

SPJ Detroit Minutes – February 12, 2026

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

Absent: Beth Konrad, Vince McCraw, Jeff Payne, Nicole Avery Nichols

Marty Fischhoff called the meeting to order at 8:04 a.m.

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

Programming – Tracy Wolf

- Tracy said the January 14 event with Chris Baxter of Spotlight PA, had a fine turnout of approximately 20 people, despite taking place in near-blizzard conditions. Baxter spoke of the origins of Spotlight PA, its encouraging growth, its approach to journalism, the collaborations it has spawned and its plans for the future. His talk was followed by a lively round of questions from the assembled journalists. The event was held in partnership with the University of Michigan Wallace House Center for Journalists.
- Marty suggested that the chapter should offer a program on the rights of journalists, the protections they have as they pursue stories and where they can turn for legal help if needed. He said he knew a Michigan lawyer, Bill Burdett, who could talk to some of these issues. Anna Clark mentioned Sarah Matthews, an attorney with ProPublica, who previously worked at the Reporters Committee for Freedom of the Press.
- There was also discussion of a program on how the local media is covering ICE. Briana Rice said Koby Levin of Outlier Media has done some excellent reporting on the subject.
- Tracy brought up the idea of hosting a live event involving local food and restaurant reporters. Marty said that Supergeil, which was the venue for the Chris Baxter program, expressed interest in working with us again.
- Mark Lee resumed a discussion about the status of local news, especially in light of Gannett's acquisition of The Detroit News and how that changes the media landscape. He suggested a broad look at the potential impact on readers. Walter Middlebrook said that community reaction would be an important topic to include. Jeremy Allen proposed an annual "State of Journalism" conference.

Banquet – Tracy Wolf

- We have confirmed the date of the banquet – Wednesday, May 20, at the San Marino Club.
- Marty announced the three winners of the board vote for Lifetime Achievement Awards. Kennan Oliphant offered to contact Alicia Nails. Christina Ferretti will contact Stephen Henderson. Marty will contact Bill McGraw.
- We need the honorees to provide brief bios, headshots and the individuals who will introduce them at the banquet.
- Mary Zatina, who volunteered to run the silent auction this year, said her plan was to streamline the event. She would prefer items that the winning bidders can take home with them that evening. She asked board members to please let her know of potential items they might be able to acquire for the auction. Rob said that he would reach out to the Tree Top Golf Club again.

- The Lifetime Achievement Awards will be announced in late March. The finalists for the Excellence in Journalism categories will be announced in early April, along with opening ticket sales for the banquet.

Contest – Walter Middlebrook

- Marty said we need to establish two three-person panels for judging the Journalist of the Year and the Young Journalist of the Year. He asked the board if they had any suggestions for likely judges. Peg McNichols offered the names of Nancy Hanus and Joe Grimm.

Campus Outreach/Scholarships – Annalise Frank

- Annalise Frank said her committee will be reaching out to university journalism departments, asking them to make their students aware that the chapter is accepting applications for its annual scholarships. She asked if the chapter could use social media to publicize the opportunity.
- The committee needs to decide the number and amount of the scholarships.

FOIA – Beth Konrad

- Beth reported that the chances of the legislature voting on FOIA reform are practically nil. And the idea of placing a ballot proposal on open government was also likely dead.
- The chapter agreed to contribute \$250 to the Michigan Press Association, which is planning to file an amicus brief in support of the ACLU Michigan petition to the Michigan Supreme Court to set reasonable deadlines for public bodies to produce nonexempt information in response to FOIA requests.

Regional Conference – Peg McNichols

- Peg reported that the national SPJ organization is helping to plan a “megaregional conference” mostly likely in Louisville. It will include Region 4, 5 and 8.
- The planning committee continues to meet every Friday at 1 p.m. It is seeking ideas for programming at the conference.
- A venue has yet to be determined.

Membership – Rob Davidek

- Our membership count is now 56 according to the national office.

Financial – Walter Middlebrook

- \$9,783.77 in Checking
- \$7,219.52 in Scholarships

Next meeting will take place on Thursday, March 19 at 8 a.m.

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/Scholarships: **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