



SOCIETY OF PROFESSIONAL JOURNALISTS BOARD OF DIRECTORS MEETING MINUTES

DATE: NOV. 20, 2021

TIME: 1 P.M. EST

(THE FULL MEETING MAY BE VIEWED ON YOUTUBE AT
[HTTPS://WWW.YOUTUBE.COM/WATCH?V=3N6WAEyOWbM](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3N6WAEyOWbM))

MEETING CALLED TO ORDER

President Rebecca Aguilar called the meeting to order at 1:01 p.m. EST.

ROLL CALL

Secretary-Treasurer Ivette Davila-Richards called roll. Those present in addition to Aguilar and Davila-Richards were Claire Regan; Israel Balderas; Daniela Ibarra; Danielle McLean; Rafael Olmeda and Cheryl Smith. Emily Bloch was not in attendance due to a family emergency. Staff present were Executive Director John Shertzer; Controller Jake Koenig; Staff Accountant Nate Rushton; Event Planner Katie Riggs and Director of Communications Jennifer Royer.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Olmeda made a motion to approve the minutes from the Sept. 18, 2021, board meeting. Balderas seconded. Motion passed.

PRESIDENT'S REMARKS

Aguilar reminded everyone that it is National Native American Heritage Month and encouraged news organizations to make sure Native Americans are represented in newsrooms and news stories. She recognized and gave appreciation to SPJ HQ staff Linda Hall, Billy O'Keefe and Caroline Escobar for their commitment and hard work to the organization. Hall is retiring and O'Keefe and Escobar are leaving to pursue other endeavors. Aguilar commended the Los Angeles Pro Chapter for its work in ensuring SB98 passed and the Detroit Pro Chapter for keeping journalist Danny Fenster, who returned home, in the spotlight. She encouraged everyone to spread the word about SPJ and the importance of journalism for Giving NewsDay Nov. 30 and to ask their friends, family, colleagues for financial support for SPJ on that day. She said committee chairs have done a great job putting together their teams. The Awards Committee has added Spanish language categories as part of the move to have more inclusion and diversity in what we do. Awards open for submissions this week and she encouraged everyone to spread the word. The Membership Committee is conducting a college outreach initiative where they are asking

SPJ members to contact their alma maters and volunteer to speak to journalism classes about what SPJ has to offer. Those who have questions should contact Adam Senott, chair of the committee, for more information. She said this board meeting is about being positive and productive and said she would look at the chat when she can, but would like to keep the meeting focused and everyone speaking face-to-face. She noted there will be an Executive Session to discuss the possible sale of the HQ building and the executive director's performance review.

PUBLIC COMMENT PERIOD

Member McNelly Torres shared that the National Association of Hispanic Journalists just launched an investigative task force to reach out to editors regarding diversity on investigative teams. She said anyone who is interested in joining the group can let her know and email her at mtorres@nahj.org. She also voiced concern regarding the Facebook training program and said she would like to have a conversation about that. Aguilar said it is being discussed and she will keep everyone updated.

Member Hazel Becker said she is happy to see new faces on committees but will also miss some faces of the past. She suggested that all committee chairs think about transparency when they have their meetings and that it is a longtime SPJ tradition that committee meetings are open to all members. She also said as one of the moderators of the Freelance Facebook group, she is interested in looking for other types of communication and forums where freelancers can gather virtually and would be happy to hear suggestions. Aguilar said she prefers committees being efficient with meetings and reporting out any actions taken. She added that no previous SPJ presidents told her committee meetings need to be open and she doesn't recall them being open when she has been chair or a member of committees. Becker said there is no reason to have closed committee meetings. Member Alex Tarquinio added that there was criticism in the past about committee meetings held at the annual conference not being open to everyone. She said committees might have to discuss some things in private. Member Jennifer Ellis said there is no reason to meet in secret and that paying SPJ members should be free to attend any meetings they want. Board member Danielle McLean said as FOI Committee chair, if someone wanted was thinking about joining the committee, she would invite them to attend a meeting. She added that minutes are taken in those meetings and available to anyone who wants to see them.

APPROVAL OF 2021-22 SPJ APPOINTMENTS TO THE SPJ FOUNDATION BOARD

The board approved the one-year appointments of Balderas, Davila-Richards, Jerry McCormick, Regan and Smith to the SPJ Foundation Board.

APPROVAL OF REGION 7 REGIONAL COORDINATOR APPOINTMENT

Balderas made a motion and Davila-Richards seconded to appoint Pilar Pedraza to a one-year appointment as Region 7 RC. Motion passed.

APPROVAL OF 2021-22 NOMINATIONS CHAIR APPOINTMENT

Davila-Richards made a motion and Regan seconded to appoint Ashanti Blaize-Hopkins as Nominations Committee Chair. Motion passed.

LEGAL DEFENSE FUND UPDATE

Balderas as LDF Committee chair gave an update on action regarding the LDF. He said it has been a very busy time for LDF and not a week goes by that we do not have a request to join amicus briefs. He

commended the Reporters Committee for Freedom of the Press for its work. He reported there have been several applicants for LDF assistance with legal costs and the five-person committee met a couple weeks earlier. He said the committee had a good conversation about how often and how much should SPJ join amicus briefs when other organizations ask us to join. He said the committee should scrutinize whether it is in the best interest of SPJ, the First Amendment and if it will motivate more journalists to join SPJ.

FINANCE COMMITTEE REPORT

Davila-Richards said the committee met last week said the budget is lean and robust. She handed it over to Shertzer who said there is a small surplus and that is always a good place to be. Shertzer then asked Koenig to present the details. He gave an overview of the budget first and explained they projected a conservative budget which includes a modest surplus they are projecting. Olmeda asked about the reserves and Koenig said they increased quite a bit in 2021. Because board members didn't travel and the PPE loan, Koenig said it is at a good level now and we're hoping it will increase each year. Aguilar added that the sell of the headquarters building and meeting every requirement to not pay back the PPE loan will also help. Balderas suggested SPJ is in trouble because the inflation rate is going to increase and he can see a future where a lot of SPJ members will be let go from their jobs. He said we have a six month cushion, but if something goes south that can quickly go to two months. Shertzer explained that the budget is just a management tool and is not set in stone. They budget on trends, including planning for a decrease in membership this year. The committee can change the budget if needed and if circumstances are so severe, a revised budget can be presented. Koenig agreed and said there is no "fluff" in the budget and we know that nine months of the next 12 months exactly what we'll be paying in health insurance, which is a very big part of the budget. Koenig said all we can do is not inflate things, give it the best guess. He said everything is very tight and if this budget comes to perfection, we'll have \$22,000 more in the bank than we do now. If things go south, we'll have to pivot and make decisions based on those circumstances. McLean asked if we have ever assessed how layoffs in journalism affect SPJ conference attendance, etc. Shertzer said not to his knowledge but that is something we could look into doing.

Olmeda made a motion to approve the budget. Davila-Richards seconded.

Balderas said he is going to vote against the budget because he thinks at least one person should be on the record as not accepting modern monetary theory.

A roll call vote was requested. Vote was 7 yes (Olmeda, Smith, McLean, Regan, Davila-Richards and Aguilar) and 1 no (Balderas). Bloch was absent and did not vote. Motion passed.

2022 STRATEGIC PLAN GOALS

Shertzer reviewed the strategic plan and goals for the year. There was discussion about professional development training for chapters. Shertzer said HQ does not always know who chapter officers are because chapters don't always report that information, but perhaps once a quarter all chapter presidents should gather via Zoom to discuss best practices, training, etc. Balderas said he hopes we're not adding "ethics" or "ethical" to everything, referencing the Director of Ethics and Diversity title given to a staff member. Shertzer said that is not what is happening and we do have a staff member who manages both of those areas. Balderas also said he would have a problem with calling someone a "director of advocacy" and that perception is sometimes reality. We do want to champion first amendment principles that help our members, Balderas said, but he thinks more conversations need to

happen regarding lobbying for legislation to pass that would be beneficial to journalists and journalism. Balderas also said he believes we missed a big opportunity by not recording the Future Leaders Academy so all members could benefit from the leadership training. He suggested surveys should be sent to members to find out what they want and need from SPJ. Balderas also asked how staff will be managed and work together once the HQ building is sold. Shertzer said procedures and protocols will be developed, but staff has operated mostly remotely the past two years and have stayed collaborative and working together.

2023 CONVENTION PROPOSED SITE REVIEW

Shertzer and Riggs presented some possibilities for the 2023 Convention site to get the board's input and see if we are heading in the right direction. Shertzer said if the convention has not been in Pacific Coast Time since 2017. So far, in 2023 we have no partner organizations, though there are some ideas for partnerships that we are exploring. But as of now, we are on our own. The three cities they are looking at are Phoenix, Las Vegas and San Diego. Riggs said all three properties offer F&B that looks good to us, free wifi in meeting rooms and good room rates. Riggs explained that because so few conferences were held in 2021 and 2022, many were pushed into 2022 and 2023 so there is a lot less availability for dates, space and room blocks because so many groups pushed contracts forward. Aguilar said she would like the room rate to stay under \$170 and said she likes Las Vegas for the business and pleasure, the hotel rate of \$159 and flying in and out is sometimes cheaper. Olmeda asked about Seattle. Riggs said it can be pricey and very few hotels can accommodate the amount of meeting space we require. McLean said she is concerned there has been little concern about climate change, adding that we dodged a massive bullet in 2021 with planning the convention in New Orleans during hurricane season. Two of the cities mentioned for 2023 have extreme heat in September, she said, and if we do not factor in that risk, we are not doing our fiduciary duty. Shertzer said staff will investigate Las Vegas and Phoenix and report back to the board.

DATABASE TOOL FOR ADVOCACY EFFORTS

FOI Committee Member Kathryn Foxhall explained that she would like to purchase a database of employees of state offices to nonprofits, federal, congressional and media offices, called Leadership Connect. She would like SPJ staff to play around with it and see if it would be beneficial, especially if we move toward an advocacy presence in Washington, D.C., as mentioned in the strategic plan. Foxhall offered to pay the \$13,000 for the first year to include staff access. Regan thanked Foxhall for her generosity and asked if there are other options where SPJ could invest in it instead of relying on the generosity of one member. Foxhall said she worked in public health for 17 years and knows from conversations with reporters from the New York Times and The Washington Post and other lesser-known publications that reporters are often blocked by PIOs in these offices from gaining access to subject matter experts and information. She said people are dying right now because of the deficiencies in the federal structure and reporters need access to the truth. She said she is panicked, not generous. Aguilar, Balderas and McLean supported accepting Foxhall's offer and thanked her for her generosity.

ENTER EXECUTIVE SESSION

Aguilar said the board needed to enter executive session to discuss the building sale update and the executive director's annual performance review.

McLean made a motion to enter executive session. Regan seconded. Motion passed. The board entered executive session at 4:05 p.m. EST.

EXIT EXECUTIVE SESSION

The board exited executive session at 4:36 p.m. EST.

Ibarra made a motion to give the executive director the authority to sell the SPJ HQ building under the terms discussed by the board in executive session. Regan seconded. Motion passed unanimously.

ADJOURNMENT

Olmeda made a motion to adjourn. Davila-Richards seconded. Meeting adjourned at 4:41 p.m. EST.