



Commonwealth of Massachusetts  
**DEPARTMENT OF HOUSING &  
COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT  
COMMISSION ON INDIAN AFFAIRS**

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

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

Friday, January 27, 2023 3:30 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): Rachel Bayliss, Ella Blackowl, NAICOB; Nicole Brewer-Lowry, Tracy Claudio, Cheryl Cromwell, DPH; Tracy Eastman, Melissa, Ferretti, Chairwoman, Herring Pond Wampanoag Tribe; Nicole Friederichs, Suffolk University Law School; Penny Gamble-Williams, Thomas Green, Raquel Halsey, Cheryll Holley, Kitten Hunt, Bishop Jordan, Nehemiah Jordan, Amira Madison, Ellie Page, Jon Patton, Mass DCR; Gino Roaming Buffalo, Duane Shepard, Elizabeth Solomon, Jason Vickers, Jennifer Vickers, Brittney Walley, Akuahah Wheaton, and Ray Williams.

Names from the list of zoom participants whose last names were not included: EB, Candia, Cassie, Fran, Marcus, and Nees.

Comm. Phillips called the meeting to order at 3:35 PM. He opened the virtual meeting with a prayer and then a roll call of the Commissioners. All were present.

**1. Discussion on State Recognition Bills: Indian Arts and Crafts vs General State Recognition**

At the last meeting of the Commission in 2022, it was agreed among the majority of the Commissioners, that rather than file a bill before the state legislature seeking state tribal

recognition, it was best to pursue a different avenue and address a more immediate problem relative to Indian arts and crafts in the Commonwealth. After that meeting, Comm. Anderson reported that she submitted language to Senator Jo Comerford on what will be a Proclamation recognizing the rights of members from specific Massachusetts tribes, to sell Indian Arts & Crafts and to be able to say they are “Indian-made.” She is now waiting to hear back from the Senator.

Melissa Ferretti, Chairwoman of the Herring Pond Wampanoag Tribe, raised some concern that the bill or proclamation might inhibit other tribal rights in the future. She was assured by Comm. Phillips that the proclamation is limited to the sale of Indian arts and crafts by tribal members and will not affect or interfere with seeking any other rights or benefits under the laws of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts.

A question for clarification arose by Elizabeth Solomon of the Massachusett Tribe at Ponkapoag. She asked if the Commission is saying that a tribal member needs to be from a federally or state recognized tribe in order to sell and say that their arts and crafts are Native-made?

Chief Cheryll Holly of the Hassanamisco Nipmuc Band responded that if the artist is not federally recognized that in the federal regulations (C.F.R. – Code of Federal Regulations) there are other options that include:

You can be from a state tribe that was recognized legislatively,  
You can be recognized by a state agency with powers of state recognition, or  
You can be a member of an Arts & Crafts cooperative.

She then asked that if the Commission is not going to put forth legislation and opt for a proclamation, will the proclamation be sufficient for the federal arts and crafts regulations? Comm. Anderson responded that Senator Comerford and others are discussing the best strategy and approach and the Senator feels that a proclamation will be sufficient.

## **2. Discussion on Truth and Reconciliation**

Nicole Friederichs is a Practitioner-in-Residence at Suffolk University Law School in Boston. She teaches the Human Rights and Indigenous Peoples Clinic. She and Comm. Anderson have been working together on a model for a Truth and Reconciliation Commission in Massachusetts. It will be a means to continue a conversation with tribes and state government officials on land issues, resources, and state recognition. Ms. Friederichs has brainstormed with Comm. Anderson and others to bring in a panel of

speakers who will share their experiences on this issue. So far, three are confirmed. They include:

- Christina Snider of California who serves as the Secretary of Tribal Affairs and leads the Truth & Healing Council.
- Maria Girouard, a member of the Maine Wabanaki-State Child Welfare Truth & Reconciliation Commission
- Robert Innis, Associate Professor at McMaster University and Chair of the Indigenous Studies Department.

In April 2023, all will come to Boston and sit on this impressive one-day panel for a discussion on their shared experiences. A date of April 11<sup>th</sup> has been proposed but is not definite yet. Ms. Friederichs will send an e-mail blast when the date is confirmed.

Massachusetts state officials will be invited as well as the Native communities. It is hoped that Governor Healey or members of her staff will come to listen.

Comm. Wagner asked what happens after the seminar. Ms. Friederichs said a planning meeting will be held before the seminar. The Commissioners should share topics on what they expect from the panel discussions. The goal is to hear about the process to create a dialog with Native communities and state officials. Comm. Anderson added that it's an opportunity to come together to hear from the panelist on their experiences, their purposes and results from being involved with a Truth and Reconciliation Commission. She would like to have tribal representatives and leaders help make it a successful event as their input is needed. She added that we need government officials to build relationships with tribes and tribal leaders as this is a statewide, multi-year process. It is hoped that this is the beginning of real discussions and that more meetings will be held.

### **3. Status on State Seal & Motto Commission**

Jim Peters stated that the process of appointing members and holding meetings started slow. And before any significant or meaningful progress was made, time ran out. Members are now waiting to see if the State Seal & Motto Commission will continue so that they can conclude their work. The House of Representatives voted on and passed an extension that was filed but we're unsure what happened in the senate. Jim asked members who were present at today's meeting, that sit on the State Seal Motto Commission, if they have any updates. Brittney Walley said she hasn't heard anything. Elizabeth Solomon gave a brief update about what she knows. She said that one of the first things voted on is that the state should completely redesign the flag. Some members of the State Seal & Motto Commission felt that there should be no human

figure on the flag while others disagreed. She feels that there needs to be broader input from the communities at large....non-Native and Native alike. She concluded by saying that there is more work to do as there wasn't enough time to work through everything that needed to be done. Mr. Peters said he hopes that when the new legislative session begins that the legislature will vote to give more time and extend the work of the State Seal & Motto Commission.

#### **4. Mascot Bill**

Jim Peters stated that there's not a lot of support in the legislature for this bill. Comm. Anderson said she is working on it and is trying to get new names of legislative supporters. She said right now they have a great senator behind the bill (in the Senate) but to get more support, the House of Representatives needs to co-sponsor the bill.

Jean-Luc Pierite, President of the North American Indian Center of Boston (NAICOB) gave the bill number for the mascot bill: HD 3026 / SD 857: An Act prohibiting the use of Native American mascots by public schools in the Commonwealth.

He mentioned that there are four other bills that are part of the Massachusetts Legislative Agenda. They are:

- HD 468 / SD 268: An Act establishing an Indigenous Peoples Day.
- HD 2237 / SD 387: An act relative to celebrating and teaching Native American cultures and history.
- HD 932 / SD 1826: An Act providing for the creation of a permanent commission relative to the education of American Indian and Alaska Native residents of the Commonwealth.
- HD 1611 / SD 1410: An Act to protect Native American Heritage.

He said that all five bills have passed the joint committee in previous sessions. He left the URL (<http://mainindigenousagenda.org>) to the information in the chat encouraging attendees to urge their state legislators to co-sponsor the bills.

#### **5. United States 250th Anniversary - Revolutionary War: National Park Service and Commonwealth of MA**

Jim Peters informed us that in 2026 there will be a big celebration for the founding of the United States. In a bill filed by the Revolutionary War Committee it mentions involving the underserved communities. He has been meeting and talking with them about the overall commemoration. He said that there are different view from the Native communities.

Jim has been invited to sit on the Committee for Diversity and Inclusion. They have talked about what kind of presentations can be done. They will raise funds to pay Native presenters. He said that 'Our Story' is very different from theirs and needs to be told. He will keep us informed as things develop.

## **6. Retirement:**

Jim Peters informed everyone that he is seriously thinking about retiring this year. It could be June or later. The Department will go through its official process of announcing the position and use its hiring policy and procedure. The community can suggest people to recommend to the Department. In the past, the Commission has had a part in recommending candidates. Jim commented that his work at the Commission has been a rewarding journey in some respects.

A number of attendees offered their congratulation. Some can't believe he might retire. Many said that they see that his retirement won't preclude him continuing his involvement in Native affairs locally and across the state.

Since there was still time left before adjournment, Comm. Phillips opened up the floor to those who had comments or information to share.

Cheryl Cromwell spoke. She introduced herself as a member of the Mashpee Wampanoag Tribe and a new hire at the Dept. of Public Health. She represents her tribe on health care issues. She is working on data on tribes and Indigenous communities. She mentioned that she was formerly employed with Health Resources in Action (HRA) where she worked with the Chappaquiddick, Herring Pond, and Ohketeah Cultural Center.

Tracy Claudio introduced herself. She works for the Dept. of Veteran's Affairs in Bedford, MA and wants to be a resource for government Indian resources, Indian Health Services, etc. Tracy is also on the Board of Directors for Disabled American Veterans, District 4. She is a good resource for veterans who are in need of information or services.

Amira Madison, Aquinnah Wampanoag, introduced herself. She currently works for the City of Boston and is the liaison between the City and the Natives who live in the city. Her interest is in how to create a position for the future.

Jean-Luc Pierite gave an update from the North American Indian Center of Boston (NAICOB). He said they participated in the process of selecting three Natives for the

1965 Freedom Plaza Monument on Boston Commons. They are: Shirley Mills, Wamsutta, and Anna Mae Aquash.

The meeting adjourned at 4:58 PM.

Submitted by Burne Stanley and Jim Peters