

Minutes of the Morris Museum Astronomical Society's Board of Directors Meeting, August 17th 2020

Note: Because of the Coronavirus Pandemic and the consequences of that, this meeting was held *via* conference call

Meeting called to order at 7:00 PM by AP

Attendees: Anthony Pisano (AP) President and Publication Committee chair

Paul Blass (PB) Secretary

Bob Coccaro (BC) Program Chair

Joe Molnar (JM) Outreach chair

Ron Russo (RR) Rule and Credential Committee chair

Cleveland Johnson (CJ) Morris Museum liaison

Secretary: Minutes of the previous meeting had already been e-mailed to all participants and were accepted.

Rule & Credential Committee:

The revised MMAS Constitution had been approved by the Board at the previous meeting and included in the Heavenly Herald for ratification by the general membership. AP reported that he'd received zero responses to date.

Silence \neq approval, so we remain under the old Constitution.

Treasurer's report:

The Treasurer was not in attendance. AP doubted there have been any significant changes in our finances since we've had neither income nor expenses since the previous meeting. AP will post the Treasurer's report as soon as it's available.

Old business:

None

New business:

The summer picnic was cancelled. UACNJ (United Astronomy Clubs of New Jersey) received permission from the State to resume lectures at Jenny Jump (subject to masks, social distancing and advance-reservation-required) but none of the member organizations expressed any enthusiasm for the picnic.

Bill Eberly, our liaison to UACNJ, has announced his desire to retire from that post – though he will remain a member of the MMAS. We'll send him a "thank you" for his service. Did anyone want to replace him? No (virtual) hands were raised. RR gave a qualified "maybe" if no one else from the general membership steps up.

The question should be included in the next Heavenly Herald. Along with a reminder to vote on the Constitution.

The next issue of the Herald is scheduled for late September, but that may be moved up if our meeting schedule is changed. More details on that below.

There have been no Outreach sessions since the previous meeting. Two are still scheduled for September and October but their prospects are small. Schools and libraries keep cancelling; no one wants to infect students. JM is keeping abreast of the situation, contacting organizations at least two weeks in advance.

Considerations for when Outreach does resume. BC pointed out the coronavirus can be spread through the eyes, not just through the nose and mouth. Attendees will be, rightfully, reluctant to press their faces against the eyepiece of a 'scope. Disinfecting between viewers is a possibility, but a better option would be to affix a smartphone to the telescope. We apparently own a bracket which will do just that. The image could then be viewed on other phones or on larger monitors. This is an **excellent** idea and one which shouldn't have required Covid-19 to make us think of it. No professional astronomer has peered into a telescope in decades. In addition to letting more people watch at once, CCDs are more sensitive than human eyes. We'll work on implementing this.

AP reports that Google has changed the requirements for websites which they host. Which includes the MMAS site. AP does not approve of the changes, but it is what it is and he'll begin modifying our pages.

Future programs:

The Morris Museum has reopened. But attendance is down about 80% relative to this time a year ago. They've had to lay off staff and, most important from our perspective, the Museum is no longer open Thursday evenings.

We discussed where that leaves us. The Rock and Mineral Club has gone on-line. That's a possibility. Physical meetings are still seen as preferable – provided we stay within quarantine restrictions. There has to be sufficient room for social distancing and the Museum has to disinfect everything afterwards. That's a significant expense for them.

After considering many possibilities, including outdoor gatherings, we concluded our best venue would be the “anteroom” behind the Museum's front desk but before the entrance to the Bickford Theater.

It is reasonably large and can be blocked off from the general public. Note: meetings must be held during the Museum's regular hours to avoid additional costs. Our meetings are normally “open” but we don't want over-crowding. A “doorman” might still admit the curious is there's room.

The chief downside is the area is well-lit and cannot be darkened for projections.

Since evenings are out, the best time seems to be Saturdays as 11:30 AM. Specifically, the Saturday following our usual Thursday evening time.

CJ will check with the Museum to confirm they're OK with this plan.

BC will check with already-lined-up speakers to see if they've any problem.

If no obstacles develop, the Heavenly Herald will be published in time to let all members know about the new schedule.

PB made the suggestion for “hybrid” meetings. In case too many people (for the space) want to attend or for the benefit of those still uncomfortable with public gatherings, the meetings could be live-streamed. AP could simply hold up his phone and broadcast on Facebook or Twitter or whatever. The Museum has Wi-Fi. With the approval of the speakers, talks could even be recorded.

The Christmas Party, though not definitely ruled out, looks unlikely. CJ said the State rules would deem it “indoor dining”.

AP closed the meeting at 7:40 PM.

Next Board Meeting:

Because of this emergency meeting, the one which had been scheduled for October 24th, 2020 at 10 AM has been cancelled. Tentatively, the next one will be January 23rd, 2021.