

SMA Directors' Meeting Minutes
November 20, 2024
Via Zoom
7:00 pm

In attendance: Directors Russ Pinizzotto, Mike Simmons, David Gay, Jeremy Wright, Bob Dodge, Howie Marshall, Paul Howell, Carson Hanrahan and Rob Burgess. Also in attendance were members Anne Dobriko, Mike Green, George Bokinsky and new member Jenna Buckingham. A quorum was present.

The minutes of the October 16, 2024 meeting were approved, with an amendment by Howie Marshall: the Harpswell Heritage Land Trust indicated it would like to continue these joint star parties in future years but not necessarily do more than one per year.

Follow-Up on Action Items and Committee Reports:

Program Committee: Russ

Russ reviewed scheduled speakers:

- December 5 – Fe McBride, Professor of Astronomy, Bowdoin College – cosmic rays, neutrinos and multi-messenger observing
- January 2 – member short talks on observing tips for those new to astronomy. Russ will send an email to the membership soliciting topics to cover and speakers to make short presentations.
- February 6 – tentative: Elizabeth Kessler, Stanford University – Hubble images compared to the sublime celestial paintings of the late 1800's.

Survey Results: Carson

Discussion ensued on follow up to survey results on creating small specialty groups within the club including Astrophotography, AL programs, Beginner help, Solar observing and Citizen Science participation. Jeremy inquired if we could set up email subgroups for those who wanted to participate. **ACTION ITEM:** Select “champions” for each of these categories who would be responsible for organizing and administering the groups. Russ volunteered to lead AL Observing Programs and reported he and David Crocker, Jon Wallace and Ron Thompson are setting up an email list for those interested in solar observing. Anne stressed that it was important that members are kept apprised of these developments to know that the club is being responsive after conducting a survey. Rob suggested that a president's newsletter or blog might be a good addition to club activities (the website supports blogs). Only about one third of the club attend monthly meetings so most members are not aware of activities being pursued by the club.

Outreach Committee: Carson, Mike and Anne Dobriko

- Clare Harrington – MSAD 51 (Cumb./No Yar) – April 2025 based on discussion with Carson
- November 16 and rain date Nov 23 star party at Bug Light cancelled due to weather

- December: possible events include a joint program with Southworth Planetarium at the So Portland tree lighting ceremony in Mill Park; possible star party with about 80 Seventh graders at Falmouth Middle School on Dec 3. Details of both are being explored.
- **Corporate Star Party requests:** Russ and Mike provided their recommendations on how to respond to corporate star party requests. Their work included finding examples of programs offered by other clubs:
 1. \$1,000 providing three astronomers with scopes and laser tour
 2. \$200 for each additional scope
 3. \$500 if the event is cancelled by requester
 4. \$250 minimum if event is cancelled due to weather
 5. \$750 for indoor Stellarium-type presentation
 6. Roster of volunteers willing to participate will need to be developed, as well as a coordinated program for volunteers to present
 7. Mileage and other out-of-pocket expenses of volunteers to be reimbursed out of fee paid to club; remainder of funds to club
 8. Tab will be added to website to solicit interest
 9. Rob will reconnect with Navitour regarding this new club offering
- Rob reported on three small events where he would represent the club: a Teens to Trails fundraiser at Flight Deck Brewing on 11/20; a talk to an astronomy group in VT (Night Owls club) that developed from the Maine Space 2030 Conference; and the Dark Sky Maine Virtual Star Party on 12/19/24 where he would speak about astrotourism.

Dark Sky Committee: Rob, Howie, Jeremy

- Rob reported that Dark Sky International recently released its “Principles of Responsible Astrotourism” developed in concert with a group in So. Africa and Namibia (leaders in this field). As we promote this concept in Maine these will be helpful. He also noted that DSI has developed a revised model lighting ordinance. Finally, he noted he attended several hours of the annual “Under One Sky” 24-hour virtual meeting of Dark Sky International where efforts to control and mitigate light pollution were discussed by participants from six continents. Recordings of the proceedings are available online at darksky.org

Membership Committee: David

- David reported that eight new members have joined in the month of November, bringing total membership to 109, the highest it has ever been. Four of the eight new members were women.
- David and Rob will be working on the membership renewal process for 2025.
- **ACTION ITEM:** Paul previously raised the idea of again offering club swag. Paul noted that Geiger Brothers, 4 Imprint and Vista Print all offered a variety of products that could be embroidered with our SMA logo. Unless we find flexibility from the vendor for a broader offering of clothing in various styles, colors and sizes, it was decided to initially limit our offering to ball caps and knit hats. Paul and David will review options and report back.
- **ACTION ITEM:** A new member inquiry as to a multi-year membership option was discussed but not adopted as it added more recordkeeping requirements.

- **ACTION ITEM:** David reported that all new members' membership data included a home town, better enabling the club to reach out to members in a particular area for events or to solicit volunteers.
- There was follow-up discussion about seeking to raise the number of women members in the club. While there was full agreement that having more women members in the club would be a good thing, how to actually encourage that remained elusive. In the short term it was agreed that continuing to maintain a warm and supported welcome to the club, for all members, including women members, would be the best approach. Programs recognizing and celebrating contributions to astronomy by women should also be a deliberate part of our programming.

Equipment Committee: Jeremy and Dean

- Jeremy and Dean started the laborious process of evaluating all the equipment the club has for sale to ensure it was in good working order and had the necessary components. Hand controllers for some of the Meade instruments have proven elusive and warrant further digging in the shed. Once an item has been checked out it will be photographed and put on our website for sale, followed by postings on platforms such as Cloudy Nights and Astromart. Jeremy indicated that some of the equipment is old and is of little value and will be scrapped.
- **ACTION ITEM:** There was discussion about how to respond to inquiries to our website by non-members seeking help with equipment, in some cases requesting house calls. It was agreed to continue to direct those inquirers to come early to one of our star parties where assistance could be provided.

Treasurer's Report/Finance Committee: Bob

- With new memberships and proceeds from our equipment sales our checking account balance was \$10,724.26. Our endowment fund balance was \$10,252.29.
- **ACTION ITEM:** Mike offered his expertise as an investment advisor to generally explain how an investment policy should be developed. Mike stated that we need to clearly define the purpose of the endowment and that the goal should be to not touch the corpus but should live off the earnings it generates. Mike provided a sample Endowment Policy that the directors will take up at a future meeting. Our CD does not mature until May 2025 so we cannot move funds without a penalty. Mike suggested that these funds could then be redeployed into three or four diversified mutual funds that would generate greater earnings. He said endowment funds should never be invested in cash assets. Mike also suggested we look into promoting year-end giving that could include donations of cash or other assets. As a 501(c)(3) we could even be the recipient of Required Minimum Distributions from 401(k) plans that would offer some tax advantages to the donor. The Board was very grateful to Mike for his expertise and direction.

Executive Committee: Rob, Bob, Russ

- ACTION ITEM: Rob asked the board to consider the current committee structure with fresh eyes to ensure we are well organized and covering all the necessary tasks of running a successful astronomy club. He also asked all board members to look at their current committee assignments to see if they could do more, or would like to work on a different committee.

The meeting ended about 9:00 p.m.

Submitted by
Rob Burgess

Next Directors' Meetings (all on Wednesdays at 7p.m. via Zoom):

- **Dec 18**
- **Jan 15**
- **Feb 19**
- **Mar 19**