



MINUTES
SOCIETY OF PROFESSIONAL JOURNALISTS
BOARD OF DIRECTORS MEETING

DATE: MAY 1, 2021

TIME: 12 P.M. EDT

Meeting Called to Order

President Matthew T. Hall called the meeting to order via Zoom at 12:02 p.m. EDT

Roll Call

Secretary-treasurer Ivette Davila Richards called roll. Those present were:

- Matt Hall
- Rebecca Aguilar
- Ivette Davila-Richards
- Lauren Bartlett
- Jerry McCormick
- Rafael Olmeda
- Claire Regan
- Bey-Ling Sha
- Yvette Walker

Approval of Minutes

A motion was made by Bartlett to approve the minutes, with the amendment she sent to the board, for the April 17, 2021, meeting minutes. Walker seconded. Motion passed.

President's Report

Hall said conversation surrounding conference has been inclusive, open, transparent and mostly civil. This is the third meeting the board has held since February to discuss 2021 convention and whether to have in person, virtual or hybrid. He reminded everyone that two

surveys were distributed to members in February and April and every pro chapter president was asked whether they thought the convention should be virtual or hybrid, and should SPJ require convention attendees to be vaccinated with exceptions as permitted by law. The unscientific results were that 19 boards or board presidents prefer hybrid, 2 preferred virtual and 5 others were split. As for requiring vaccinations, it was 12-3 in favor of them. Hall explained that today's meeting, so as not to jeopardize our contract or convention partner, will be held largely in closed session at the advice of SPJ's attorney, but there will be a public vote after the board exits executive session.

Public Comment Period

Hall began the public comment period, given each speaker 60 seconds to speak.

Nerissa Young asked what the estimated loss would be from the trade show in an in-person vs. virtual conference and where would money come from if the contract is broken and SPJ has to pay a penalty? Hall said following SPJ's attorney's advice, the contract would not be discussed in open session. Executive Director John Shertzer said it is not clear at this point whether money would be lost or gained in either a virtual or in-person format and that staff would sell it differently depending on what is decided.

Jonathan Make read a statement from a number of individuals, local/regional SPJ leaders, who support only hybrid conferences.

Hilary Niles commented on the website navigation and access to board materials. Shertzer put a link to the materials in the chat and said he would investigate the navigation issues she mentioned.

Randy Showstack, president of the Washington, D.C., Pro Chapter read a statement which was approved by the chapter's board. They urge the Board of Directors to return to planning for a hybrid conference in September and said they are concerned about the financial implications of exiting the hotel contract.

Bob Becker added that moving to an all-virtual conference would be a waste money. That since the board last met events have occurred and things are opening up and are likely to do so even more by September.

Alex Tarquinio said the board at its last meeting did an excellent job weighing implications of the pandemic. As a past-president and former member of several conference planning committees, she made a list of the types of questions the board should ask in deliberations in executive session. If the board asks those questions, she has complete confidence its decision will be in the best interest of SPJ.

Robert Buckman said his chapter voted in favor of a hybrid conference. He said the last time the board met the situation was more dire than it is now and by September, with masks,

vaccinations we can have a safe and successful convention. With an all virtual convention you lose the interactivity among members. He said that is one of the most valuable aspects of our conventions and he really missed that last year. Would like to see an in-person convention come back this year.

Irwin Gratz agreed that the SPJ convention energizes SPJ members and the board should seriously consider going for a hybrid convention.

Patti Newberry said she could see value of both sides, but her biggest concern is the quality of the in-person aspect if we go hybrid. Many speakers and panelists believe they will stay virtual and that concerns her. She loves seeing fellow members and staff in person, but one of the big draws is a chance to see journalists making contributions in person. If there is an in-person element, she hopes that efforts will be made to convince some speakers to be at the in-person events.

Hagit Limor said she would not mind sitting in a room with friends watching virtual speakers. A virtual convention is just one way to do a convention. A hybrid lets everyone who wants to attend virtually do so. It also allows members who want to attend in person to do that. Why not let people to attend how they want, she asked.

Hazel Becker said there are freelance panels that have some speakers who have said they won't go to an in-person conference, but it's not a given that speakers won't go to New Orleans.

Sonny Albarado said for him it has always been about the fiduciary responsibility and hopes that will be taken into consideration in executive session.

Israel Balderas said going forward slowly is the best way for everyone. He said money is important but at the end of the day a life cannot be bought.

Enter Executive Session

Bartlett made a motion to enter executive session and include relevant staff, SPJ's attorney and president and vice president of the SPJ Foundation Board of Directors. Olmeda seconded. Motion passed.

The board entered executive session at 12:27 p.m. EDT.

Exit Executive Session

The board exited executive session at 3:45 p.m. EDT.

Olmeda made a motion that the board authorize the staff to resume preparations and negotiations for a hybrid conference for 2021, continuing to monitor the pandemic and

preparing to pivot to all virtual should future circumstances warrant. Bartlett seconded the motion.

Hall gave each board member the opportunity to speak. He then said every board member has taken this seriously, has lived up to their fiduciary duty, has lived up to the moral ethical journalistic duty. He said members should be proud of this board and vote all nine of board members take today. He said it was the most difficult decision he's faced in seven years on this board.

A roll call vote was taken to host a hybrid conference:

Walker – yes

Sha – yes

Regan – no

Bartlett – yes

McCormick – no

Aguilar – no

Davila Richards – no

Olmeda – yes

Hall – yes

Meeting adjourned

Bartlett made a motion to adjourn; Walker seconded. Motion passed. Meeting adjourned at 4:12 p.m. EDT