



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

Maura T. Healey, Governor ♦ Kimberley Driscoll, Lieutenant Governor
Edward M. Augustus, Jr., Secretary ♦ John Peters, Jr., Executive Director

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

Monday, October 7, 2024 2:00 PM

Zoom was facilitated by Commissioner Gonzales

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

Staff: John “Jim” Peters, Executive Director; and Burne Stanley, part-time Administrative Assistant.

Community Members & Other Attendees (names from list of zoom participants):

Kym Ayala, Joe Bagley, Ella Blackowl, NAICOB; Nichol Brewer-Lowry, Kate Burgess, NCEL; Kerry Chavez, Tracy Claudio, VA Bedford; Deborah Twisting Breeze Copp, Pocasset Wampanoag; Tracy Eastman, Melissa Ferretti, Chairwoman, Herring Pond Wampanoag Tribe; Candia Flynn, Vice-Chair, NN Hassanamisco Tribe; Rae Gould, Thomas Green, Jonathan Guzman, Director EJ & Equity; Cheryl Holley, Andrei Jacobs, Brad Lopes, Melissa Miller, Wendy Pearl, DCR; Jean-Luc Pierite, Love Richardson, Heath Share of Oregon; Paul Singer, GBH News; Elizabeth Santana-Kiser, Elizabeth Solomon, Oleander Stone, Akuahah Wheaton, and Ray Williams.

Names from the list of zoom participants whose last names were not included: Brans, Chairwoman, Crystal, Diane2TVWze, iPhone, Peaceful, Penny’s iPhone, NJ, and Roaming.

Comm. Phillips called the meeting to order at 2:05 PM and offered a prayer in both the Nipmuc and the English languages. Following the prayer was a roll call of Commissioners and staff, all of whom were present except Comm. Tashanna Carter who joined us at 2:30 PM.

The first and only topic on the agenda was state recognition and the role of the Commission on Indian Affairs. Comm. Phillips opened the discussion by saying that the primary role of the Commission is to assist tribes and organizations not to approve tribes. He added that we have a list of tribes and organizations on our web page. It has become confusing to state agencies who are trying to identify the tribes that have a government-to-government relationship with the state.

Comm. Wagner added that in Executive Order 126, former Governor Dukakis identified three tribes that constitute a government-to-government relationship with the state.

He went on to say that:

- We have been asked by other state agencies to identify tribes so that they can establish working relationships with them as several have funding opportunities for tribes. We need to clarify this for those state agencies.
- The Commission will write a letter stating that there are three tribes that have a government-to-government relationship with the state - the Mashpee Wampanoag Indian Tribal Council; the Wampanoag Tribal Council of Gay Head; and the Hassanamisco Nipmuc Tribal Council.
- We can state that there are other tribes that can have different classes of relationships with the government. We need to establish criteria and recommend a process to the legislature to address this.
- We need to look at what other states are doing relative to state recognition and see what might work in Massachusetts for our communities.

With regards to state agencies reaching out to the Commission for information on tribes with government-to-government relationships, Comm. Anderson said it's important to bring into context that the Mass. Cultural Council has been working with the Commission to create tribal cultural councils that will provide funds for tribal governments to make grants to Native communities for projects. She added that it's also important that Native artisans have status to pass the Indian Arts and Crafts Act (IACA). There needs to be some recommendations on a process.

As the conversation about Executive Order 126 and a process for state tribal recognition resumed, several community members spoke and expressed their frustration.

- Melissa Ferretti, Chairwoman of the Herring Pond Wampanoag Tribe said that she is getting increasingly frustrated with having the executive order constantly being used as a weapon against the tribes that are not mentioned in the document. She said she doesn't feel that the executive order was created to give the tribes listed any more authority over the others. She added that the executive order is not a law.

- Elizabeth Solomon of the Massachusetts Tribe at Ponkapoag, said she feels disrespected and is frustrated with the increasing divisions between tribes. She said that the Commissioners are not affected by Executive Order 126 because they are already included in it. Her suggestion was that there be a separate commission set up to establish criteria with the people who are affected by the recommendations and that the process be carefully thought out so that those who have a stake in the process are considered.

Akuahah Wheaton, Nipmuc, offered some guiding points on government-to-government relationships

- Any band or tribe that wants to have a relationship with the state should be involved in the process.

There is a starting point:

- Go back in history
- Research the Massachusetts bands and tribes from 1620. Look at the Earle Report of 1859 and the Briggs Report.
- Any bands or tribes with no tribal governments, help them organize a government.

She mentioned that she has information on the tribes/bands and is willing to share it. She listed for the Nipmucs: Hassanamisco Tribe; Chaubunagungamaug Tribe; and Natick Tribe. She suggested that there be a representative from each tribe and band and over time meet and make a list of the other tribes.

Comm. Wagner said that when he started off the conversation naming the three tribes with government relationships with the state, he used to the language in the Executive Order 126 – Mashpee, Aquinnah, and Nipmuc. He emphasized that Nipmuc referred to “Hassanamisco” as the Nipmuc Nation is not a historic tribe.

Love Richardson, Nipmuc, who works at Health Share of Oregon as a Tribal Relations Strategist, mentioned that she will be attending and presenting at the Tribal and Indigenous Health Summit in Norwood, MA on Tuesday, October 15th. While she lives and works in Oregon, she feels that her presentation will elevate the Massachusetts tribes. As tribal liaison of the Nipmuc Nation-Hassanamisco Indian Tribe, she also brought up a letter that Comm. Phillips wrote several years ago for Chief Cheryl Holley regarding the Hassanamisco Tribe. Her issue is.... if the Commission doesn't have the authority to recognize tribes, why did Comm. Phillips state in the letter that the Commission acknowledges the Hassanamisco Indian Tribe (also known as the Hassanamisco Nipmuc Band) as the governing tribe of the Nipmuc. She asked that the Commissioners please discuss the letter in the executive session and get back to the

Nipmuc/k people as to the process and authority of the letter written by Comm. Phillips.

Comm. Philips adjourned the meeting at 3:35 PM and then the Commissioners and staff went into executive session.

Submitted by Burne Stanley and Jim Peters

Executive Session summary

With regards to the list of tribes on our web page, Comm. Wagner suggested that we get rid of it for the short term as it's causing confusion with state agencies and others who visit the page. He talked about drafting a letter in response to state agencies wanting to know what tribes in Massachusetts have a government-to-government relationship with the state. After it is drafted, he will share it with the rest of the Commissioners for edits, etc.

With regards to our meetings, Comm. Phillips suggested that moving forward, there be a three-minute time limit for people to speak. Comm. Gonzales, who operates zoom for our meetings, said he will update his zoom features so that it will show a timer.

Jim mentioned that there are state agencies that have criteria for their funding because some of the funds they receive come from federal sources and they have to adhere to the requirements. That's the reason they are looking for Massachusetts tribes that have a government-to-government relationship with the state.

Comm. Anderson brought up the issue of the letter that Comm. Phillips sent Chief Cheryll Holley about the Hassanamisco Tribe. She feels that the problem was that Jim, as executive director, should have signed it as a state employee. The letter basically reiterates what's in Executive Order 126.

The executive session ended at 4:02 PM.