

SPJ minutes – Feb. 12, 2025, via Zoom

Marty Fischhoff called the meeting to order at 8:02 a.m.

President's Report – Marty Fischhoff

- Marty praised Mark Lee for passing along a wonderful scholarship opportunity for minority students aspiring to a career in banking and finance. The Detroit Chapter of the Urban Financial Services Coalition is offering these scholarships in honor of Mark's father, Dr. Aubrey Lee, Sr., who was a trailblazer paving the way for future generations to succeed in the banking and finance industry.

Minutes were approved by a unanimous vote of the board.

Program - Tracy Wolf

- Tracy discussed the status of the proposed DEI event. The committee still needed to finalize the venue, date and time in order to invite panelists. MusicTown was eliminated as a possibility, as it didn't have Zoom capabilities. Anna Clark suggested the Detroit Historical Museum as another option, as it is conveniently located. Mark Lee mentioned Detroit PAL, which has an attractive meeting space, also in a convenient location. Other suggested venues included Wayne State and the Detroit offices of Michigan State and the University of Michigan.
- As for the date, the committee was thinking of early March.
- Marty said he talked to former Detroit News editor Rod Hicks, who is now the director of Ethics and Diversity for the national office of SPJ. He has written about newsroom diversity for Quill magazine and was willing to join the panel virtually. Annalise Frank said she would reach out to Kevin Heard, founder of the Detroit Regional LGBT Chamber of Commerce, and Vince McCraw said he could contact Felecia Henderson, who now works for the Maynard Institute.
- Rob Davidek brought up an idea for a program around the upcoming Detroit mayoral election. With Duggan not running, the field is fairly open with at least four current candidates and more likely to announce. He had discussed with Mark the possibility of partnering with Detroit NABJ, AAJA Michigan and other journalism organizations on an event, which could be a debate or a series of one-on-one discussions with each candidate prior to the primary. Mark said that there would be a high level of interest in this kind of programming. Christine Ferretti reported that BridgeDetroit and other news organizations might be willing to participate. Mary Zatina voiced her support for such an event, which would give the community and the media an opportunity to learn about and hear from the candidates for this important office.

Region 4 Conference – Tracy Wolf/Peg McNichol

- Tracy reported that the weekly Saturday morning planning meetings are continuing for the annual Region 4 SPJ Conference, which is taking place April 4-5 at the Levin College of Public Affairs and Education in Cleveland. The lineup of programs is taking shape, though the keynote speakers have not been finalized. The regional conference traditionally has a partial focus on preparing journalism students for a career in the profession. Marty suggested we reach out to local journalism programs to alert them to this opportunity.

[Eventbrite: <https://www.eventbrite.com/e/society-of-professional-journalists-2025-region-4-conference-tickets-1243046508569?aff=oddtcreator>]

FOIA -- Beth Konrad

- Beth provided an update on the status of Senate Bills 1 and 2, which would increase government transparency. Senate Majority Leader Winnie Brinks is pushing House Speaker Matt Hall to bring the bills forward for consideration. SPJ Detroit is collaborating with other media organizations to promote action on FOIA reform. Beth said that there needs to be concerted efforts to fight for this cause. Rob said he would raise these issues when the Michigan Association of Broadcasters (MAB) meets. Jeff said he thought the Michigan Press Association would be open to work with us.
- Peg Nichols reported that U.S. Representative Hillary Scholten from Western Michigan has introduced the Consistent Legal Expectations and Access to Records (CLEAR) Act, which would require temporary organizations (DOGE and others) be subject to FOIA

Contests – Walter Middlebrook

- Marty emphasized that the deadline was fast approaching for the chapter to complete the judging of the Fort Worth journalism competition and that many assignments had not been completed. For the larger, investigative categories, it was suggested that people could work in small groups to decide the winning entries. It is an obligation of the chapter, if we are expecting other chapters to judge our competition. Fort Worth is a relatively small contest. The chapter will be asked soon to judge a much larger competition from Minnesota SPJ.
- Marty went over the list of individuals who had been nominated for the 2025 Lifetime Achievement Awards. He suggested that we follow the same procedure as last year, asking board members to vote by email for their three candidates in order of preference. The votes would be tallied by giving three points for each first-place vote, etc.
- Marcia reported that the deadline for our own annual journalism competition was fast approaching. So far, we had received 200 entries, while hoping for 600 like last year. Many of the major news organizations had yet to submit their entries, which is normal. A deadline extension is probably needed.

Communications – Peg McNichol

- Peg said that she had been unusually busy but planning to call a committee meeting soon.

Membership – Rob Davidek

- In a meeting with Walter and Marty, it had been decided to create a Google doc, which would detail our members, their organization and their membership status. The list we received from the national office listed 41 people who belong to national SPJ but not SPJ Detroit. We can reach out and encourage them to pay \$15 and join our chapter.
- Over the past few months, we had discussed building a list of potential members and having the board contact them about joining our chapter. The goal would be to hit 70 members by June 1.

Campus Outreach/Scholarships – Annalise Frank

- The deadline is Feb. 28 for scholarship applications. Annalise talked about reaching out to Eastern, U-M, Central, Alma, Oakland U and MSU to alert the heads of journalism programs and their publications about the scholarship offer. We can also send applications to individual students if board members know any prospective applicants.

Other Business

- Rob and Mark reported that they both attended Eastern Michigan University's MLK Jr. Day event, which is the largest in the state. It was packed.
- Vince reported that Detroit NABJ is partnering with the WGPR Historical Society on a panel discussion on the state of journalism in Detroit and whether communities of color are being equitably served. It is part of a series of events this month celebrating the society's 50th anniversary. Marty said that the chapter would be happy to help promote the event.

Next meeting was scheduled for 8 a.m. Wednesday, March 12.

The meeting was adjourned at 9 a.m.

Committee Assignments (chairs in bold text)

- Programs: **Tracy Wolf**, Walter Middlebrook, Beth Konrad, Mark Lee, Monica Williams, Briana Rice, Anna Clark
- Membership Outreach: **Rob Davidek**, Mary Zatina, Walter Middlebrook
- Communication Committee: **Peg McNichol**, Christine Ferretti, Tracy Wolf
- FOIA: **Beth Konrad**, Mary Zatina, Peg McNichol
- Banquet: **Tracy Wolf**, Marcia Hart, Monica Williams
- Campus Outreach/Scholarship: **Annalise Frank**, Kennan Oliphant, Christine Ferretti, Briana Rice, Anna Clark and Beth Konrad
- Finance/Fundraising: **Walter Middlebrook**, Marty Fischhoff
- Bylaws and elections (nominating committee): **Marty Fischhoff**, Mark Lee, Rob Davidek, Peg McNichol, Walter Middlebrook
- Contest: **Walter Middlebrook**, Jeff Payne, Marty Fischhoff