



Commonwealth of Massachusetts
**EXECUTIVE OFFICE OF HOUSING &
LIVABLE COMMUNITIES
COMMISSION ON INDIAN AFFAIRS**

Maura T. Healey, Governor ♦ Kimberley Driscoll, Lieutenant Governor
Jennifer D. Maddox, Interim Secretary ♦ John Peters, Jr., Executive Director

**MINUTES OF THE VIRTUAL MEETING OF THE
COMMISSION ON INDIAN AFFAIRS**

Thursday, March 12, 2026 2:00 PM

Meeting held via Zoom, facilitated by Commissioner Gonzales

Commissioners Present: Rhonda Anderson, Tashanna Carter, Aaron Gonzales, Gail Hill, and Troy Phillips, Chairman, and Mike Wagner.

Staff: John "Jim" Peters, Executive Director; and Burne Stanley, Part-time Administrative Assistant.

Others: Numerous community members attended this virtual meeting.

1. Opening

Comm. Phillips called the meeting to order at 2:02 PM and offered greetings to all present. He then invited Comm. Carter to give the opening prayer. Following the prayer, Comm. Phillips conducted a roll call of Commissioners and staff.

2. Pocasset Tribal Council – Watuppa

Jim Peters provided an update on the status of the Watuppa land located at 275 Indian Town Road, Fall River, MA. He explained that it had long been assumed that the Commonwealth held title to the property in trust for Natives with lineage to the land. He reported that it was recently discovered that the land hasn't been held in trust for some time, contrary to prior understanding. As he reached out with a question to Kerry Chavez, the new Chairperson of the Pocasset Wampanoag Tribe, he was interrupted by Chief George Spring Buffalo, Chairman of the Pocasset Wampanoag Tribe of the Pokanoket Nation.

Chief Spring Buffalo requested that it be placed on the record that members of his Tribe (Pocasset Wampanoag Tribe of the Pokanoket Nation) had not been informed of any prior meetings regarding the Watuppa land. He asserted that the day's agenda is

unlawful and stated that the Commission on Indian Affairs (Commission) had no authority to bring this matter to an open meeting insisting that they are not going to discuss it as it's not the business of the Commission.

Additional statements and comments followed.

Chief Duane Yellow Feather Shepard, Tribal Elder of the Pocasset Wampanoag Tribe of the Pokanoket Nation, expressed similar concerns regarding the Watuppa land discussion. He stated that interactions involving Jim Peters have been nothing but conflict and controversy. He also voiced concerns about the leadership of the other Pocasset Tribe (Pocasset Wampanoag Tribe) stating that they have a white woman running the Tribe.

Daryl Jamieson, Vice Chairman, of the Pocasset Wampanoag Tribe of the Pokanoket Nation added that this is their business and has no place at this meeting. He welcomes the opportunity for all the Pocasset's to sit down together to discuss this matter noting that his tribal members have no problem sitting down with the others. Later in the discussion, he expressed his disappointment that we're all here arguing with each other. We should have all met beforehand to discuss this topic before it became public. He emphasized that everyone involved has a right to be at the table and to work together respectfully.

Miles Brady, Governance Consultant to Pocasset Tribal Council, asked to be heard. He thanked Executive Directors Peters and the Commission for allowing him to speak today. He reported that during a January 2026 meeting with officials from the Attorney General's Office and other state agencies, attendees were informed that the Watuppa land is in legal limbo although several options are available for them to consider. He noted that, at this time, there are two stakeholders involved: the Pocasset Tribe and the Mitchell family. In closing, he stated that they are asking the Commission to bring the two entities together, adding that the Pocasset Tribe is looking for an amicable resolution to this issue and is asking the Commission to mediate.

Alicia Mitchell asked, as a Perry descendant, the family that never left the land, why does the Commission reach out to the Tribe first and not the family? She then added that she wasn't aware of today's meeting.

Elli Page, Historian of the Pocasset Wampanoag Tribe, stated that the Tribal Council had asked her to read a letter of introduction. She then read the letter aloud for all to hear.

Comm. Phillips asked Jim and the Commissioners for their views on how the Commission should be involved in this matter.

Jim responded that the land should remain intact and that the descendants of the land should come together and decide what direction to go in and work together for the future. He added that the Commission is willing to assist with mediation or, if preferred, can recommend another entity to mediate.

Comm. Wagner stated that the different parties need to get together before the Commission gets involved. He strongly encouraged mediation and added that it's a difficult role for the Commission to sort out.

Comm. Hill agrees with Jim and Comm. Wagner and advised that they all get together and talk to one another and make sound decisions.

3. Mascot Legislation

Comm. Anderson provided a brief update on the legislation "*Prohibiting the Use of Native American Mascots by Public Schools in the Commonwealth.*" She noted that the bill has undergone numerous revisions over several legislative sessions. In the current session, both the House and Senate versions have been referred to the Ways and Means Committee for further consideration.

She also reported that according to the legislation, the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) will supply the Commission with a comprehensive list of all public schools in Massachusetts, including each school's athletic team names, logos, and mascots. Upon receipt of the list, the Commission will have three months to identify schools whose athletic team names, logos, or mascots refer to, represent, or are associated with Native Americans, including cultural elements or tribal references. She added that the Act to educate is incorporated in the bill...as it relates to culture and education.

She reported that they have now secured an eighth tribal letter of support for the bill. These letters, along with other Indigenous-related legislation, are publicly available at Mainindigenouagenda.org.

Comm. Anderson also offered a "*shout out*" to Senator Joanne "Jo" Comerford and Representative Brandy Fluker-Reid for their unwavering support of Indigenous issues and their continued leadership on this legislation.

4. Intertribal Gathering Discussion

Jim reported that the idea of hosting an Intertribal Gathering has been discussed for several years. He feels that such an event would provide an important opportunity for Commissioners and community members to get to know one another, discuss strategies, to do business, and help promote Native people across the state. He asked the Commissioners for an indication of their level of interest.

Comm. Phillips added that the Commission has previously discussed securing a venue for this type of gathering and expressed support for the idea. He suggested that the event could potentially take place in the Fall.

Comm. Wagner agreed with the concept and noted that the gathering would require a well-defined agenda

Comm. Hill expressed interest in incorporating organized workshops into the gathering. She suggested that conducting a survey could help identify what topics community members would most like to hear about.

Comm. Anderson agreed with the idea of holding such a gathering and emphasized that it would be a meaningful opportunity to get to know people and their communities, while also creating a safe space for sharing.

Comm. Phillips recapped the discussion emphasizing the need for an agenda from the communities, what's on their mind, what they want for their community. He added that funding will also be needed for the gathering.

5. 250th Online Presentations

Jim reported that he had planned to share a list of online presentations by Native Americans but did not have the list with him. He stated that he would email the information following the meeting.

6. Indigenous Health Summit

Cheryl Cromwell (Mashpee Wampanoag), Tribal and Indigenous Health Strategist at the Massachusetts Department of Public Health (DPH), provided an update on the upcoming Indigenous Health Summit, scheduled for Wednesday, April 15, 2026, in Marlborough, MA, from 9:00 AM to 5:00 PM. She shared that the Department is excited to bring together state and tribal officials to highlight the work DPH has undertaken to build a framework for tribal work.

She also mentioned that the Governor has issued a Proclamation declaring the first week of March as Native American Health Week. She noted that while the proclamation language is acceptable, she is concerned about what the next action steps are. She's interested in knowing how the state is going to address the disparities that are mentioned in the proclamation.

Cheryl also shared that she has an intern at DPH who is working on a project to develop a Tribal Community Health Profile Map. ... an interactive tool intended for anyone interested in collaborating with Tribal Nations, Historic Tribes, and Tribal-Serving Organizations. As part of this effort, the intern is scheduling interviews with tribes and tribal-serving organizations to create community health profiles. The project is expected to be completed in May 2026.

Comm. Philips adjourned the meeting at 3:30 PM.

Submitted by Burne Stanley and Jim Peters