

VERMONT  
COMMISSION  
ON  
NATIVE  
AMERICAN  
AFFAIRS



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Melody Brook, Chair  
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Andrea Brett, Secretary  
Carol Irons  
Cheryl O'Neil  
Paul Fassler  
Rich Holschuh  
Eugene Rich  
Jennifer Morton-Dow



VCNAA April 11, 2018  
Meeting Minutes

**Members Present:** Melody Brook, Chair; Carol McGranaghan, Vice Chair; Andrea Brett, Secretary; Carol Irons, Paul Fassler, Rich Holschuh, Jennifer Morton-Dow, and Eugene Rich.

**Members Absent:** Cheryl O'Neill

**Guests:** Philip Brett, Mac Mattison, Representative Kiah Morris, Dale Azaria, VDHP; Jenni Lavoie, VDHP

The meeting was brought to order by Melody Brook at 1:10 pm at 1 National Life Drive, Montpelier, in the Montpelier conference room.

**1. Changes to Agenda**

Follow-up on the ECHO Leahy Center for Lake Champlain will be added under old business.

**2. Approve February 14, 2018 Minutes**

Andrea Brett moved to accept the February 14, 2018 meeting minutes with one change. The motion was seconded by Paul Fassler the minutes were accepted by consensus.

**OLD BUSINESS**

**1. Action Plan**

**a. Abenaki Cultural Regeneration Project**

Carol Irons reported that an advanced three-day camp focusing on spiritual practices was recently completed for the six people who'd already completed the initial retreat last summer. Deb Reger was on hand to record portions of the retreat, which will be disseminated on YouTube via her Moccasin Tracks channel. Mrs. Irons stated that funding continues to be a challenge. Coupled with the current unavailability of qualified teachers, she stated that there are no plans at this time for an additional week-long retreat this year. Carol Irons and Carol McGranaghan have started a GoFundMe page to help with the funding challenges.

**b. Tribal Inter-Communication**

Eugene Rich reported that communications between the Vermont tribes are increasing and communications between Vermont's tribal chiefs and the chiefs of tribes in neighboring states are increasing as well. Mr. Rich also reported that tribes have become more interested in creating individual Facebook pages. Finally, he stated that his recent acquisition and dissemination of sweet grass has garnered communications with tribes in

other states. Rich Holschuh indicated that the Commission's Facebook page continues to get busier with over 300 people following the page.

**c. Indigenous People's Day – New initiatives, Planning an observance, Other localities, and Strategies for the next legislative session**

Rich Holschuh reported that the cross-over date for legislative bills has come and gone, with none of the commission supported bills making it out of committee. Discussion then focused on strategies that could be successful in the next legislative session.

**d. Systems Work Updates**

Melody Brook reported that there have been two babies born using the materials that she collected and disseminated. Unfortunately, none of the hospitals that she contacted regarding indigenous birth practices returned her calls. Andrea Brett indicated she may have a contact with a mid-wife that she said she would forward to Melody. Jennifer Morton-Dow is working on support systems for Indigenous people in Vermont who are not Abenaki.

**e. Elected Official**

The Commission continues to explore the possibility of having an official in the statehouse working as an indigenous liaison to the State; similar to a position that has been recently established in Maine. The Commission envisions the official working on behalf of indigenous people in the legislature to introduce legislation beneficial to indigenous people, and to testify in committees on those proposed bills, but not vote on the floor. Rich Holschuh has a legislative contact that he will be working with on this initiative.

**f. Sacred Site Protection**

A proposed Sacred Site Protection bill was proposed this year, but did not make it out of legislative committee. Commission members inquired if New Hampshire had a version of this bill either as existing law or as proposed legislation. Melody Brook stated that she will consult with the NH Commission to learn more.

Eugene Rich indicated that he would be interested in the response from NH since the Missisquoi tribe was recently gifted a piece of property in Derry, NH.

**g. NH Commission Follow-Up**

The commissioners agreed to invite their NH counterparts to a future Vermont meeting.

**h. Endangered Alphabets Project**

This topic was tabled until Tim Brookes arrived.

**i. Signage**

VTrans was consulted about incorporating an Abenaki greeting on the highway signs leading to Montpelier. Their response was that the additional wording on the sign would detract drivers' eyes from the road and therefore could not be included. Discussion

shifted to rest areas and the potential for including Abenaki signage and/or art in those publicly visited spaces.

**j. Echo Follow-Up**

Andrea Brett discussed with commission members the potential for the Indigenous community to have a display with accompanying voice over in a window space at ECHO. Discussion focused on best uses for the space. Andrea will follow-up with her contact.

**2. Status Report**

**a. CT River Hydro Re-Licensing**

Rich Holschuh reported that the re-licensing process is still on track. Progress continues on the Programmatic Agreement and Historic Property Management Program documents.

**b. VT Public Utilities Commission – Vermont Yankee**

Rich Holschuh reported that the proposed sale from Entergy to North Star Services for the de-commissioning of Vermont Yankee continues to move along. The last public input meeting with the Public Utility Commission was scheduled for April 12. Rich indicated that high level waste products will remain on site for the indefinite future.

**c. Report on Five Native Legislative Bills**

As covered previously, none of the legislative actions supported by the commission made it out of committee.

**d. Commission Priorities and Next Step Strategies**

Commissioners discussed developing a more strategic approach to future commission goals and legislative sessions. Ideas focused on supporting the Abenaki Cultural Regeneration Project, prioritization of commission and legislative goals, and better communicating the work of the Commission to outsiders.

**NEW BUSINESS**

**1. Representative Kiah Morris**

Representative Kiah Morris joined the meeting to discuss initiatives in State Government for which she would like to get support from the Native community:

**H.794 – Ethnic and Social Equity in Schools**

This act seeks the adoption of ethnic studies standards into Vermont's statewide educational standards and also to adopt a policy on ethnic and social equity in public schools and approved independent schools.

Representative Morris stated that this bill is gaining traction and could possibly be included into a final miscellaneous education bill this year. She also fielded questions from commissioners wondering if the bill would affect standards for homeschoolers.

Representative Morris indicated that statutorily they can only require public schools or schools that receive state funds to incorporate these policies. Commissioners also inquired if

## **DRAFT**

VCNAA April 11, 2018 minutes

Page 4

the committee was currently seeking testimony. Representative Morris indicated they are not currently seeking testimony, but there will likely be a joint committee public hearing on the topic soon.

### **S.116 – An Act Relating to the Mitigation of Systemic Racism**

This bill proposes to establish the Racial Justice Oversight Board to manage and oversee the implementation of racial justice reform across the State.

Representative Morris informed commission members that this bill will create a Chief Mitigation Officer who will collect and review data about people of color who have been hired by the state and either were fired or left on their own. This position would be supervised by the Human Rights Commission. Commissioners inquired if the Human Rights Commission is in support of this bill. Representative Morris indicated the Commission is in support.

Representative Morris also notified commission members of several vacancies on the Racial Disparities in the Criminal and Juvenile Justice System Advisory Panel and Vermont Criminal Justice Training Council.

### **3. Public Comment**

There were no public comments.

### **4. Announcements**

On April 26, 2018, the Lieutenant Governor will be presenting “A Dream from Standing Rock” as part of his 2018 Movie Series in the State House cafeteria.

Commission members had a recent tour of the State House with the State Curator and viewed the area designated to house Native art pieces.

Melody Brook reported that an Elnu student recently received a full scholarship to college.

The Burlington Airport will be putting in a Native arts display in 2018.

The Māori people come to the United States every year and meet with different Indigenous groups. This year they will be coming to Vermont.

The retired teachers association would like a Commission member to come speak to their group at their next meeting in September of this year.

**The meeting was adjourned at 3:50 P.M.**