

MINUTES
BOARD OF DIRECTORS
SOCIETY OF PROFESSIONAL JOURNALISTS
MONDAY, MAY 6, 2019
VIDEOCONFERENCE/TELECONFERENCE MEETING

MEETING CALLED TO ORDER

The meeting was called to order at 3:14 p.m EDT. Members present: President J. Alex Tarquinio; President-elect Patti Newberry; Secretary-Treasurer Matthew Hall; Vice President of Campus Chapter Affairs Sue Kopen Katcef; Campus Advisor At-Large Jeff South; directors at-large Lauren Bartlett, Tess Fox, Victor Hernandez, Mike Reilley, Michael Savino and Yvette Walker; Region 2 Director Andy Schotz; Region 3 Director Michael Koretzky; Region 6 Director Joe Radske; Region 10 Director Don Meyers and Region 12 Director Kelly Kissel. Members absent: Director-at-large Ivette Davila-Richards and Region 11 Director Deb Krol. Others present: SPJ Foundation president Irwin Gratz, SPJ Foundation vice president Hagit Limor, SPJ lawyer Mark Bailen, SPJ lawyer Marc Antonetti, Assistant Region 3 Director Susan Dunten, SPJ D.C. Pro chapter president Jonathan Make, SPJ member Hazel Becker and others who attended but did not speak during the meeting. Gratz, Limor, Bailen and Antonetti stayed for an executive session to discuss human resources matters related to the departure of executive director Alison Bethel McKenzie.

PUBLIC COMMENT

Dunten asked when McKenzie departed and when it was communicated throughout SPJ. Tarquinio said McKenzie departed Monday, April 29 and after close of business, Tarquinio, Newberry, Gratz and Limor contacted every SPJ staff member to let them know, then posted [a brief announcement](#) on the SPJ website late that night after talking with SPJ's lawyers. About 48 hours later, after talking to SPJ's partners, Tarquinio published [a blog post](#) with more information.

Make expressed appreciation for this public meeting but great concern about how the departure had been announced. He said that [a statement](#) signed by at least nine SPJ chapters and at least 13 SPJ leaders was not a comment on the outcome of the departure, but a critique on how SPJ's membership was told about the departure. He asked why it took 48 hours to share more information on the SPJ website. Tarquinio said it took her 48 hours to talk to SPJ's partners, do outreach and be able to write a blog post. She said SPJ could have done quicker outreach to chapters and members.

Bartlett said the board should have been notified before the initial statement was posted.

Becker said the board should have a town hall meeting later about the process but focus now on its business related to the departure itself.

Tarquinio apologized for “problems with the execution” but said it was never anyone’s intention to hide anything or cover up anything. She said the board would hire an interim executive director, but none had been selected and the timeline was to be determined.

Dunten said SPJ needs a plan of action to ensure improved communication.

Walker thanked Bethel McKenzie for her work.

Becker thanked staff for carrying on so effectively at a busy time.

Hall apologized to SPJ members and said an eblast would have been a better way of notifying everyone of the departure and vowed better communication in the future.

Newberry said Tarquinio handled a difficult situation well and also said a more immediate eblast would have been a better way to let membership know.

Tarquinio praised staff for its work following the departure and said she would put related news and updates in eblasts to keep members informed.

EXECUTIVE SESSION

The board voted at 4:08 p.m. EDT to enter executive session to discuss human resources matters related to McKenzie’s departure in a separate teleconference call. Motion: Newberry. Second: Kopen Katcef. Vote: unanimous. Members absent from executive session: Davila-Richards, Hernandez, Krol and Radske. The board voted at 5:36 p.m. ET to exit executive session. Motion: South. Second: Bartlett. Vote: unanimous.

ADJOURNMENT

The board voted to adjourn at 5:37 p.m. EDT. Motion: Hall. Second: Bartlett. Vote: unanimous.