

SPJ Detroit Minutes – November 6, 2025, via Zoom

Attendees: Marty Fischhoff, Rob Davidek, Tracy Wolf, Mark Lee, Peg McNichol, Walter Middlebrook, Beth Konrad, Annalise Frank, Mary Zatina, Christine Ferretti, Jeff Payne, Anna Clark, Briana Rice, Vince McCraw, Kennan Oliphant, Jeremy Allen; Marcia Hart, Administrator

Absent: Nicole Avery Nichols

Marty Fischhoff called the meeting to order at 8:05 a.m.

Minutes – Mary Zatina made a motion to approve the October minutes. The motion was seconded and approved by a unanimous vote of the board.

President's Report

- Marty Fischhoff attended MediaFest25 on October 15-18 in Washington D.C. SPJ National issued assurances that the finances are in good shape for the time being, with an infusion of funding from the SPJ Foundation. There is a good management team in place, which needs to make plans for a sustainable future after that funding runs out. Marty said SPJ National wants to make the organization an advocate for press freedom and has established an Advocacy Committee for that purpose. Marty attended its first meeting. Among the sessions he attended was one from the A-Mark Foundation, which cited the way we handled our inaugural A-Mark Prize competition as example for others to follow. There was also mention of a A-Mark Prize for students.
- April 2026 will likely be our turn to host the next Regional Conference. Ginny McCabe, our regional coordinator, has not be able to reach the Pittsburgh chapter, so we are next on the priority list. There is the possibility of partnering with Region 5, as we have done in the past. Peg McNicol and Tracy Wolf worked on the 2025 conference. The discussion was focused on what local schools could host us, since the conference is usually held at a university. Eastern Michigan and Wayne State were mentioned.

Programming – Tracy Wolf

- Rob Davidek discussed the Google Tools training next Wednesday. Preparations for it to take place at WWJ Newsradio 950 are all set. Tracy indicated we had 17 people registered, with 8 in-person.
- Tracy discussed our next virtual program, Behind the Headline with Beth Leblanc, to be held on November 19 at 6:00 p.m. Anna Clark will moderate.
- Mark Lee and Marty met with Melissa Tracker, director of Media Relations at Eastern Michigan University, to discuss a two-hour event focused on how the media could attract a younger audience. Mark said he was very encouraged, especially because of the school's strong journalism program. They had discussed potential dates in March and April. Tracy suggested that it could be held in mid-April, as part of the Regional Conference. There is a hotel nearby, Marriott Eagle Crest, but it might be prohibitively expensive.
- Peg mentioned that starting to plan in January for the Regional Conference would not leave enough time. She also said she has lot of notes from the preparations for 2025. Marty said he has asked Ginny to send us the budget and other financials from that conference. Peg and Tracy both said that meetings to plan the conference need a strong focus, as there were tasks that were missed last time. Mark Lee said it would be important to reach out to all universities in the state, as the regional conferences have a heavy emphasis on student participation.

- Beth Konrad said we should also consider Wayne State as host, as it has given discounts to event planners in the past, and hosting the conference in Detroit would be a draw. Tracy added that doing a new program in April, as the one discussed at EMU, would be tough and including it in the Regional is ideal. Mark agreed.

Banquet – Tracy Wolf

- It was recommended that we return to the San Marino Club in 2026. We need to book soon. Tracy will check on dates. Mid-May was suggested as a target date. This year's banquet was on May 16. The decision was made to host the event at the San Marino Club.

Contest – Walter Middlebrook

- Marty said that he spoke with Phoebe Wall Howard about concerns she had about the Digital categories in our annual Excellence in Journalism competition. Marty said that it was time to take a closer look at the categories across the board. He offered to call a meeting of the Contest Committee to do just that, inviting Phoebe and any board members to participate.

Elections – Marty Fischhoff

- The proposed slate of officers will remain the same with the exception of the secretary. That is an open position. The officers are: President, Marty Fischhoff; Vice-Presidents, Mark Lee and Rob Davidek; and Treasurer, Walter Middlebrook. Marty asked board members to consider volunteering to serve as Secretary.
- A motion was made by Beth and seconded by Mary to accept the slate of officers. Motion was approved
- Peg, our current Secretary, recommended there should be job descriptions for each of the executive committee officers. She said that she will focus on Regional Conference in the coming year..

Campus Outreach – Annalise Frank

- Wayne State is reviving its student chapter, and it was suggested that SPJ Detroit might want to consider adopting it and helping to raise money for the cause. But there was question about whether it would be favoritism to work with one university and not others, especially since Michigan State, Eastern Michigan and UD-Mercy are also talking about starting student chapters. Beth said when she resurrected the Wayne State chapter and became its advisor, a stipend was given to students for their membership fees and faculty pitched in. She said there is student activity money but the faculty advisor, now Elizabeth Stoycheff, needs to become a member of SPJ. Beth said we could help the other chapters get started as well. Marty said that at the national conference Ginny McCabe mentioned the possibility of Region 4 chipping in money for student chapters.
- Mary Zatina said that Wayne State students are touring WDIV on November 24, from 11:30 to 1:30 p.m. All board members are invited. This was the result of a student, Courtney Jordan, reaching out to WDET. Annalise says she'll attend, and it was a great way to move forward with the new chapter
- Briana Rice said NABJ is hoping to expand a mentorship program that has been running for three years.

FOIA – Beth Konrad

- Beth reported that there was a nice op-ed in The Detroit News from the Mackinac Center, which talked about Gov. Whitmer's failure to live up to her campaign promise to reform FOIA.
- She said Michigan Coalition for Open Government, of which the chapter is a member, is planning to meet in the near future.

- Beth is also the chapter's representative to the Michigan Journalism Hall of Fame, which is now accepting nominations.

Membership – Rob Davidek

- Membership remains at about 54.

Other Business

- Vince McCraw said the 2025 Show the Love fundraiser will take place at the Lager House on Sunday, November 23. It is hosted by the local chapter of the Detroit National Association of Black Journalists, in collaboration with SPJ Detroit and AAJA Michigan. Proceeds go toward grants of \$250-500 for journalists who have fallen on hard times. This year there will be a tribute to the late Luther Keith, featuring his band. Keith Owens will perform.

Financial – Walter Middlebrook

- Walter reported that as of October 31, total funds were \$46,630.59

Next meeting: It will be in-person on Wednesday, December 17, at Atwater Brewery. Tracy was going to check if we can reserve the room we've used in the past. The gathering would start at 4 p.m. with the meeting slated to begin around 4:30.

The meeting was adjourned at 9:03 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