

SPJ Detroit Minutes – September 11, 2025, via Zoom

Attendees: Marty Fischhoff, Rob Davidek, Tracy Wolf, Walter Middlebrook, Mark Lee, Anna Clark, Mary Zatina, Vince McCraw, Jeff Payne, Annalise Frank, Jeremy Allen; Marcia Hart, Administrator

Absent: Peg McNichol, Kennan Oliphant, Nicole Avery Nichols, Brianna Rice, Christine Ferretti, Beth Konrad

Marty Fischhoff called the meeting to order at 8:06 a.m.

Minutes – Mary Zatina made a motion to approve the July 10 minutes. The motion was seconded and approved by a unanimous vote of the board, with one correction, changing “Mary” to “Marty.”

President’s Report

- SPJ National MediaFest 25 is scheduled for October 15-18 in Washington D.C., with Marty Fischhoff representing the chapter and having two votes at the national meeting. Please let Marty know if you did not receive the email notification from National about the event and potential scholarships.

Programming – Tracy Wolf

- Marty reported that the Summer Networking Happy Hour was a major success, attracting 17-18 attendees, including a number of non-members. There was even a contingent from the Knight-Wallace Fellows at the University of Michigan. The event was held at Roar Brewery, the city’s first Black-owned brewery. Marty thanked Mary Zatina for the suggestion.
- Rob Davidek explained that the Google Tools training session, originally considered for August was postponed because of staffing changes at the national SPJ offices. The chapter is now suggesting that the workshop be held at noon or 1 p.m. on November 12 at the offices of WWJ Newsradio 950. It will focus on election coverage and candidate tracking for the 2026 election. Vince McCraw suggested the training be offered in a hybrid format if possible. Rob said that the facility had that capability.
- Tracy suggested that we offer one more program in 2025 in addition to the Google Tools training. She mentioned a number of ideas, including a master class on podcasts, the role of AI in journalism, the future of public media, a FOIA update, the artistic side of media, state of food journalism, a guide to internships, advice for young reporters trying to build their career, and a series of “conversations with ...” for instance, Phillip Lewis (HuffPost, popular on X), Tonya Mosley (Detroit native, co-host of Fresh Air), John Gallagher (new memoir).
- Mark Lee said that he had an idea based on what he heard at the Crisis in Local News event that was held at the DAC. He thought the organizers missed an opportunity to discuss how news outlets could attract a younger audience. He said that he thought this topic would make a good program for the chapter. He is arranging a meeting with Melissa Thrasher, the executive director of Media Relations and Social Media at Eastern Michigan University, to discuss partnering on such an event.
- Mary liked the idea, saying that the industry is hungry for new ideas, for new ways of moving forward.
- Vince suggested it could be a summit in the spring, not just for Southeast Michigan, but for people across the state.

Banquet – Tracy Wolf

Tracy said she was in the early stages of exploring options for next year's banquet, with the goal of choosing a new venue. She asked what the priorities should be – for instance, Detroit versus a place in the suburbs.

Contests – Walter Middlebrook

- Marty reported that the winners had been chosen for the inaugural SPJ Detroit A-Mark Prize in Investigative Journalism. The judges – Alicia Nails, Eric Freedman and Emilia Askari – said that they were impressed with the quality of the entries, which made choosing among them very difficult.
- The winners will be announced at an awards ceremony on Sept. 23 at Atwater Brewery. Marty thanked Tracy for all her work on the reception and hoped that there would be a strong turnout of board members.
- Marty said that he heard from Phoebe Wall Howard, formerly of the Free Press, who now has a successful substack of her own. She had questions about the contest categories in the digital section of the Excellence in Journalism competition. She offered to work on the Contest Committee to examine those categories, which Marty agreed were likely in need of updating.

Membership – Rob Davidek

- Rob reported that the current Detroit Chapter membership stood at approximately 47. He asked board members to check the status of their membership to ensure that they are on the chapter roster, which is now available online at the national SPJ site.
- Marty suggested that since we are the only pro chapter in the state with the disbanding of the Central Michigan chapter, we should look toward expanding our outstate reach. Marty offered to help with ideas for boosting membership.
- Marty said he considered the possibility of increasing the chapter dues from \$15, which has been the rate for many years. But he examined what other chapters around the nation are charging, and \$15 seemed to be the upper limit, with only a few at \$20. He recommended maintaining the current dues level.
- Marty suggested that we should reach out to SPJ members living in Michigan who are not members of our chapter.

Governance – Executive Committee

- Marty explained that it is time to hold board elections for 2025. There were six members of the board whose terms are up this year.
- He reported that Monica Williams had resigned from the board. He thanked her for all the energy, ideas and hard work that she had brought to the chapter. He then recommended Jeremy Allen of the Michigan Chronicle be selected to complete the rest of her term. A vote was taken, and he was elected unanimously. He will have to stand for election this year, along with Christine Ferretti, Vincent McCraw, Walter Middlebrook, Tracy Wolf and Mary Zatina, who have all said they would like to remain on the board.
- Marcia Hart will send an election ballot to the membership, which will also include a place for write-in candidates.

- Marty discussed the idea of increasing the size of the board, to allow for outstate representation and for a greater variety of news outlets. However, that would demand a change in the bylaws.

Campus Outreach – Annalise Frank

- Marty once more brought up the idea of board members serving as contacts and mentors of students in college journalism programs. Wayne State is reviving its student SPJ Chapter, and Marty has been in contact with the advisor, Elizabeth Stoycheff.
- The chapter heard from David Cassilo at U-D Mercy, where there is also talk of forming a student chapter. Similar conversations are under way at the University of Michigan.
- Marty said it would be great to reach out to the programs at Oakland University, Eastern Michigan, Michigan State and other colleges.

Other Business

- Jermey reported that Ebony J.J. Curry of his team received a reporting fellowship from The 19th, a prestigious honor.

Financials – Walter Middlebrook

- Account balances of August 31.
 - \$18,541.95 Checking
 - 7,219.16 Scholarship savings
 - 13,008.47 E*Trade
 - 6,612.99 PayPal
 - \$45,482.57 Total

Next meeting: October 9, 8:00 a.m. via Zoom

The meeting was adjourned at 9:04 a.m.

Committee Assignments (chairs in bold text)

- Programs: **Tracy Wolf**, Walter Middlebrook, Beth Konrad, Mark Lee, 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
- 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, Phoebe Wall Howard