

VERMONT  
COMMISSION  
ON  
NATIVE  
AMERICAN  
AFFAIRS



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

VCNAA MEETING MINUTES

DRAFT UNTIL APPROVED

September 11th, 2024

1:00 P.M. – 4:00 P.M.

Calvin Coolidge Conference Room  
6<sup>th</sup> Floor Davis Building, National Life  
Montpelier, VT, and Virtually

**Members present in-person:** Rich Holschuh, Dan Coutu, Doug Bent, Jeff Benay, Deanna Edwards

**Members present virtually:** Pat Lamphere

**Absent:** Melody Walker Mackin

**Guests attending in-person:** A.J. Ruben, Breanna Sheehan (Vermont Division for Historic Preservation), Chief Shirly Hook (Koasek of Koas)

**Guests attending virtually:** Elodie Reed (Vermont Public), Christopher Roy (Anthropologist, Philadelphia), Richard Witting

Meeting called to order at 1:08

**1. Commissioners and guests introduction and sign-in**

The guests introduced themselves.

**2. Changes to the Agenda**

Breanna requested a discussion on future Commission meeting locations. A brief discussion ensued, and Commissioners offered their preferences.

**3. Approval of April Minutes**

The June 12, 2024 meeting minutes were approved by consensus.

**4. Intention, Goal, or Priority Setting**

Breanna reminded Commissioners of the lengthy agenda and her interest in making sure there was time at the end of the meeting for a strategic planning discussion.

**5. Election of Officers**

A vote was held and by consensus Rich Holschuh was elected Chair, and Dan Coutu was elected Vice Chair. The Commission chose not to elect a secretary.

## **6. Public Meeting Law Update**

Breanna provided an overview of advisory bodies and non-advisory bodies and their obligations under public meeting law effective July 1<sup>st</sup>, 2024. A brief discussion was held to decide whether the Commission would be considered an advisory or non-advisory body. A motion was made to declare the Commission an advisory body and the motion passed by consensus.

## **OLD BUSINESS**

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

Dan walked the Commission through the LAOB's activities as outlined in an upcoming report. The report outlined their current and future priorities, projects, and coalition building efforts. Discussion ensued around the issues of affordable housing and homelessness in Abenaki communities and throughout Vermont and how to collect more data on the subject so that further action can be considered.

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

Breanna reminded the Commission of the purpose of the Division of Racial Justice Statistics and the role of the Racial Justice Statistics Advisory Council. She provided some updates from the first meeting of the RJSAC in August including the current work of the Division and the major priorities of the Council. Discussion ensued around the importance of accurate data collection for Indigenous communities in Vermont and how the work compared to that in other rural states.

### **3. Act 154 (2022) Environmental Justice Advisory Council**

Rich relayed that they have had one meeting since June and are still in an organizational stage. Rich shared that they will be putting out an RFP for a mapping tool. A brief discussion ensued about the limitations of census data in rural areas.

### **4. Act 174 (2020) "Vermont State Parks - Abenaki signage" status**

Breanna shared that Forest, Parks, & Rec is actively researching Abenaki place names throughout the state and has a running list of names with several being prioritized for new signage this fall. Rich added that information about the Abenaki place names will also be made available online when new signage is unveiled. Commissioners provided additional resources for place name research.

**5. Act 128 (2022) VT Truth & Reconciliation Commission -TRC (Melody Mackin)**

Melody was not present to provide an official update. Rich shared that the TRC has been working throughout the summer, and that they have recordings of their ongoing educational series available on their website. Dan noted their recent panel on the experiences of families of people with disabilities and that there are more panels to come. Commissioners discussed the common experiences shared across different impacted communities in Vermont.

**6. Act 33 (2021) VT Health Equity Advisory Commission**

The VCNAA needed to select a new representative to the HEAC. A motion was made to have Breanna represent the VCNAA and the motion passed by consensus.

**7. Act 126 (2023) Community Resilience & Biodiversity Protection (30x30) (10 min)**

Rich shared that they are still in the process of inventorying conserved land in Vermont, but the deadline to finish this process is coming up. Once they know how much land is currently conserved, they will be able to decide how to proceed. Relatedly, Commissioners noted the Vermont Statewide Housing Conference in November and the Vermont Conservation Conference in October.

**8. Seventh Generation Curriculum Grant Committee report (Jeff Benay)**

Jeff shared that the curriculum is moving along well and is now out for external review by community members. He added that they are reevaluating their roll out timeline to accommodate community feedback and that it will be available online and in print to make it as accessible as possible. Jeff asked the Commission to support and provide feedback on the roll out of the curriculum when the time came, and discussion ensued about the importance of this project and how the Commission could best support the roll out.

**NEW BUSINESS**

**1. 2024 VT State Health Assessment Data and Improvement Plan**

Breanna provided a brief overview of the VT State Health Assessment and their recruitment of members from impacted communities for working groups for the Improvement Plan. Due to limited time, further discussion on this topic was shelved for the Commission's October meeting.

**2. 250<sup>th</sup> Commission Update**

Breanna shared that she had yet to be officially appointed to the 250<sup>th</sup> Commission as the VCNAA's representative, but she had been in contact with the Commission's

administrator. Due to limited time, further updates and discussion on this topic were shelved for the Commission's October meeting.

### 3. Regional Planning Commission Training

Breanna updated the Commission on and gauged interest in a potential training with regional planning commissions across the state in the spring. The commission demonstrated interest in the idea and additional details.

### 4. VCNAA Website Update

Breanna provided a brief overview of updates to the Commission's website and Commissioner's shared their feedback.

### 5. Tribal representative reports

- **Elnu:** Rich shared that Archeologist R. Duncan Mathewson III is planning to donate his library/research materials related to his upcoming book on the Western Abenaki to be housing at their Tribal Center. They will host a grand opening for the library sometime next year.
- **Koasek:** Doug shared that the Tucker Mountain event in August had a large turnout and went very well. They are planning to do it again next year. He also shared that the garden did very well this year having produced several hundred pounds of squash and tomatoes and several dozen pounds of beans.
- **Missisquoi:** Jeff shared that the Circle of Courage after school program will be starting up again on 9/30. The program runs Monday, Wednesday, and Friday from 3-5:30 at 65 Canada St, Swanton, VT. He invited folks to stop by if they are in the area. It was also shared that the dates for Missisquoi's Powwow have been set for Memorial Day Weekend 2025.
- **Nulhegan:** Dan shared that Nulhegan's annual gathering had a large turnout and went very well.

### 6. Announcements/Upcoming Events

- **September 17th - [Vermont Arts & Culture Disaster and Resilience Network Day of Learning](#) in Barre, VT**
- **September 20<sup>th</sup> thru 22<sup>nd</sup> - [Atlal Workshop and Competition](#) in Addison, VT**
- **September 21<sup>st</sup> & 22<sup>nd</sup> – [Elnu Green Corn Gathering](#) in Brattleboro, VT**
  - The event will be hosted at the Elnu Tribal Center in Brattleboro VT and is free and open to all. If you plan to attend, please considering bringing a corn-based dish to share.
- **September 23<sup>rd</sup> thru 29<sup>th</sup> – [Alnobaiwi Dugout Canoe Project](#) in Swanton, VT**
  - The event will be led by members of the Missisquoi Abenaki Nation and the Nulhegan Band of The Coosuk Abenaki Nation, and hosted at Mac's Bend in Swanton, VT. Volunteers who would like to participate should contact David at Alnobaiwi.

- **October 1<sup>st</sup> – [Vermont Historical Society Research and Exhibition Gallery Opening in Barre, VT](#)**
  - The gallery will include over 200 American Abenaki objects loaned to VHS by the Abenaki Cultural Conservancy.
- **October 5<sup>th</sup> – [IPD Rocks! in Stowe, VT](#)**
  - The event will be hosted at The Current in Stowe, VT and admission is \$15 or free if you are Indigenous.
- **October 7<sup>th</sup> - [Sowing Seeds Conference in Randolph, VT](#)**
- **October 7<sup>th</sup> & 8<sup>th</sup> – [2024 Health Equity Summit](#) in South Burlington, VT**
- **November 14<sup>th</sup> – [Vermont Statewide Housing Conference](#) in South Burlington, VT**

## STRATEGIC PLANNING

### 1. Report: A Year in Review

Breanna provided an overview of the Commission’s work over the past year including advisory, advocacy, and outreach projects.

### 2. Report: Commissioner Goals and Vision

Breanna shared themes that she made note of from her interviews with Commissioner’s on their interests, goals, and vision for the Commission and its work.

### 3. Discussion: Planning for the Future

Breanna led a discussion around the purpose and use of strategic planning and gauged interest amongst the Commission for more formalized strategic planning sessions. The Commission demonstrated interest. Breanna will compile additional information on the process for the Commission and asked the Commissioners to reflect on their priorities for the next six months for further discussion at the Commission’s October meeting.

## CLOSING

### 1. Final Thoughts

None.

### 2. Public Comment

None.

### 3. Meeting Adjourned

Motion to adjourn passed by consensus.