Champlain Regional Repeater Association
Meeting of the Executive

April 28, 2021
7 p.m. via Zoom (to accommodate the COVID-19 pandemic)

Present: Greg VE3ECI (Chair), Tim VA3PYC (Zoom host & note taker), James
          VE3KAW, Robert VA3AGN, Allen VE3JGU, Randy VA3RKS, Phil VE3HOA,
          Graham VE3AMN
Regrets: None
Absent: None

The agenda for the meeting was circulated via email.

Agenda:

- Review previous executive meeting minutes - Tim
- May AGM plan - Greg
- Project updates:
    - STP2 VHF FM interference - Phil
    - STP2 VHF DMR repeater - Phil
    - STP2 Remote Access/Control - Greg/Phil
    - STP2 Router Issue - Greg
    - STP2 VHF FM RPI based EchoLink - Allen
    - STP1 Packet - Graham
    - Winlink VARA FM STP possibilities - Tim
    - YYX - TBD
- Special initiatives update:
    - Financials & Membership - James
    - CRRA/STP history curation - Tim/James
    - STP site 1 situation - Greg
    - Social events - antibodies needed
- New business:

The meeting began at 7:05 p.m.

Motion to accept the agenda as presented (Tim, Greg)

Passed unanimously.

Review of the minutes – outstanding business from previous meetings

Tim VA3PYC reviewed outstanding action items from the previous two meetings.

Only two items to note:

1. **ACTION:** Greg VE3ECI will email everyone on our mailing list to remind them that memberships are due and to encourage donations. *Greg noted that this was done, and James will report on memberships during this meeting.*

2. CRRA/STP history curation – *Tim VA3PYC noted that he and James VE3KAW will make dates to interview VE3AAC, TAE and AMN*

Motion to accept the minutes of the past meeting as posted. (Tim, Robert)

Passed unanimously.

May AGM plan – Greg
Greg VE3ECI noted that the Almonte Club is using Zoom for their meetings. Phil VE3HOA noted that these are working well. Greg suggested that because not all members are technically inclined, we might want to run a parallel meeting on radio along with Zoom. A discussion ensued about how best to do this, and it was agreed that anyone who was to speak would also speak into their radio. If our repeater has difficulties with noise, we would still be able to continue the meeting via Zoom.

MOTION: Tim VA3PYC moved that our net manager, Robert VA3AGN, be net control for the meeting (Seconded by James). Unanimously accepted.

MOTION: Greg VE3ECI moved that the meeting be set for Wednesday, May 26, 2021 beginning at 7 p.m. (Seconded by Tim VA3PYC). Unanimously accepted.

ACTION: It was also agreed that we would test the set up on Wednesday, May 12th during the regular net time.

ACTION: Tim VA3PYC will send Greg VE3ECI a Zoom link that he will have posted on the CRRA website.

Project updates:
1. STP2 VHF FM interference – Phil
   Phil VE3HOA reported that, using the SDR at VE3STP, he heard someone operating simplex very close to the input frequency of VE3STP. Phil copied the operator's call sign, called the individual and chatted with him who explained that he was using this frequency based on the RAC band plan. Phil explained that this was causing interference, and the operator agreed to move to another frequency higher up the band. Phil has not heard them back on the input frequency since this time. Some discussion of past experiences like this ensued among the group.

Greg noted that he drafted a letter to RAC about their band plan. He had circulated for comment, and he invited Graham VE3AMN to comment. Graham spoke to the mismatch between band plans and the reality of repeaters operating both in Canada and our American neighbours. Discussion followed noting how unlikely it is that users will follow up with local authorities on exceptions as is currently noted in the band plan.

MOTION: Tim moved that Greg send the letter that he drafted to the RAC (Seconded by Phil VE3HOA). The discussion included the possibility of another letter by Graham VE3AMN, but not waiting on sending the shorter letter by Greg VE3ECI now.
Unanimously accepted.

2. STP2 VHF DMR repeater – Phil
The update is that the repeater is still at Phil's place running stand-alone (no Internet connection). It's available for use. He monitors it occasionally, and he is ready to connect with whomever might want to work it. Greg VE3ECI wondered if we might want to network this repeater so that it is more accessible. Phil has a hot spot that we could throw on the network to provide this link.
ACTION: Greg suggested that we put this interoperability issue on the agenda for our next meeting.

3. STP2 Remote Access/Control - Greg/Phil
Greg VE3ECI reported that recent malicious interference on VE2CRA and VE3OCE led to a decision to be prepared in case this were to happen on VE3STP. We need remote control of our repeater, so Greg designed a system to shut the power off remotely using a Raspberry Pi, a relay system and packet radio. Allan VE3JGU will provide relays to Phil to prepare the device for installation on site this spring (perhaps before the blackflies start).

4. STP2 Router Issue – Greg
Greg VE3ECI reported that the router has been working well since Phil adjusted the settings on it. Greg suggested that we should think about having a back-up router on site in anticipation of a failure.

5. STP2 VHF FM RPI based EchoLink – Allen
Allen VE3JGU reported on the project to implement Echolink on a Raspberry Pi to free up space in the VE3STP shack. Allen used a complex set of programs from Sweden with many functions (e.g., reflector, email, etc.). He has it connected at home to his radio. When started manually it works. However, there is a problem with rebooting after a power outage (may be related to the GPIO pins) that is yet to be solved. Hoping to have this installed later this year.

6. STP1 Packet – Graham
Graham checked the system on site at the end of winter. It has been operating well. VA3PYC uses it most often among all of the CRRA members.

7. Winlink VARA FM STP possibilities – Tim
Tim VA3PYC reported his interest in digital communications, particularly for emergency use. In this area, we use packet communications for Outpost and Winlink. Winlink is the better of the two programs, providing worldwide coverage through a network of RMS and CMS.

Currently, we have Winlink packet in Ottawa: VE3OCE-10 and VE3BQP-10. I use OCE regularly, and others in our area digipeat to BQP through VE3STP. These systems work with AX.25 protocol. There is a new protocol for these digital communications known as VARA FM and VARA HF.

VARA is program that works in conjunction with a software TNC such as Sound Modem and a sound card like Signalink or a built-in sound card. Tim uses VARA HF quite a bit. It's an excellent program providing weak signal decoding and higher speeds than previous programs such as ARDOP and Winmor. Recently, Tim completed a 5-week online course through an ARES group in LA who introduced him to VARA FM. This seems like a good upgrade for packet in our region. Bob, VE3YX, agrees as VARA is significantly faster than the AX.25 protocol.

The closest VARA FM (VHF) gateway is AC2FH (Syracuse), too far south (265km) to access. VA3QT-10 is south-west of us by 335 km. In sum, there is a need for VARA FM in our region.
A complete list of Ontario VARA FM stations is provided below:

281832Z	VA3ETN-10	FN02FW	144.930 MHz	VARA FM WIDE	00-23	Dunnville, Ontario, Canada
281842Z	VA3OG-10	FN03CQ	145.030 MHz	VARA FM WIDE	00-23	Brampton, ON, Canada
281847Z	VA3QT-10	FN04DI	438.100 MHz	VARA FM WIDE	00-23	Barrie, ON, Canada
281743Z	VE3EXI-10	FN03DN	144.970 MHz	VARA FM WIDE	00-23	Mississauga, Ontario, Canada
281852Z	VE3VAI-10	EN58II	145.030 MHz	VARA FM	00-23	Thunder Bay, Ontario, Canada
281839Z	VE3ZPW-10	FN03IA	145.090 MHz	VARA FM WIDE	00-23	Fonthill, Ontario, Canada
281807Z	VE3ZPW-10	FN03IA	446.950 MHz	VARA FM WIDE	00-23	Fonthill, Ontario, Canada

ACTION: Tim was encouraged to pursue this further.

8. YYX – TBD

Special initiatives update:

1. Financials & Membership – James
   February 10th was the last deposit. Current balance is: $2643.18.

2. CRRA/STP history curation - Tim/James
   See update above about a commitment by VA3PYC and VE3KAW to further interviews this spring with VE3AAC, TAE and AMN.

3. STP site 1 situation – Greg
   Greg VE3ECI has been working closely with Ed VA3EJT who is well connected to people in the township. COVID has caused understandable delays in making progress. Site 1 is still with the same owner (Mrs. Edge), so until something happens, we have no reason to make changes. We are "squatters," and we will continue until hear otherwise.

4. Social events - antibodies needed

New business: None.

The meeting was adjourned at 9:14 p.m.