

**MINUTES**  
**SOCIETY OF PROFESSIONAL JOURNALISTS**  
**BOARD OF DIRECTORS MEETING**  
**VIA TELECONFERENCE AND VIDEO CONFERENCE**  
**JUNE 27, 2020**

**MEETING CALLED TO ORDER**

President Patricia Gallagher Newberry called the meeting to order at 12:01 p.m. EDT.

**ROLL CALL**

Those attending were Newberry, Rebecca Aguilar, Lauren Bartlett, Yvette Walker, Mike Reilly, Tess Fox, Matt Hall, Taylor Mirfenderedki and Erica Carabajal. Staff members John Shertzer and Jennifer Royer were also present.

**APPROVAL OF MINUTES**

Walker moved to accept minutes from the April 18 board meeting; Aguilar seconded. Newberry pointed out one typo – a stray “4” on third page of minutes from previous meeting. She also asked for the inclusion of new chapters we approved at that meeting for the record so we get those names in the minutes. No more discussion. Motion passed.

**PRESIDENT’S REPORT**

Newberry said it is a busy time for SPJ and the cancellation of Excellence in Journalism in Washington, D.C., due to COVID-19 is the news of the day. But she is excited about our pivot to a virtual conference. She added the announcement of this year’s Fellows of the Society will be in the coming week. She is happy with the people selected and thinks the membership will be excited by that as well. In the finance department we are spending less money and doing OK on some revenue fronts, which is good news since our last conversation about an operating deficit. Moving forward we are hiring a director of education and we are grateful the SPJ Foundation was able to grant SPJ some funds to make that happen. We’ve given \$40,000 to help journalists in need, which has made a real difference short term for journalists.

**EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR REPORT**

Shertzer said it has been a very busy few months with the Sigma Delta Chi Awards, EIJ20 cancellation announcement and several days with multiple things happening at once. He reported there were many interesting and compelling candidates for the director of education position. He plans to do follow up calls next week and interview in person after that. Aug. 1 might be realistic for someone to be in that position and ready to begin their work. He reported

that a letter has been sent to the Washington Hilton about the cancellation of EIJ20, but no response has been received. He also reported that we are talking with a couple of organizations interested in taking advantage of our association management work and he feels good about the conversations and opportunities there.

#### UPDATE ON EIJ20 PLANNING

Newberry said with the cancellation of EIJ20 due to COVID-19, the conference partnership with RTDNA and sometimes other groups, which began in 2011, is coming to an end. She said she is happy to have members on the call and hope they will offer their thoughts on a virtual conference. Fellows of the Society have agreed to participate and there are many programs that were selected pre-COVID-19 that we can choose from for the virtual conference. The programming committee is becoming the conference committee and will work with John and others at HQ to put it together. There are a lot of decisions to make quickly, including the price point.

Aguilar said it is important we address diversity, inclusion and systemic racism in the programming. There are a lot of webinars going on right now pertaining to these issues and we don't want to be repetitive, but they are very important topics and we need to have those discussions.

Newberry said pandemic, protests and politics are the top topics of the moment.

Conversation then moved to public comment to discuss conference only. Bob Becker said committees can meet independently and a business meeting could be limited to a couple of hours. Hazel Becker said discussions about freelancers and the future of journalism will be important to have. Hilary Niles said she would prefer two days of programming over just one day and it should be over the weekend. Andrew Seaman said topics like making sure newsrooms are reflective of the communities they serve, what can we do as a result of the protests and outcry for social justice. Jonathan Make said he liked the "three Ps" as a theme.

#### FINANCE

Newberry pointed out that we are now on a calendar year fiscal year, which she thinks is a great change. She pointed everyone to the memo in the board packet and said the committee will see the third quarter report in October. Matt Hall's board may need to have a meeting in November.

#### STRATEGIC PLAN UPDATE

Shertzer said the Strategic Plan Task Force took a pause in its meetings when the pandemic hit, but it is starting its meetings back up and the goal is to end up with a document we can call SPJ's Strategic Plan. He gave a presentation and shared ideas for a strategic direction. He said things are changing so rapidly that once established, the Strategic Plan should be approved annually to ensure SPJ is moving forward and achieving its goals.

Aguilar said the plan is an excellent piece of work and she is happy and sad at the same time that diversity in journalism is in the plan -- Sad that it has to be in it, but happy it is included. Since 1981 she has been waiting – and many people of color and people of diverse backgrounds have been waiting for diversity in journalism.

Bartlett agreed that it is one of the most thoughtful and comprehensive pieces she has ever seen out of headquarters and she has been a member since she was 18 years old. Diversity, advocacy and ethics are the issues this organization has held as pillars but not necessarily acted upon.

Hall said he echoes what Bartlett and Aguilar said and added that the presentation was phenomenal. He commended Shertzer for coming in midstream of a strategic task force and working with what was a continuation of previous task forces. He thinks communities are a smart way to go and he agrees that every year at the same time an annual plan and budget will come forward with the strategic plan as the guide. He said there is a lot of work to do, but this is a very good foundation.

Walker thanked Shertzer for the excellent presentation and said one of the biggest and hardest tasks is doing less and trying to figure out what to not do. When there is so much work to do, you focus on putting out those fires instead of having a cohesive focus. This helps us figure out who we are and what we want to be.

#### PUBLIC COMMENT PERIOD

Bob Shapiro said he supports a great deal of the presentation but said the way chapters are discussed is disturbing. He said SPJ national is an obstacle to the New Jersey chapter because of high dues, which are an obstacle to chapters getting and keeping members.

Newberry said chapters provide fellowship and structure but managing chapters is daunting from a national perspective and she's sorry if national SPJ is an impediment to chapters reaching their goals or making chapters feel alienated.

Bartlett said there is an effort to update and simplify rules to form collegiate chapters and encouraged Shapiro to follow up with his regional coordinator.

Hilary Niles said she echoes the appreciation and thinks the presentation is a great distillation of reframing and bringing certain activities of the organization into focus. It is gratifying to see freelancers being understood and recognized by the organization and the journalism industry as a whole. She said it was a shame when the Scripps Leadership Program changed because it encouraged freelancers to push themselves out of their comfort zones and into leadership roles. And it is critical, she said, to embed diversity into everything we do so volunteer leaders have some guidance in the best way to foster diversity.

Newberry added that things like how to be a good newsroom manager, diversity in newsrooms, etc., are all important things that need to be taught and encouraged, but are those things in

SPJ's wheelhouse> There are partner organizations and other groups who do those things very well. So there may be things SPJ partners with others on.

Jonathan Make said he hopes there are no sacred cows when the strategic planning efforts continue. He said even some ideas are contradictory to his own colloquial interests, if that is going to make SPJ a longer-lived, more vital organization, so be it. We must think strategically, he said, and he's glad to see that we are.

## COMMITTEE REPORTS

Awards and Honors Committee – Newberry thanked the committee for its exceptional work. Newberry asked if we are asking this committee to do too much?

Andy Schotz said more volunteers have been added to the committee and he thinks it has been helpful. He said the committee took on three new awards and he thinks it is appropriate for them to go before the awards committee. New categories for awards have also been added, including COVID coverage so it doesn't get lost in the other awards.

Newberry said she wants to be sure we're not burning out our volunteers. She said the virtual SDX Awards presentation was very well done and added that it is on SPJ's YouTube channel if anyone missed it and wants to watch.

Aguilar agreed the SDX Awards was a great production, excellent from beginning to end.

Diversity Committee – Aguilar said with the help of Newberry and Shertzer, the diversity fellowship was revamped last year. Normally, the diversity fellows would be active at the annual conference but because it had to be moved to virtual, this year's fellowship has been put on hold. Rachele Kanigel is also updating the Diversity Style Guide and several SPJ webinars have included diverse panelists. Walker agreed that having conversations is good and that so many people who may not have been asking questions are asking now about DACA, BLM, etc. When organizations and groups and allies can answer those questions, it relieves people of color of a level of fatigue they are feeling, Walker said.

Ethics Committee – Nothing to add to the report. Newberry said she would like to see better promotion of the Ethics Hotline because it is often used but a lot of people still don't know it exists. Said she would follow up with Shertzer about that.

Freedom of Information Committee – Newberry commended the committee and especially Kathryn Foxhall for staying on top of the public information officer issue and advocacy work being done to bring that work to another level. Bob Becker said a lot of jurisdictions are claiming COVID-19 has stopped their responses to FOIA requests. He said agencies in Washington, D.C., are not responding until after the pandemic is over, which is a major problem. It is going on across the country and he thinks SPJ should be very vocal about that.

Journalism Education Committee – Newberry said the committee transformed its “Press4Education” resources into virtual offerings and they have been used 667 times by teachers across the country.

Legal Defense Fund Committee – Memo shows 36 cases since September. Newberry said SPJ does a lot of work under the LDF umbrella and we don’t do a good job of tooting our own horn about it. There is a need for it and we do it well, so we should continue to promote the fact that we have it and the work we do for the world of journalism. She thanked SPJ’s lawyers and Hagit Limor, chair, for their work. Bartlett said as liaison to the regional coordinators, it came up in an RC meeting that when we support someone, it would be helpful if someone at HQ could reach out to the RC in that area so they can promote it.

Membership Committee – Newberry said the committee has had a lot of activity. Considering doing LDF testimonials. She sat in on a new subcommittee on student membership and the takeaway is that we know students are an important part of our future and we need to do better in finding them, etc. Advisers are the glue and we need to find and nurture those relationships.

Nominations Committee – Newberry called on everyone to reach out to their networks to get a more robust slate of candidates. There is no competition at the moment. We can and should do better. Diversity is one of the priorities we have, we should bring in diverse candidates.

Regional Coordinators – Jane Primerano said a couple of regions thought about doing virtual conferences instead of their usual in-person ones but it seemed like a huge undertaking so they canceled. Some are planning bigger conferences for next year.

International Community – Elle Toussi referred everyone to the report. The community’s Facebook group is about 400 people. A lot of people aren’t on Facebook so they also started a list serv which has about 300 people. Newberry added that the community is hosting several webinars every Tuesday evening and they are getting great feedback. People are enjoying connecting virtually and having access to the well-known speakers, including Maria Ressa, who was named SPJ Fellow of the Society last year.

Freelance Community – The community has been working on a press badge or photo i.d. program. Ginny McCabe is membership coordinator for the freelance community and has spoken to Colin DeVries, membership chair, about more strategic things the community could do to support membership initiatives. The freelance Facebook group has about 1900 members and a strong following on Twitter. The facebook group is a relevant, useful and timely forum, but there are other ways to engage with the community, she said, which they hope leads to more board recruitment and volunteer activity and engagement.

PUBLIC COMMENT PERIOD

Membership Database -- DeVries requested a session with staff to discuss the new database and ask questions. Bartlett said she is supportive of that in a very broad way. She said there have been database problems since 1996 when she joined SPJ as a pro member. HQ scheduling a meeting to hear from members is a positive thing and she understands implementing the new database is on track.

Shertzer gave a short update on the new database. He said he's always open to a forum. The implementation is moving along great with one staffer taking the lead as the day-to-day connection. All staff participated in discovery sessions to delineate functions, awards, etc. We are on track for it to go live internally in October and externally in November. You never know what can happen in the midst of that, but because September is so busy for the flow of data in and out, we didn't want to transition during such a busy time.

Newberry said an early evening session for members to ask questions would be beneficial.

Niles said underlying her interest is a suggestion for a bit of a paradigm shift to view volunteers as users of the system. Even though volunteers might not be the ones who have their hands on it, there is a lot of functionality that could enhance their ability to provide services to our members, support our members and fulfill obligations and responsibilities to SPJ.

Badge proposal – Niles and Shapiro worked together on amendments to a badge proposal and suggestions the New Jersey chapter would be interested in. Shapiro said instead of a press badge, it would be better to limit the scope to an enhanced membership card/photo i.d. card. Would include photo, SPJ logo, local chapter logo. Require that member certifies they have read the SPJ Code of Ethics. It would avoid terminology that attempts to identify cardholder as a working journalist. It would not undermine other efforts at the chapter level or otherwise to do separate press badges. Another suggestion would be to provide a phone number of someone at HQ so membership could be verified.

Newberry asked if we think it would allow freelancers smoother access? Niles said she does. It's not a perfect solution, but there are no perfect solutions. But it would satisfy the needs of most of the people. It feels actionable and avoids some of the landmines that could come up, she said.

Newberry asked about the National Rapid Response program Shapiro mentioned. He said it has been operating in New Jersey for several years. When a reporter is arrested, they contact the NJ chapter which reacts right away and makes a phone call to inquire about the situation and why the reporter was denied access or arrested. It shows that the journalist is not alone and the agency is going to face scrutiny. Shapiro said HQ has paid staff and should be able to take on this responsibility.

Bartlett said it would need to be run past attorneys and the board could put together a short, single topic meeting to discuss and vote on it. But additional information is needed and it would have to go by legal counsel.

Newberry said if we are adding another item to the list of duties at HQ she wants to be sure it is the direction we want to go. But she supports the cause and is willing to see if we can work out logistic.

Hall asked what the cost, time and logistics would be.

Aguilar said she has been a freelancer for 10 years and when she gets questioned by officials she shows them her LinkedIn profile. But she thinks a rapid response program is great because when you're in the middle of chaos it helps to know someone is on your side.

Hazel Becker said the issue came up because Haisten Willis, SPJ member and freelancer, was detained in Atlanta for covering protests. Officers took his phone away immediately and would not let him show an email from his editor who said he freelancing for him at the time. So many journalists are freelancing right now. There is a real need for this.

Schotz said when Shapiro talks about someone at HQ being available, that is exactly what part of the job of the Journalist on Call was supposed to be. Schotz had concerns about how the code of ethics was presented in the original proposal. We have to be careful not to use the code as a litmus test. He said he is a little less concerned now, but encourages not using the code of ethics at all, because it will be misused and he'd rather us stay away from that.

ENTER EXECUTIVE SESSION

Newberry thanked everyone for their input and said that ends the public portion of the meeting.

Bartlett moved to enter executive session. Reilley seconded. Motion passed. The board entered executive session at 2:45 p.m. EDT.

EXIT EXECUTIVE SESSION

The board exited executive session at 4:25 p.m. EDT. No votes were brought to the floor. Motion to adjourn by Bartlett, second by Reilley. Motion passed.

MEETING ADJOURNED

Meeting adjourned at 4:26 p.m. EDT.