

SPJ Detroit Minutes – January 15, 2026

Atwater Brewery

Attendees: : Marty Fischhoff, Tracy Wolf, Mark Lee, Beth Konrad, Mary Zatina, Vince McCraw, Peg McNichol, Walter Middlebrook, Anna Clark; Marcia Hart, administrator

Absent: Rob Davidek, Annalise Frank, Jeff Payne, Jeremy Allen, Nicole Avery Nichols, Kennan Oliphant, Christine Ferretti, Briana Rice

Marty Fischhoff called the meeting to order shortly after 8 a.m.

Minutes – The minutes from the December meeting were approved unanimously.

President’s Report

- Marty Fischhoff explained that the decision on the timing and location of the annual regional meeting had not been decided. National SPJ was advocating for a multi-regional event, likely to be held in Kentucky. As many as three regions might be involved. The Detroit chapter said that it would participate in planning for the programming at the event, as it has in the past. But it also expressed its strong interest in hosting the 2027 regional conference; however, it urged that this be decided late this coming summer to provide adequate time for planning. He also thanked Peg and Tracy for their involvement in these conversations.
- Marty noted that the chapter’s DEI program had been cited in the national SPJ newsletter as one of the highlights of the year. He congratulated everyone who had worked on it, especially Mark Lee who was instrumental in organizing the event.

Programming – Tracy Wolf

- Tracy recapped the 2025 programs, saying that there was a fair number and thought the chapter had taken advantage of impromptu opportunities and collaborations, including the Chris Baxter event the previous evening.
- Marty reported on the success of the event featuring Baxter, founding editor of Spotlight PA, which was a collaboration between SPJ Detroit and the University of Michigan Wallace House Center for Journalists. More than 20 people attended the conversation, enjoying food provided by Supergeil restaurant in Detroit’s Corktown neighborhood. Anna Clark gave Baxter’s talk high marks and praised Spotlight PA, which she said is receiving strong response to its service-oriented reporting and stories that resonate with its audience. Mary Zaina found the conversation thorough and very interesting, particularly what Baxter had to say about the business side of his nonprofit.
- Marty and Tracy mentioned that there have been other programs suggested, including ones focused on food journalism, attracting a younger audience and open government. Marty said that Supergeil might be a good location for a conversation with local food writers and restaurant critics about what is a growth sector of the journalism business.
- Mary liked the idea of a program on FOIA reform and the rights of journalists. At the national level, this is a hot topic as journalists are being arrested for covering protests and other events. Such a program could address what rights reporters have and whom they can turn to for help in such cases. Beth Konrad said she would approach MPA about a collaboration.
- Mark said he met with Eastern Michigan University about a program on attracting a younger audience as part of a regional conference. However, we are waiting for more clarity from the regional coordinators and national office.
- Beth said that with the end of the JOA, the editors of the Detroit Free Press and The Detroit News might be open to a program on what lies ahead for the newspapers.

Banquet – Tracy Wolf

- As discussed at the previous meeting, Tracy said the 2026 banquet will be held again at the San Marino Club in Troy. The optimum date is May 20, slightly later than usual, which provides additional time for planning and arrangements. She said she would be reaching out to the club to lock down the date and other details.
- Marty reported that SPJ National President Chris Vaccaro has expressed interest in visiting Detroit. He will let him know about the date of the banquet, which would be a great time for a visit.
- Discussion ensued about the silent auction. It was reported that last year's auction was greatly expanded yet made about the same amount of money, approximately \$500, as the first year. Mary offered to organize the auction this year, saying she would concentrate on fewer, simpler items.

Contest – Walter Middlebrook

- Marcia Hart has sent out a Call for Entries in this year's Excellence in Journalism competition. Marty thanked the Contest Committee for its work on updating the categories in the competition to bring parity and broader recognition for journalists working in all news platforms. The deadline for most of the competition is February 16.
- Marty also stressed the need to choose the 2026 Lifetime Achievement Award honorees. He said they would again be chosen by a vote of the board. He requested that nominations be sent to him, which would be forwarded to board members, who in turn would be asked to rank their top three candidates. The three nominees with the most points would be chosen.
- Marty also asked that board members please recommend judges to choose this year's Journalist and Young Journalist of the Year.

Campus Outreach – Annalise Frank

- Marty said he and Annalise had spoken about the need to reach out to college journalism departments and newspapers about our scholarship program. The application deadline is February 28.

FOIA – Beth Konrad

- Beth reported that there has been no action on FOIA reform in Lansing. MPA and the Michigan Coalition for Open Government (MCOG) have shown an interest in a ballot proposal on FOIA reform, but she was not sure where that initiative stands. She will be in touch with them.

Membership – Rob Davidek

- Marty said that the SPJ national website has two different rosters for SPJ Detroit membership – one count had the number at 55 and the other at 65. We will attempt to resolve the discrepancy. He reported that a couple journalists at the Baxter event said they were interested in joining our chapter.

Financial – Walter Middlebrook

- \$7,602.77 Checking (which will drop closer to \$4,000 after some outstanding bills are paid)
- \$7219.52 Scholarships

New Business

- There was discussion about the state of public media and inaccurate reporting about stations closing. Mary said that WDET membership is up significantly since federal defunding. She added, “We’re not going anywhere.”

Next meeting will take place on Thursday, February 12, at 8 a.m.

The meeting was adjourned at approximately 9 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