

SMA Directors' Meeting Minutes

February 21, 2024

Via Zoom

7:00 pm

In attendance: Directors Bob Dodge, Al DiSabatino, Carson Hanrahan, Jeremy Wright, Russ Pinizzotto, Ara Jerahian and Rob Burgess and club members David Gay, George Bokinsky and David Crocker. A quorum was present.

The minutes of the January 18, 2024 meeting were approved.

Follow-Up on Action Items and Committee Reports:

Program Committee: Russ and Maame

- Rob asked for a discussion on whether our monthly meetings were too esoteric for new members. Carson expressed concern that when new people join a club they go there for help and that our monthly programs may not address that need. Rob and Russ noted that our March 2023 with the "Planetarium Lady" covered some basic material and that our past "So Santa Brought You a Telescope! Now What?" covered basics as well. However, it was agreed that perhaps two recurring programs a year, such as March and September, covering some basics of star gazing, using star charts or planetarium software, star hopping, binocular astronomy, etc. could be promoted and advertised to newbies so they knew which meetings might be most helpful to them.
- Russ reviewed upcoming programs: Ara on astrophotography on March 7 and Philippe Reekie from the Harvard College Observatory on "Evidence of Life in Extraterrestrial salts?" on April 4 were set. Russ has qualified us to be able to get NASA speakers through NSN and we will seek to get someone to speak about the Deep Space Network. We could also ask Greg Shanos to share his trip to totality in Texas on April 8. Russ also has asked Larry Esposito to talk about planetary rings.
- Rob will continue to reach out to Spirit Aero Systems in Biddeford to discuss their role in supplying heat resistant materials for planetary missions.

Outreach Committee: Carson

- There was a brief follow-on discussion regarding the club survey indicating weather and distance were the two inhibitors to more club participation at events. Consequently, the club will be looking for more venues in the greater Portland area for star parties to balance out activities in Brunswick. Carson reminded the Board that the comments submitted with the survey conveyed much useful information beyond what the survey answers revealed. Most respondents said they planned to attend a club event in 2024. We had a 45% response rate on the survey. Thanks to Carson for generating, administering and analyzing the survey.
- Jeremy offered that affiliating with established organizations in the area can provide a venue and an audience and that efforts in the greater Portland area should be pursued through local land trusts or similar organizations. It was noted that each of the communities around Portland has a local land trust, among other non-profits, environmental, etc. groups.

- Rob said he would reach out to the Brunswick Topsham Land Trust, the Maine Coast Heritage Trust and Maine's First Ship, to invite joint events in 2024. These organizations all requested star parties in 2023 we couldn't accommodate. This was an **ACTION ITEM**.
- Other outreach events, sought by third parties or scheduled by or through the club:
 - Freeport Women's Club – winter stargazing – Jan 19, 2 pm – Russ
 - Maine Senior College Winter Wisdom program – Light Pollution – Feb 14 – Rob
 - Adaptive Outdoor Education Center – light pollution talk – mid Mar – Rob
 - Clare Harrington – MSAD 51 (Cumberland/No. Yarmouth) – fall 2024 for 180 students
 - Harrison, ME public library – talk in March, TBD, on stars, planets and eclipse – for children and families – Chris Parent
 - Falmouth and Cumberland Libraries – eclipse talks, dates TBD – Ron Thompson
 - USM Garden Club, Sabattus – seeking volunteer for speaker
 - Space Day Maine, May 3, 2024 – Greeley Jr High – 840 students – many SMA volunteers as speakers, demonstrators, sought.
 - Ara reported that the observatory project at Maine Coast Waldorf School appears to have died on the vine. Enthusiasm for the project remains high in the school and faculty but there appeared to be insurmountable problems with the Town of Freeport over permitting for such a project.

Dark Sky Committee: Rob, Howie, Jeremy and Paul Howell

- Rob reported that the Land Use Planning Commission recently voted to deny the request to rezone the area around Pickett Mountain for mining.
- In Howie's absence there was no update on Mitchell Field in Harpswell.
- Jeremy provided a great Google Maps tool for highlighting the location of our recommended stargazing sites in our club footprint. A few more suggested sites were added in the meeting and the final version will be submitted to Kevin to upload to our webpage. This was an **ACTION ITEM**. Jeremy also suggested that we needed a tab dedicated to dark skies on our webpage. Rob offered to put together some Dark Sky International information on sensible outdoor lighting standards.
- Rob reported that he continues to participate in discussions about modifying Dark Sky Maine's board structure and integration into the astronomy and environmental landscape. He highlighted the recent ornamental lighting decision made by Maine DOT on the Penobscot Narrows Bridge in Bucksport that is highly light polluting. DSM has protested but it was too late. This is an illustration of why DSM needs to expand its network to become aware of these kinds of decisions before they are hard baked.
- Rob reported on discussions with Dr. Elizabeth Stone, DVM, of Freeport about a birding group proposing to use Community-based social marketing technique to galvanize commitment and funding. This new process may have value to SMA in the future.
- Rob prepared a proposed gubernatorial Proclamation about International Dark Sky Week and submitted it to the Governor's Office on behalf of SMA and DSM.

Membership Committee: Al and Kevin

- A long-pending **ACTION ITEM** on whether or not to create a buddy system for new members as one way to possibly reduce attrition in new members was discussed and rejected. It was determined that between the communications from our Membership chair and the follow up by Club President there's a fairly warm welcome provided to each new member. We will emphasize newbie programs and the value of coming to club star parties.
- Al reported that membership peaked at 106 at this time. However, approximately 30 of these members have not renewed and will be dropped from our roster at the end of February. Al has sent two reminders. Rob will send one final notice encouraging those thirty to renew. This level of member fall-off is similar to what was experienced at the beginning of 2023.

Equipment Committee: Ara & Kevin

- Jeremy reported he had all the equipment donated from NH and recommended those assets be sold at the Club Open House. The club needs to choose a date and establish what is to be sold, with prices.

In previous conversations it was suggested that a work session occur at Neptune Drive to install dew rings, photograph lending program telescopes and prepare materials for sale.

Treasurer's Report/Finance Committee: Bob

- Bob reported that as of 2/21/24 the club had \$19,569.95 in its account, the highest we have ever had, recently boosted by membership renewals. Three other deposits have posted on Stripe but have yet to be transferred into our account. The Board approved the recommended transfer of \$10,000 of club funds into a CD at Bangor Savings Bank that would become the basis for a club endowment fund.
- The Board approved a \$100 donation to Dark Sky Maine in honor of our deceased member, Earl Raymond.

Executive Committee: Rob, Ara, Bob, Russ

- **CARRY OVER ACTION ITEM:** The director bios and pictures need to be uploaded to the website. Russ has promised a picture (or one of Alfred E. Newman will be substituted 😊).
- Bob and Howie, serving as a Nominating Committee, report that they have reached out to several possible candidates and have received positive interest by most. They expect to have a slate of three replacement candidates for the Annual Meeting on April 4.

Other: The Board supported the idea of an Open House on 4/27 or 5/4. The Board recommended to proceed with a date and to buy or rent tents to provide coverage in the event of inclement weather.

The meeting ended about 8:40 p.m.

Submitted by
Rob Burgess

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

- **Mar 20**

- **Club Annual Meeting (April 4)**
- **Apr 17**
- **May 15**
- **Jun 19**