tribal level. Guest John Moody was called upon and attempted to explain the situation from his perspective. He then stated that he was in a position to educate the VCNAA about these processes and how they might become better activists, but that he felt disrespected. He stated that he would only return to the commission meetings if he was asked and could be a more active participant. After discussion, Mr. Moody interpreted the commissioners' responses as not in favor of his proposal and he left.

5. Equity in Education H. 3 – Update

There has been a committee formed to make recommendations to the state about education equality. Rich Holschuh stated that the tribes have to make sure to nominate someone to this committee, lest Native voices not be represented in future curricula.

6. Announcements

- a. Lane Fury stated that the screening of Dawnland is scheduled for May 19 from 2:00 – 4:00 PM at the Capitol City Grange. All donations generated at the event will be given to the Abenaki Cultural Regeneration Project.
- b. There will be a Mother's Day Powwow at Dartmouth this weekend.

The meeting was adjourned at 4.13 PM.