RASC WINNIPEG CENTRE COUNCIL

Minutes of a meeting of the council of RASC Winnipeg Centre held via Zoom on Monday, February 6, 2023, at 7:00 p.m.

PRESENT: Ed Wright, Dennis Lyons, Judy Anderson, Bryan Stach, Marc Sarrasin, Michelle Boyce, Kamala Kodi, Mike Karakas, Daemon Nightshade

REGRETS: Mark Irvine, Scott Young, Russell Brown,

1. Call to Order, Land Acknowledgement — Dennis
2. Welcome and Introductions — All
    - Dennis: Introduction to Council for new members, Daemon, Kamala, Stan.Meetings are 2 hours, typically a break at 8:00, finish 9:00. Encourage participation as long as discussion not too long. Key things this year:
        i. Glenlea (water damage and future in best interests of the members), few different ways we can go,
        ii. strategic plan, after this year needs to be refreshed. No commitment to do everything, would need a champion for each idea. Not expectation that Council runs everything. If it is not championed by a volunteer, we won't do it.
        iii. Outreach is big component, First Fridays at Museum, Oak Hammock Marsh
        iv. Policies and Procedures Manual to support bylaws with detail of operations, big step last year was calendar that Scott put together. All to be invited to the Google Drive for Council. Allows people to go in and edit. This will be a Council document. Dennis will draft the document and Council can review and revise.
        v. Google Drive storage & communications - Everyone will be invited to google drive – Centre records and working documents for review.
        vi. Closing the loop on incorporation. Just waiting for them to respond.
        vii. Other items such as SWSP. There will be other projects such as Telescopes for Kids. If volunteers do not step up, well we won't do something.
3. Adoption of Agenda — Dennis
    - No additions
4. Adoption of previous minutes — Dennis

Ed moved, Judy seconded, ADOPTED with amendments

5. Financial Report — Abdul
    - No update, Mark is away.
6. National Council meeting –
    - Dennis: Finances are in a bad situation. We are in a reactive mode. We will be asked to make decisions on certain things. National is on the verge of being bankrupt. Looking out they have expenses with no money for. Shortfall this year is $700K. Keeping the wolves from the door by not paying suppliers. The situation is dire. The points to talk about are key areas where being bled. (Dennis shared his screen.) They are overstaffed at National. How finances move at National is extremely complicated. Every Centre adds fees on to National's fees. Somebody has to physically calculate how many are new, which Centre, and then a cheque to send out.
    - First point - One suggestion is less frequent (1 or 2 times per year). I suggested Jan 15th and Jul 15th. Ed: Need to be careful with a debtor org to not allow too much time

between payments. Daemon: Agree with Ed. How many new members so we know what to expect? Dennis: Hard to tell because there is a 2-month grace period. Best way would look at historicals. Mike: Dovetails to Ed's comment. How much comes from National. Dennis: Last year we had some donations. Noted not a lot of room. Mike: Their payments affect our budget. Dennis: If the Board does hard choices they need to do, what has to happen to be aggressive and remove the costs that are dragging them down. Dennis: If they go bankrupt, we would become independent, right now we have a year to work with. So, first question will tell them Jan and July 15th.

- Second point, Budget – They are trying to get the membership fees to cover services. With the $15 increase membership fees now covered fully, it offsets the $26K deficiency in membership services.. The membership are net neutral now. National proposes membership fees will go up in synch with the cost of living, even though this has been rejected at previous AGMs. Membership fees for our org are probably half of what others pay, e.g., Scouts Canada. This $15 increase is what triggered the discussion with National Council. Then this info came out.
- Third point, Unified RASC membership fee – There are several different fees. They are looking at National fee on top of Centre fee. They are looking to go to standardized fee to reduce the admin costs, so would be one fee charged. $75 goes to National. Judy: Think $23 to Winnipeg. Mike: How do we compare to other centres? Dennis: I think that we are in the middle. $105 for family sounds familiar. Question, part 1 – are we in favour of a unified fee? Michelle yes, although on the fence about youth vs. general/adult. No objection from anyone. Part 2 – current fee is $30 or should we raise it? Judy – suggests leaving the fee the same, e.g., $105 total, ($75 to national plus $26-30 is the current) so as not to prevent people renewing by raising the current Centre fee any further. We'll let National know; if there is no approval for a unified fee, then the amount of the fee is moot.
- (Stan joined) Dennis: Overview of what discussed already. One area cutting is staff. They are looking at to streamline is to reduce the admin by cheques twice a year. We talked about a unified membership fee.
- Fourth point, Family fee – Annual family membership structure very complicated. Current structure would be two adults and any number of youths. Want one family fee regardless of the size of the family. Dennis: Why not say … Michelle: Trying to move away from something complex. Dennis suggests adults pay regular fee, and youths are covered under that membership fee. Judy: Prorated and extra for each kid. Dennis: For the family fee make it two times the single amount. Daemon: What are the benefits. Ed and Catherine are a family membership ($95 + $14.90, total of $110, as of Nov 1/22). Michelle: The other thing is just one Observer Handbook for a family. Kamala: Are they looking to adapt systems to take care of this. Dennis: They did upgrade the system and it is failing miserably. Unfortunately, the new system has been a dud and there's no more money to get it to work. I am thinking same as two adult family members for $210. It would be twice the cost of a single membership.
- Fifth item, Robotic Telescope – Never made money, good concept but never took off. They would be able to divest that quickly. Do we agree to sell off. Seeing agreement. Michelle: Could it join iTelescopes. Dennis: It is losing money.
- Sixth item, SkyNews – Good magazine, but losing money at $186K this year. Cannot change to digital only because would lose the grants. It has been recommended by Board to discontinue. Majority of money is to pay the staff to put it together. It was

going bankrupt at the time RASC bought it 8 years ago. It is technically a separate entity, but because we own it, RASC is responsible for it. Even reducing number of issues is not going to reduce costs of staff to produce it. Part of the loss is the CEBA grant is one of the outstanding debts. Charles Mountain identified three reasons to jettison: losing money, legal complications with CRA, significant burden it places on RASC staff. Recommendation is to divest and cease further production.

- Stan: How big are the losses? Dennis: $700K for the year. Kamala: Other publications? This does not affect the Journal or the Handbook. The difference is that those are volunteer editors. With the Handbook it takes a year to compose. What really hurt SkyNews were bankruptcies of small telescope shops. SkyNews is creating content and seeking sponsors every two months and this is very costly. The unfunded cost is 186,000/4200 = $44, would be required just to pay the debt that is owed; not counting the operating costs. Two years of profit in eight years. Judy: Believe that the staff in the office write articles for SkyNews. Michelle: Could we charge for it in a separate fee? Dennis: Not enough subscribers interested in it. Michelle: Due to mismanagement? Dennis: No it is the cost to print them. When the RASC bought it 8 years ago it was going bankrupt. It has lost money every year except one. Kamala: Maybe SkyNews can be cancelled, at least they will not see so many changes. If revising member fees, fees up but value to member down with loss of SkyNews. Maybe should keep the fees the same. Dennis: The challenge is that at beginning of year they had $1M in the bank, now $300K in bank, but a whole lot more owing. They have some reserves. There will be some staff that won't be there in a couple of weeks. One young lady working on dark sky preserve. Michelle: I don't want to get rid of it, Michelle: To keep it need to find $186K. Don't understand how got into this. Judy: They were overbudget on several things, admin, SkyNews, mailing costs, part due to Board not keeping track of the money. They have not been doing that. They had revenue shortfall of $500k. Michelle: Sounds like poor management, would prefer to keep it. Stan: If we had professionals look at it and nothing viable to get it out. Kamala: It is better than RASC going bankrupt. Judy: The complications don't excuse. You need to make cuts. They have to get out of the hole. They might be able to start up again in the future. Michelle: Maybe the fees should increase and have them go to the magazine. Michelle abstains. Dennis: Generally the Centre agrees to cease further publication of SkyNews. All others held their hand up. Dennis: Realize this is a bad situation. The good news is the Board is now talking to us. Kamala: The Robotics, should be run in dark sky preserve, where is night during our day. Dennis: It was marketed to every school. It was iTelescope, program it and the data is sent to you. Kamala: If I am a teacher and want to show to a student. Dennis: That scope is designed for astrophotography. Judy: There are many scopes around the world. Michelle: I think we should do a written response. Dennis: The Board still has the final decision. There were supporters on the call. On Sunday final decisions made. They seemed to have taken grant positions and turned into full-time positions. These things should have been discussed a long time ago. They now have expert help. Now in position of reacting.
- Dennis: Could of other things, it was obvious that the Board did not look at financials every meeting, suggested the Board start that. Also recommended that the Board take on training about tracking the financials. Daemon: What is their annual budget. They lost $700K. Annual revenue is about $1M. Daemon: How much will these things reduce the costs? Dennis: The $1M donated is being used to keep the RASC afloat. If they make these changes in February, for example the $60K for shipping should have been

$30K. They went through two different shipping houses. The RASC staff had to mail them out. Any monies for comm won't be spent. They had to go for big ticket items first. For the eclipse glasses, we may have to pay for those. The glaring things were staffing, robo scope and SkyNews. Removing SkyNews and staff and simplifying membership structure/management, should tackle most of it. So, this year will be rocky but closer to balance. Part of the issue was that shipping companies messed up the Handbook shipping. The proposed changes should adjust a lot of the problem, and there won't be any extraneous expenses. The CEBA, any fluid org kept the $10K and saved the $40K loan. RASC took it as a loan and spent it as part of general revenue, rather than putting it into a GIC and collecting the interest. It is life and death situation for the RASC. Have to let the people go. Ed: They are saying not in the black until 2024. Dennis: Pushing them to have a wrap up plan. Had this in another organization. That is where I learned on a federally incorporated board that you are responsible for unpaid severance and salary. Dennis: I will share the spreadsheet from Michael Watson. You cannot share outside the centre council.

- Mike: What is the value of the robo scope asset. Dennis: Not sure. Partly covered by a grant. A lot of maintenance costs.
- Stan: I know Michael Watson. Highly respect him. Also thank you for explaining this to us. Appreciate the situation of passing on the bad news. Ed: Should we have a Plan 'B'? Dennis: Separate meeting on this. We could survive for a couple of years. Kamala: A Roboscope would be important for the RASC. Could be used by a lot of people working on space exploration. Maybe for the next generation working on space exploration. Dennis: These are all the things people thought would happen. The problem is that it is expensive. Only people with funds used it. Were not enough. If the funds of $1M from our member had been put into a trust, it could have continued. One of the risks that happened, they brought in a fund raiser that worked well for a few years, this is a contributing factor, they did not get near that level of donations this year. The shortfall in fund raising is not the issue. It is the money going out.
- Michelle: iTelescopes, it is an affordable way to book scope on the planet. I am a member, can grab a 12" scope anywhere on the globe. It has killed off the mom and pop scopes. But they can be linked in. I am surprised that our scope was not linked in to iTelescopes.net. Gord does a great presentation, great way for classroom stuff. I don't know why the Robotic scope was not made part of iTelescopes.net as it would have generated funds for RASC.

7. Committee Work Reports
   a. Policies and Procedures Manual — Dennis
   - Dennis: Ongoing
   b. Observatory Committee — Dennis
   - Dennis: Continue to recruit for that.
   c. Incorporation — Dennis
   - Dennis: That is ongoing
   d. Member Meeting — Judy
   - Beginner session - Stan Runge "Explore the Universe"
   - What's Up – Bryan Stach
   - What's New? – Danielle Pahud
   - Main speaker – Alan Dyer – Astrophotography – Ed: Allan description? Judy to send description/bio

- March – Darrin Hennig, April - John Percy

e. Finance Committee Budget Mark Irvine

- Dennis: Chair is Mark. Judy volunteers, Ed volunteers.

Motion to appoint Ed and Judy to the Finance Committee. Passed.

f. Star Parties Russell

- Dennis: Russell – was to meet with Silvia; if they have not, Dennis will talk to executive and start this going so SWSP is planned.

8. Appointed Positions Recruitment Dennis
   a. Explore the Universe Stan Runge Dennis
      - Stan is the coordinator.
   b. Volunteer Coordinator
   c. Mentor Coordinator
   d. Meeting Coordinator
   e. Light Abatement Committee Silvia Graca Dennis
      - Dennis: Did not hear from Silvia. Nobody opposed.
   f. Youth Outreach
9. Business Arising
   a. Name tags Scott
   b. NCC Dennis'
      -
   c. Glenlea, cleanup, damage repair Ed
      - Process and correspondence sent to Council last night. Judy responded. It's a bit frustrating to fill out another form, and approaching the insurance company for a letter, plus getting the University to give tax assessment from Rural Municipality. Also a contract to be signed by us (Dennis, as president) with terms and conditions; plus the landowner. However, there does seem to be money available to us from Disaster Financial.

   d. Spruce Woods gift to casino $180 plus tax Dennis
   e. NC Report Dennis
   f. Science Rendezvous Dennis
      - Dennis: Judy got initial contact, and since she/Jay will be away, she needs a coordinator. Dennis will put on announcements that looking for someone to coordinate that. May 6 is date for public to come on campus. Need somebody to take the lead on it. Jay and I will not be here. Dennis: I will put it in the announcements looking for a coordinator. Stan: I will take on that role. Dennis: Thanks, I will make the announcement at the meeting.
   g. Bino/telescope day Darren Hennig Dennis
      - Dennis: Darren put up bino telescope tune day, Eastview Community Church, March 25, I will let Darren know is okay and announce it at meetings.
   h. Book give away Jay Anderson Dennis
      - Dennis: About 60 books from Jay for this week.
   i. Nova Program do we do it? Dennis
      - Dennis: We talked about this. Will want to bring the new members in to this. In the email blurbs has been in there. There is a fee charged, program is entirely written.
   j. RASC Board nominations Dennis

- Dennis: RASC National put out the offer to the Board, can be on two boards at same time now. Not urgent, but consider, although it would not be good to lose people from our Council to the National Board.

k. Website – usability — Dennis
l. Strategic Plan/Bylaws — Dennis

10. Round table — All
    - Stan: Apologies for being late; contact for Zoom got lost. Has a history of almost 50 years on Centre; when we bought Robotic scope and SkyNews, he was concerned that National Board was overextending themselves without sufficient thought. Consequence is that we now have consequence of such over-optimism, and we need to do something to keep RASC. Tonight's meeting went fine.
    - Kamala: Meeting went well. Was Youth Outreach in the agenda. Dennis: The outreach coordinator is a posn trying to fill.
    - Daemon: Thought the meeting went well. Have concerns that by fixing National's issues may affect our membership, could reduce membership. Situation is as is, and we can only work with what we've got, but not a good thing. Dennis agrees; lots of bumps to go.
    - Ed: Will be heightened risk for the hybrid technology for this. Dennis: Scott has been unavailable due to wife's illness.
    - Dennis: Did new members get groups.io invite? Eventually they will get note to be able to use Google Drive.
11. Next Meeting, Monday February 7, 7 PM?
12. Adjourn — 9:01 PM

	Name	Signature	Date
Secretary	Ed Wright		