



*MEETING MINUTES*

## **SOCIETY OF PROFESSIONAL JOURNALISTS**

### **BOARD OF DIRECTORS MEETING**

APRIL 23, 2022

VIEW RECORDING OF MEETING: [HTTPS://WWW.YOUTUBE.COM/WATCH?V=F8ST7365X7M](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=f8ST7365X7M)

#### **MEETING CALLED TO ORDER**

President Rebecca Aguilar called the meeting to order at noon EST.

#### **ROLL CALL**

Secretary-treasurer Ivette Davila-Richards was absent due to work so President-elect Claire Regan called roll. Those present were: Aguilar, Regan, Israel Balderas, Emily Bloch, Daniela Ibarra, Danielle McLean, Rafael Olmeda and Cheryl Smith.

#### **APPROVAL OF MINUTES**

Olmeda made a motion to approve the meeting minutes of Jan. 22, 2022. Regan seconded. There was no discussion and the motion passed.

#### **PRESIDENT'S REMARKS**

Aguilar said it has been an interesting three months since the last meeting. Committees and communities were very productive and served their local and national members well. The Georgia Pro Chapter took the lead on two Zoom sessions – attended by more than 100 journalists -- regarding the safety of multimedia journalists. There were more Mark of Excellence and Sigma Delta Chi awards entries than last year. Aguilar thanked Honors and Awards Committee Chair Brian Collister and Awards Manager Lou Harry for their work on the awards programs. Regional conferences were held across the country and local chapters helped in the planning. In March, the Membership Committee launched the #SPJChapterStrong Leadership Series. Aguilar thanked Membership Committee Chair Adam Sennott for his leadership and vision. Sunshine Week was a success and Aguilar thanked FOI Committee and Chair Haisten Willis for their work. April started with a successful Ethics Week with roundtables. Aguilar thanked Ethics Committee Chair Duane Pohlman and Director of Ethics and Diversity Rod Hicks for their leadership on Ethics Week. She commended chapters for the many Zoom events, bringing in great speakers and continuing to be the boots on the ground for SPJ and journalists everywhere. She congratulated the Chicago Headline Club for celebrating its 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary this year. She thanked the International Community for keeping us informed about what is happening to journalists around the

world. She thanked the SPJ Foundation for its support of the SPJ Foundation Freelance Fund. She thanked headquarters staff for supporting the efforts and celebrated the creation of two new chapters in Puerto Rico and Baruch College in New York City and encouraged everyone to keep Ukraine in their thoughts and prayers during this difficult time.

## **PUBLIC COMMENT PERIOD**

Member Colin DeVries wanted the board to hear his concern about something he heard on his own recently. He said he wanted to encourage the board to prioritize the SPJ Code of Ethics in its associations and work to champion journalists who adhere to it. He wants us to position ourselves so we don't harm our reputation and uphold the code appropriately.

Member Andy Schotz asked if the Delegate Task Force Report is available for people to read. Aguilar said yes it would be and she would address it later in the meeting.

Jennifer Ellis, chair of regional caucus, asked if comments would be allowed to comment after report is given. Aguilar said there will be another meeting next month. Ellis then mentioned that the MOE Awards deadline was too late for a lot of regional conferences to present awards at their regional conferences. She asked that the deadline be moved up so there is more lead time in planning regional conferences. Aguilar said she would speak to staff about it.

Sennott said he hoped the membership database issues would soon be under control and that he continues to hear about issues. Aguilar said it has been an ongoing issue and that staff continues to work on it, there has been staff turnover, but we will keep working on it.

## **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR REPORT**

Shertzer said 2022 has been fast paced so far and staff has worked through a couple significant things including selling and packing up, moving equipment, etc., from the headquarters building. There has been staff turnover and we have recently lost some staff who have been around for quite some time. There has been a big knowledge and information transfer, but staff is getting stronger every day. Spring is always a very busy time for HQ staff due to Ethics Week, Sunshine Week and other things Rebecca mentioned and it has been a lot of trial by fire in some cases and learning on the job.

Shertzer then shared a presentation regarding membership and what is happening with the Impexium membership software. We have not lost members from the database, but some join dates, etc., need to be corrected to members' records. Shertzer said Membership Specialist Amy Monteleone has taken off with membership and Impexium. He said the bottom line is that there have been some technical issues with Impexium. Those issues primarily impacted members wishing to rejoin or join chapters. In addition, staff turnover impacted how we handle membership billing and communications. Some bright spots include 911 new members have joined since Jan. 1. Student member numbers continue to be strong. At the most recent peak of membership, Impexium was working smoothly for the most part, and Impexium has been a responsive partner. Shertzer outlined some of the issues, including an error where memberships were renewed for 2023, not 2022. Some members have had trouble locating chapters; Membership dues have been inadequate and due to these issues, chapter rosters have not been accurate. Shertzer said it is time to put these issues to bed and create the best member experience in the business. He hopes by July he can report the things we've done. At minimum, we're going to do these four things: 1. That joining/renewing process is user friendly. 2. Campaign to encourage members

to give us their most current information on their Impexium profiles. 3. We're building a member outreach and retention program. 4. We will do a membership drive focused on lapsed members from the last 3-5 years. He said it's a new system, we're still learning how to work with it.

Aguilar said 900 new members is music to our ears. She appreciates that Shertzer took ownership of the Impexium issues and being more involved in learning the database and fixing the problems. She requested that community membership can be a prominent feature on member profiles within the database.

McLean said she thinks our website and database are holding SPJ back. Annual reports are still done on paper but should be easy to enter electronically, see on the website, scroll through to see that data. Want to know process for getting community and chapter feedback and making sure concerns are being integrated.

Shertzer said we get a lot of feedback and suggestions from chapter presidents, etc., and incorporate that feedback. More routine meetings with chapters is a good idea, satisfaction surveys throughout their experience. Right now we're putting out more immediate fires, but all that feedback can be incorporated.

McLean said the fact that a lot of this is due to issues with staffing turnover is concerning as well. Nonprofits go through staffing changes and whether this is the right system or not, things being automated is important so when we lose staff members things don't have to be gone through manually and things aren't affected by the loss of staff members.

DeVries suggested that giving all the feedback, a meeting to outline issues having as a group would be beneficial and make everyone feel heard. Creating a centralized document would be really great. Has the 911 members affected our total membership? How many have lapsed? Many may not realize their membership expired and they should renew.

Hilary Niles, Freelance Community chair, reminded everyone that community leaders should be included in the conversations too.

Member Hazel Becker said she has been looking at reports for the Freelance Community for two or three years now. She said on the old database, there was some wiggle room on whether someone's renewal came in a little late and she thinks that is an important thing to be looking at too in the database.

Aguilar said it has been a headache but she has six months left and she doesn't want to turn over a problem to Claire. She appreciates the feedback because as a board they can't see every issue.

McLean said documenting issues and progress would be helpful to see what is being addressed and when it is resolved, what issues need more time, etc.

Shertzer said that's a good suggestion as a way to report back on how we're doing this.

## **FINANCIAL REPORT**

Shertzer said overall we ended up in the black for the budget and referred to the detailed report in the board packet. Almost all can be attributed to receiving a PPP loan from the federal government.

Controller Jake Koenig said we look at everything on a cash basis. Positive unrestricted cash flow of \$186,000 which went to increase our reserves which gives us more financial punch in the future. Shertzer referred to a memo with recommendations for use of revenue for proceeds of sale of the headquarters building. Recommendation is to invest funds and use the revenue from those funds to pay for office expenses in perpetuity.

SPJ Foundation Board President Irwin Gratz said the Foundation board would discuss in their meeting this afternoon. He does not know how the board will respond. He said from Foundation's experience they have adopted a fairly hands off approach to investing. The board has experimented with hiring money managers but found the board was outperforming the money managers. Long-term strategy of Foundation has been to move money as little as possible and keep expenses down.

McLean asked what the cost is for renting office space. Shertzer reported that rent at Industrious in downtown Indianapolis is currently \$20,000 annually. Add a storage facility and phone service and it comes to roughly \$1,000 more annually.

Bloch made a motion to invest funds of the building sale, following existing SPJ investment policies, and use the proceeds to fund occupancy expenses for SPJ and the SPJ Foundation. Ibarra seconded. Motion passed unanimously.

## **MEDIAFEST22**

Regan reported the conference is scheduled for Oct. 27-30 at the Grand Hyatt in Washington, D.C., with American Collegiate Press Association and College Media Association. We are in proposal stage, seeking programming proposals. Deadline is April 28. Education Director Karyn Sneath said we emailed community leaders, committee chairs and regional coordinators and encouraged them to submit proposals.

Aguilar encouraged board to put in an idea for a session, especially because we haven't seen panels in person for two years. Bring in ideas, the more we have the more we can choose from. It's a very simple form to submit proposals.

Regan said last year there were 70 proposals and we put into place 50 of them. We need proposals and we will use most of them. She said the conference is entirely in person. We are still monitoring the pandemic, but are looking forward to being in person.

There was discussion about requiring proof of vaccination. Shertzer said for now there is a vax requirement and if the board does not want the requirement to speak up. He said the question is how to enforce it. Ibarra mentioned Clear, which verifies vaccinations.

## **DELEGATE TASK FORCE REPORT**

Task force chair Adam Sennott presented the task force's recommendations, which is included in the board packet and is posted on the website. The recommendation is to abolish the delegate system and have one member, one vote. The board will vote on the recommendation at a special June 4 board meeting and if passed, will move on to the Bylaws Committee and to delegates for vote at the convention in October.

Olmeda suggested giving members a chance to speak before the meeting in June. He said we should talk to as many members as we can in a public setting to give people a chance to voice their opinions and express their views. They agreed that two town halls would be held via Zoom before the June board meeting.

### **NOMINATIONS COMMITTEE REPORT**

Nominations Committee Chair Ashanti Blaize-Hopkins said there are no candidates who have declared for president-elect, secretary-treasurer or regional coordinators for regions 5, 7, 8 or 9. She reported there will be a series of moderated Q&A sessions to educate members on what running for elections and serving in elected SPJ positions entails. The first one is at 9 p.m. EDT and will include Ibarra and former board members Bey Ling Sha and Jerry McCormick. The deadline to declare is Sept. 15, six weeks before convention per SPJ bylaws.

Aguilar encouraged everyone to find someone who has leadership qualities to run.

### **OTHER COMMITTEE REPORTS**

There were no other committee reports presented.

### **ENTER EXECUTIVE SESSION**

Ibarra made motion to enter executive session. Regan seconded. Motion carried.  
Board entered executive session at 2:02 p.m. EDT to discuss 2022 SPJ Fellows of the Society selections and a matter involving SPJ legal counsel.

### **EXIT EXECUTIVE SESSION**

Board has determined the Fellows of Society and will announce them at a later date.

### **ADJOURNMENT**

Ibarra made motion to adjourn. Regan seconded. Meeting adjourned at 2:40 p.m. EDT.