

VERMONT
COMMISSION
ON
NATIVE
AMERICAN
AFFAIRS



COMMISSION
Daniel Coutu, Chair
Jeffrey Benay, Vice Chair
Doug Bent
Melody Walker Mackin
Pat Lamphere
Deanna Edwards
Open Seat
Open Seat
Open Seat

VCNAA MEETING MINUTES

DRAFT UNTIL APPROVED

January 8th, 2024

1:00 P.M. – 4:00 P.M.

Calvin Coolidge Conference Room, 6th Floor Davis Building,
National Life Drive, Montpelier, VT, and Virtually

Members present in-person: Dan Coutu, Jeff Benay

Members present virtually: Doug Bent, Melody Walker Mackin,
Pat Lamphere, Deanna Edwards

Guests attending in-person: Breanna Sheehan (VT Division for
Historic Preservation), Rich Holschuh (Elnu/Atowi)

Guests attending virtually: Christopher Roy (Anthropologist,
Philadelphia), Richard Witting (Historian, VT), Jane Barber
(Descendant, ally), Chief Shirly Hook (Koasek of the Koas), Katie
Stetler (VT Department of Health), Patrick Kinner (Center for
Behavioral Health Integration)

Meeting called to order at 1:12.

1. Commissioners and guests introduction and sign-in

Commissioners and guests introduced themselves, and Dan read aloud the Commission's enabling statute.

2. Changes to the Agenda

Commissioners took time to thank Rich for his time, dedication, and work on the Commission. Rich shared his thanks and love for the opportunity to serve the Commission and Elnu. He also shared his intention to stay involved in other ways. Other than this, there were no changes to the agenda.

3. Approval of November Minutes

The November 13, 2024 meeting minutes were approved by consensus.

4. Intention, Goal, or Priority Setting

Breanna reminded the Commissioners that they would have a guest speaker joining remotely around 2-2:30.

5. Election of Officers

A vote was held and by consensus Dan Coutu was elected Chair, and Jeff Benay was elected Vice Chair.

OLD BUSINESS

1. Act 182 (2022) Land Access & Opportunity Board report (Dan Coutu)

Dan reported that the Board has been actively involved in addressing the housing needs of those who are unhoused, especially during the winter. He also shared that the LAOB is working to grow its network across the state to understand who is working to address housing and homelessness in Vermont, what is being done, and what funding is available.

2. Act 142 (2022) Racial Justice Statistics Advisory Council (Breanna Sheehan)

Breanna shared that that Council is now meeting monthly and will be putting out its annual report in January.

3. Act 154 (2022) Environmental Justice Advisory Council

Rich did not have an update, but he did state that he would remain the VCNAAs' representative on the Council.

4. Act 128 (2022) VT Truth & Reconciliation Commission (Melody Mackin)

Melody reported the TRC has been very busy with truth telling sessions coming up. She shared that folks will be able to find the dates for two virtual and two in-person sessions on the [TRC website](#) in addition to 33 in-person office hours across the state. Additionally, she shared that that the hiring process for their third Commission is ongoing, and that they have two RFPs out for a Care Coordinator and a Marketing Coordinator.

5. Act 126 (2023) Community Resilience & Biodiversity Protection (30x30)

Rich did not have a formal update to share, but he stated that he plans to stay up-to-date and will keep the Commission informed. Discussion ensued around the definition of conservation in relation to different projects throughout the state.

6. Seventh Generation Curriculum Grant Committee report

Jeff reported that the last meeting with stakeholders was completed, and they have received some really useful feedback. They will be moving into the final phase of printing and finishing the website shortly with a roll out date coming soon.

7. 2024 VT State Health Assessment Data and Improvement Plan

Breanna shared that the Cost of Living working group has spent the past several months developing strategies to address the impact of the high cost of living in Vermont, and she will present on those strategies for feedback at the Commission's February meeting. Discussion ensued around how to ensure cross-collaboration during strategy implementation and the Director for Health Equity position.

8. Regional Planning Commission Training

Breanna reminded the Commission about the potential training and provided an update on its status. She shared that she would be having a meeting with the Chittenden County Regional Planning Commission soon for those who wanted to join and that she would take notes for those who could not.

9. Communication with the Legislature

Breanna provided an update on her outreach efforts to the Legislature including emails, one-on-one meetings, and a mailing list. She shared that she has received interest and positive responses from legislators so far and will continue to update the Commission on those efforts as they continue. She also shared that she is working on developing educational resources for the website to provide more in-depth information on the VCNA, the recognition process, the state-recognized tribes, and more.

NEW BUSINESS

1. Presentation on State Health Assessment Data

Katie Stetler from the Vermont Department of Health and Patrick Kinner from the Center for Behavioral Health Integration provided a presentation on the VT State Health Assessment data collection process and analysis with a focus on health data related to Indigenous communities in the state. Discussion ensued around stakeholder engagement, common themes and outcomes amongst impacted communities, data quality and collection challenges, and future data use and mitigation strategy implementation.

2. Tribal representative reports

- **Elnu:** Rich reported that Elnu had held a community Winter Solstice gathering in December and that they would be hosting a regalia workshop for tribal members in January. He also shared that Atowi would soon be started a traditional foods assessment project in Wantastegok to understand what has been there, what is there now, and how we interact with it. He hopes this could be a pilot project of other communities to take on and an opportunity to knowledge sharing.

- **Koasek:** Doug shared that they have been distributing squash, potatoes, and pumpkins to tribal and community members. He also shared that he and Chief Shirly were in New Mexico and looking forward to planting.
- **Missisquoi:** Pat shared that Alnobaiwi is going through a transition period, and that they are planning to refocus their efforts on Abenaki ceremony, communicating with the four recognized tribes, and giving back to the Abenaki community. The first thing they will be doing this year is a Forgiveness Moon ceremony later in the month, and all are invited with good thoughts. Jeff commended the work Alnobaiwi is doing, and Rich mentioned an upcoming virtual lecture with Marge Bruchac that is being hosted by Ethan Allen Homestead on January 19th.

Jeff shared that Missisquoi has been hosted some well attended basketmaking workshops, the next of which would be on the 18th and 19th of January. He also reported that the Parent Advisory Committee had been meeting and building relationships with local superintendents, and that they would be continuing to meet with different educator or social service administrators at every meeting. He urged all tribes to do this.

- **Nulhegan:** Dan reported that Nulhegan also had a well attended Solstice celebration and that they would be hosting snowsnake games later in the winter.

3. Announcements/Upcoming Events

- **January 19th** – [Ethan Allen Homestead Lecture Series: “Encountering Ndakiinna: Recovering Abenaki History in Vermont and New Hampshire”](#)
 - 2-3pm, free monthly lecture via Zoom
- **January 25th** – [Nulhegan Snow Snake Games](#)
 - 12-4pm, Nulhegan Educational and Cultural Center, 26 School Rd, Derby Line, VT
- **February 7th** – [MKIM Book Club: Becoming Kin](#)
 - 5-6pm, Via Zoom
- **February 15th** – [Snow Snake Games at MKIM](#)
 - 10-2pm, 18 Highlawn Rd, Warner, NH

STRATEGIC PLANNING

1. Commissioner Recruitment

Breanna opened up the floor to discuss possible recruitment strategies to fill the Commission’s three vacant seats. Discussion ensued around revising and clearly communicating expectations for incoming commissions, issues with the recruitment/application process, the implications and expectations of becoming a commissioner, how to best support incoming Commissioners, mapping community assets and needs, and connecting recruitment strategies to the community and the VCNAA’s enabling statute.

CLOSINGs

1. Final Thoughts

None.

2. Public Comment

None.

3. Meeting Adjourned

Motion to adjourn passed by consensus.