

12 March, 2013

Members of the Select Board of Chester, Vermont,
P.O. Box 370,
Chester, VT 05143

Re: Chester Astronomical Observatory

Dear Members of the Select Board of the Town of Chester, Vermont:

The Board of Directors of the Southern Vermont Astronomy Group, Inc. (SoVerA), regret to inform you that it has reflected upon, considered and by unanimous vote decided to retract the offer to donate an available astronomical observatory to the Town of Chester at this time.

On October 10th of 2012 Claudio Veliz, SoVerA President, sought the guidance of Town Manager David Pisha, regarding the interest and opportunity to proceed with an installation of a small astronomical observatory for the purposes of benefiting the Town of Chester residents, their children and local school students, teachers and Town visitors. The suggestion was greeted with immediate enthusiasm by Mr. Pisha, to the degree that he insisted at that meeting on walking the most likely site and discussing general points of the proposal.

A casual questionnaire was distributed amongst Chester educators, business owners and residents in the Town soliciting their response to the proposal that an astronomical observatory be installed in the Town. The response was unanimous, as copies of the survey will show and which were submitted to the Town Select Board for their review.

Members of SoVerA gave a PowerPoint presentation to the Select Board on the 21st of November, 2012, detailing the situation and purpose of the Chester Astronomical Observatory ("CAO"), indicating that the required modifications required would remain under \$14,000. The Select Board was asked if the funding for the Observatory installation by the Town was sufficiently likely that it would be worthwhile for the organization to make the effort to contact contractors and suppliers to secure their commitments and estimates. The Board said "yes".

SoVerA Board members and others then attended the Chester Select Board meeting held on the 19th of December to present the confirmed figures requested by the Select Board which - thanks to contractors who offered their time pro-bono, requiring only cost of materials - had reduced the cost of installation to slightly above \$7,000.

At this second meeting, the Select Board stated the Town might make available the small amount of land required for the small structure and cover electrical costs for the life of the building (estimated at under \$8/month).

However, they made clear they had no intention of providing the funding for the installation. The primary reason stated was that recreational activities are not a priority in their view (even though astronomy research and education is not a recreational activity), and that the budget was tight as is. Our commitment to the owner of the Observatory was such that a decision was required by mid-March of this year as to the disposition of the structure and we sought to meet that commitment. As this deadline loomed one SoVerA Board member after another expressed growing frustrations regarding the situation since the Select Board announced their apparent change of mind. A Motion was entertained by a SoVerA Board member to reconsider the nature of the installation and on the morning of the 12th of March, met with a unanimous vote in the affirmative.

As such, an alternative location has been arranged for the observatory structure, allowing SoVerA to honor its commitment to the owner.

For a dedicated organization such as SoVerA, intent on the deployment of educational opportunities for Chester Town residents, to embark on a project that fails to enjoy the full-throated, outspoken support from the Town's leadership incurs potential risk. It risks primarily the possibility of further roadblocks in the course of the installation and the operation of the facility. The SoVerA Board was unwilling to take such risk when so many Chester Town residents, their families and friends might depend on the facility for educational, research and outreach functions.

Education is a community responsibility. It is nurtured by the values of its leadership. It speaks to the core functioning of a civilized, educated and engaged community. It would be hoped the Town's leadership would respond to the desires of the community and treat such an opportunity to benefit local business, schools and quality of life for all residents with the enthusiasm that such is due.

Regardless of this current outcome, the Board of Directors of the Southern Vermont Astronomy Group, Inc., will continue to seek opportunities to educate, provide outreach opportunities, conduct research and interact with similar institutions and communities that seek to sustain a high value in an educated public. To that end, let it be known that the SoVerA Board remains willing to consider future opportunities with the Town of Chester, with the blessings and support of the current or future Town leadership to build an astronomical facility that supports such ambitions in the interest of every resident of Chester.

Thank you for your consideration,

Mr. Roderick ("Rick") Bates Ms. Maureen Bell, Treasurer Mr. Robert Dudley

Ms. Amy Howlett, Secretary Ms. Donna Monahan Mr. Patrick Porch, Vice President

Mr. Claudio Veliz, President

Board of Directors of the Southern Vermont Astronomy Group, Inc.:

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SoVerA, Inc., [501 (c)(3)]