

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

February 12th, 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), Fred Wiseman
(Abenaki Health & Heritage), Michael Greenia (Abenaki
Missisquoi)

Guests attending virtually: Christopher Roy (Anthropologist,
Philadelphia), Richard Witting (Historian, VT), Jane Barber
(Descendant, ally), Shalini Suryanarayana (VT ORE), Jessica
Wisloski (School Librarian SBSB), Victoria MacLeod (Vermont),
Urmila Chhetri (CCRPC), Sarah Muskin (CCRPC), Anne Nelson
Stoner (CCRPC), Charlie Baker (CCRPC), Jeremiah King

Meeting called to order at 1:04.

1. Commissioners and guests introduction and sign-in

Commissioners and guests introduced themselves,

2. Changes to the Agenda

No changes to the agenda.

3. Approval of January Minutes

The January 8, 2024 meeting minutes were approved by consensus.

4. Intention, Goal, or Priority Setting

Dan reiterated the Commission's enabling statute.

OLD BUSINESS

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

Dan reported that there has been a lot of legislative work and outreach to plan a variety of activities across the state to improve conditions for marginalized peoples. If folks want to learn more or get involved, he suggested taking a look at the [LAOB's website](#) where all the information is posted.

2. Act 154 (2022) Environmental Justice Advisory Council

Rich did not have an update but shared that the Council and environmental justice more generally has taken a hit with the new administration. Discussion ensued about the need to continue to move the work forward and make cross connections.

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

Melody reported that all of the Commission's truth telling sessions and save the dates are posted on the [TRC website](#) in addition to 33 in-person office hours across the state. Additionally, she shared that an independent committee is in the process of the hiring their third Commissioner, and they hope to have more information by March 1st.

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

Rich did not have a formal update to share as much of their work is internal currently.

5. Seventh Generation Curriculum Grant Committee report

Jeff reported that the roll out date for the curriculum is May 8th, and the committee is currently working on what that roll out will look like. Discussion ensued around curriculum stakeholders and sources.

NEW BUSINESS

1. 18th Annual Report from Dr. Fred Wiseman

Dr. Wiseman shared reflections on his last four decades of work in and for the Abenaki community and his last several years of research in relation to the current political tensions with Canadian First Nations. Fred shared that more information on his research and recent publications can be found at the [Vermont Abenaki Artists Association website](#). Additionally, he reiterated his interest and willingness to reschedule his presentation on the Vermont Abenaki for the Abenaki Council of Odanak.

2. Presentation from Chittenden County Regional Planning Commission

Representatives from the Chittenden County Regional Planning Commission (CCRPC) provided an overview of their work, the Vermont regional planning process and regional

plans, and the impact of Act 181 (2024) on regional planning. Discussion ensued around Indigenous perspectives on land use, community engagement, and how the Commission could continue to be involved.

6. 2024 VT State Health Improvement Plan Implementation Strategies Presentation

Breanna provided a brief overview of the VT State Health Improvement Plan's proposed implementation strategies for addressing access to care, cost of living, housing, and a mental health & substance use in Vermont. Discussion ensued about how strategies align with other state entities and legislation and the reliability of proposed indicators.

7. Legislative Update

The Commission discussed Odanak First Nation's upcoming presentation at the Vermont Statehouse.

3. Tribal representative reports

- **Elnu:** Rich reported that Elnu's programming is in a lull given the winter, but that Chief Roger Longtoe Sheehan would be doing a storytelling session at Retreat Farms in Brattleboro on March 29th.

- **Koasek:** Doug did not have any updates.

- **Missisquoi:**

Michael shared that Missisquoi's food shelf has seen a big influx in use recently. They are now serving about 200 families (approx. 3000 ppl) a month. He reiterated that their food shelf is open to everyone, and that their program Circle of Courage is also open to anyone. He also shared that Missisquoi is continuing to do workshops including basketmaking and drumming, and that the Swanton library is going events for teens every other Friday.

Pat shared that Alnobaiwi had a small forgiveness moon ceremony, and that they have plans for more, but they are lacking human resources.

- **Nulhegan:** Dan reiterated that Nulhegan's food shelf is up and running and is open to anyone as well. He shared they have been serving about 400 families a month.
- Dr. Wiseman shared that the previous weekend, they have a well attended beadwork seminar discussing Vermont Abenaki Beadwork.

4. Announcements/Upcoming Events

- **March 2nd** – [Ancient Sea Peoples of the North Atlantic Webinar](#)
 - 2-5pm, via [Zoom](#)
- **March 15th** – [Maple Day at MKIM](#)
 - 10am-4pm, 18 Highlawn Rd, Warner, NH
- **March 22nd** – [MKIM Spring Social](#)

- 12pm-4pm, 18 Highlawn Rd, Warner, NH
- **March 29th – [Missisquoi Spaghetti Dinner Fundraiser](#)**
 - 4-6pm, Parish Hall, 65 Canada St, Swanton, VT
- **March 29th – [Winter Storytelling with Roger Longtoe Sheehan](#)**
 - 2-4pm, Retreat Farms, 45 Farmhouse Sq, Brattleboro, VT

STRATEGIC PLANNING

1. Commissioner Recruitment

The Commission discussed and provided feedback on interview questions for prospective Commissioners.

CLOSING

1. Final Thoughts

None.

2. Public Comment

Michael Greenia shared his intention to apply for the Commission.

3. Meeting Adjourned

Motion to adjourn passed by consensus.