

**MINUTES  
BOARD OF DIRECTORS  
SOCIETY OF PROFESSIONAL JOURNALISTS  
AUGUST 20, 2014  
SKYPE CONFERENCE CALL**

**MEETING CALLED TO ORDER**

With President David Cuillier presiding, the meeting of the board of directors of the Society of Professional Journalists was called to order at 7:03 p.m. on Wednesday, Aug. 20, 2014, via Skype conference call.

In addition to Cuillier, the following were present for all or a portion of the meeting: President-Elect Dana Neuts; Immediate Past President Sonny Albarado; Secretary-Treasurer Paul Fletcher; Vice President for Campus Chapter Affairs Sue Kopen Katcef; Director at-Large Carl Corry; Campus Advisers at-Large Kym Fox and Becky Tallent; Student Representatives Lindsey Cook and Brett Hall; Regional Directors Andy Schotz, Michael Koretzky, Patti Gallagher Newberry, Joe Radske, David Sheets, Pia Hallenberg, Matt Hall and Tony Hernandez.

Staff members on the call were Executive Director Joe Skeel, Associate Executive Director Chris Vachon and Chapter Coordinator Tara Puckey.

The purpose of the call was to:

- Consider the application from the Digital Community.
- Make a recommendation on the most recent Ethics Code revision.

**DIGITAL COMMUNITY**

Neuts provided brief background on the Digital Community, including its current activity and short-term plans. She also answered questions from board members.

**Upon proper motion and second by Neuts and Hernandez, respectively, the board voted to approve the Digital Community.**

**ETHICS CODE REVISION**

Fletcher, who is also a member of the Ethics Committee, explained that the revision has been a year-long process. A number of concerns were appropriately raised about the process. Each time those concerns were raised, they were addressed.

He went on to explain the concept of a “living code,” later referred to by board members as the “annotated code.” The purpose of the annotated code is to live “behind” the Code of Ethics and provide more detailed explanations and examples of principles listed in the code.

Fletcher asked the board to consider the body of work, and that it vote to recommend to delegates to support the code as written.

To start discussion, Fletcher moved that the board recommend that the delegates adopt the latest code revision. The motion was seconded by Tallent.

Schotz shared that he was hesitant about voting yes or no on the current version because it still needed work.

Other board members also shared their opinions:

- Hallenberg thanked the committee for its work, and liked the tone of the new code. She said it more accurately reflects the way many reporters work today. She asked if it would be prudent to present the code and revisit in a set time period, such as two years. She asked if that set review should be in the code.
- Addressing concerns about having the current code “line edited by delegates,” Tallent shared that she was part of the group that revised the code in 1996. She said they expected the code to be picked apart at convention. They were shocked when it wasn’t.
- Furthermore, Tallent said she likes that this is a “green-light” code, but recognized it isn’t a perfect code. “Is it perfect, heck no it’s not. No code is. If the rank and file membership wants to say no, so be it. I think it’s time we (as a board) pushed it on.”
- Albarado agreed with Tallent.
- Gallagher-Newberry had two main concerns regarding the information that is being put out to membership, specifically related to editing at EIJ and future revisions. In short: What’s possible in Nashville and what’s possible going forward. Can we define that in some way?
- Matt Hall stated that the board doesn’t want to mislead people and have them think SPJ is going to review the code on a regular basis. “These aren’t the 10 Commandments, but they are the Four Pillars. You don’t rebuild your foundation every two years.”
- Specifically, Hall asked if Social Media should be mentioned more. Also, he questioned the principle of *Weigh the consequences of publishing personal information, including that from social media*. Hall felt the phrase “personal information” was too vague.
- Hall also asked for an example of the “footnotes” or annotated code. Fletcher provided that and further explained that the social media question was hotly debated among the committee during its meeting in July.

Schotz moved that the board recommends to the delegates that they remove the following principle: *Be cautious about reporting suicides that do not involve a public person or a public place*.

It was seconded by Cook

Schotz disagrees with this because he said it seems to be pointing to a philosophy that it’s taboo and should be kept private. Schotz said suicide is a public health issue. He went on to say the wording may actually work opposite of its intent: instead giving the implication that journalists don’t need to be cautious when reporting suicides of public people or those that occur in public places.

**Upon proper motion and second by Schotz and Cook, respectively, the board voted to recommend to delegates that it strike the following passage from the revised code: *Be cautious about reporting suicides that do not involve a public person or a public place.***

Schotz then moved that the board recommend to the delegates that the following passage be added: *Encourage a civil exchange of public opinions, in which participants don't mask their identities and poison the conversation. Recognize the potential harm of anonymous comments.*

Motion was seconded by Sue Kopen Katcef and discussion ensued.

Schotz said he felt like this would be a good opportunity for SPJ to take the lead on this, pointing to the comment sections on news sites that often devolve into vile, racist, non-helpful dialogue – sometimes changing the tone of the original news story.

Cook opposed adding the principle, pointing out that news organizations around the country still haven't come to a conclusion on if public comments on websites are valuable or not.

M. Hall also spoke against the addition, stating that his job requires him to pull comments from the web – some of them anonymous. He also doesn't support singling out "online comments" since SPJ is trying to make the code platform neutral. He stated that he does support the notion of "Encourage a civil exchange of public opinions."

Vigorous debate continued for several minutes.

The motion failed on a roll call vote 10-5 against. The votes were as follows:

Corry: No

Neuts: No

Cook: No

Kopen Katcef: Yes

Radske: No

Hallenberg: Yes

Sheets: No

Schotz: Yes

M. Hall: No

Fox: No

Tallent: No

Gallagher-Newberry: No

Hernandez: Yes

Albarado: No

B. Hall: Yes

Gallagher Newberry then moved that the board recommend to the delegates that they include the following passage in the revised code: *"Encourage news consumers to identify themselves and offer civil exchanges when offering feedback to news coverage or issues of the day."*

Hernandez provided a second for the motion.

After some debate, the motion failed on a voice vote.

Schotz made a third motion that the board recommend to the delegates that they include the following passage in the revised code:

*"Encourage a civil exchange of public opinions. Recognize the potential harm of allowing anonymous online comments."*

The motion was seconded by Koretzky.

The motion failed on a roll call vote 8-5 against. The votes were as follows:

Matthew Hall: No

Cook: No

Albarado: No

Corry: No

Tallent: No

Fox: No

Sheets: No

Neuts: No

Schotz: Yes

Gallagher Newberry: Yes

Hernandez: Yes

Kopen Katcef: Yes

Hallenberg: Yes

Hearing no further motions or discussions, Cuillier called for a vote on Fletcher's original motion, including the amendment passed by the board regarding suicide coverage.

**Upon proper motion and second by Fletcher and Tallent respectively, the SPJ Board of directors recommends that the delegates of ELJ14 adopt the latest revision of the Code of Ethics. It further recommends that the delegates vote to strike the following passage: "Be cautious about reporting suicides that do not involve a public person or public place."**

The motion passed on a roll call vote of 11-4 in favor, with one abstention. The votes were as follows:

Cook: No

B. Hall: Yes

Neuts: Yes

Hernandez: Yes

Gallagher-Newberry: Yes

Koretzky: No  
Albarado: Yes  
Hallenberg: Yes  
Fox: Yes  
M. Hall: Yes  
Schotz: No  
Tallent: Yes  
Kopen Katcef: Yes  
Fletcher: Yes  
Corry: No  
Sheets: Abstain

**Upon proper motion and second by Tallent and Neuts respectively, the SPJ Board of directors adjourned at 8:48 p.m. EST on Wednesday, Aug. 20.**