

Canadian Astronomical Society Société Canadienne d'Astronomie

Meeting of the Board of Directors via videoconference

Minutes for July 7, 2020

Present:

Sara Ellison (President)
Samar Safi-Harb (Vice President)
Judith Irwin (Secretary)
Lewis Knee (Treasurer)
Laura Parker (Director)
Etienne Artigau (Director)
Julie Hlavacek-Larrondo (Director)
Rob Thacker (Past President)
Roland Kothes (Guest)
Dennis Crabtree (Guest)
Tim Robishaw (Guest)

Absent: Ivana Damjanov (Director)

1. Discussion: the CASCA 2021 meeting

There was one item on the agenda, i.e. to discuss the CASCA 2021 meeting. Roland Kothes is the LOC chair for the in-person meeting which was originally scheduled to occur in Penticton, B. C. The issue is whether or not we should proceed with an in-person meeting, whether it should be purely virtual, or whether some hybrid could occur.

Roland let everyone know that a complete reopening in B. C., to the extent seen before COVID-19, would likely have to await for either a vaccine or the virus being virtually eradicated. B.C. is currently in phase-3 of the roll-out, meaning that no gathering of more than 50 people is allowed. Phase-4 would allow conventions, but wide-spread vaccinations or equivalent would be needed.

Hybrids: A challenge with a hybrid meeting is that it is difficult to plan. It's as much work as completely in-person and it is more difficult to offer our sponsors anything. All of the bookings need to be done well in advance, again with some realistic estimate of numbers. People might say that they are coming but then change their minds. Even if we did a poll in advance, people may simply not know whether or not they could come. If a virtual-meeting is added on, the LOC becomes very strained in terms of person-power. In reality, it's twice the work with only a small staff. In the long term, we could look at hybrid meetings, involving the Sustainability Committee, but probably not for the 2021 AGM.

In-person only: Some of the same arguments apply as for hybrids. Without the surety of a vaccine, we can't really go in-person.

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Virtual: The Canadian Association of Physicists (CAP-2021) is recommending a fully virtual meeting in June 2021. Our experience with the 2020 virtual CASCA meeting was reasonably successful and we received good feedback from our exit poll. We can probably do a better job now that we have experience. We also didn't have much lead time to prepare for the 2020 meeting, but now have more time. We can also gain from the experience of the AAS whose winter meeting was fully virtual, all on zoom. The Europeans also recently had a fully virtual meeting which was very successful. Hiring a professional organizer, of possible, helps with this process. A decision for a virtual meeting could alleviate the uncertainty and allow for good planning. A virtual meeting also removed the 'geographic lock'.

The Board concluded that a fully virtual meeting in 2021 was required. Penticton can be in 2023 but a discussion is needed with Waterloo about 2022 since that was the original location for 2022, and they might be amenable to shifting later. [Ed: Waterloo is confirmed for 2022 and Penticton for 2023.]

There was some more discussion of a virtual meeting and how it can be most effective, e.g. the European meeting had recorded sessions which were very scientifically effective. Also there needs to be enough time between sessions and breaks are required. We don't really want to extend the meeting into a second week, if possible. Small groups might gather together within a single university and go online together.

Regarding the organizing committee: The LOC needs to indicated how it should proceed. The Board does not want to micromanage this. [Ed: Dennis Crabtree will spearhead the 2021 virtual meeting.]