

## WTTW COMMUNITY ADVISORY BOARD

MINUTES of the  
PUBLIC MEETING of the  
WTTW Community Advisory Board (CAB)  
Tuesday March 1, 2016  
WTTW Studios  
5400 N St. Louis Avenue  
Chicago, Illinois

Chairman Joseph Morris (Chair) called the meeting to order at 6:00 p.m. In the Secretary's absence, the Chair designated Vice Chairman (Vice Chair) Mary Lou Mockus to act as Secretary Pro Tempore.

**The following members of the Community Advisory Board (CAB) were present:** Joseph Morris, Chair; Mary Lou Mockus, Vice Chair; Denise Avant; Joe Bosco; Leatrice Campbell; Barbara Cragan; Jennifer Fletcher; Kimberly Frost; Janice Goldstein; Susan Ivers; Linda Jackson; Derrick Kimbrough; Lennette Meredith; Sharon Meroni; Heather Penn; Shonna Pryor; Maggie Steinz; Norma Sutton; Chet Szerlag; Rita Tandaric and Felicia Townsend.

**The following persons also were present:** Dan Schmidt, WTTW's President and CEO; Reese Marcusson, WTTW's Chief Operating Officer and CFO; Jim Mabie, WTTW's Board of Trustees President; Michael Gonzalez, WTTW's Board of Trustees representative and CAB's trustee liaison; Dan Soles, WTTW's Senior Vice President and Chief Television Content Officer and CAB's management liaison; and Yvonne Davis, Administrative Assistant to Chicago Tonight and staff liaison.

**The following members of the public were present:** Scott Szczurek and Tom Weinberg.

### DISCUSSION WITH DAN SCHMIDT:

**The Chair's opening remarks:** In the interest of maximizing CAB's conversation with Dan Schmidt, the Chair stated that self-introductions would be deferred until later in the meeting. However, the Chair acknowledged the new CAB members elected after last year's meeting with Mr. Schmidt (Denise Avant, who provided valuable insights regarding utilization of public television by and for visually impaired viewers, Shonna Pryor, who presented an interesting art related program proposal, and Jennifer Fletcher, Susan Ivers and Derrick Kimbrough). The Chair also acknowledged the presence of Jim Mabie and Michael Gonzalez.

The Chair initiated the discussion, by noting that CAB submitted its 2015 CAB Annual Report (Annual Report) to WTTW management, and that management responded and addressed CAB's observations, concerns and recommendations. He further noted that CAB is aware of the rapidly changing media landscape, the expanding number of platforms and applications, and the broadcast spectrum sales. Given this environment, he hoped that WTTW's mission -- to provide distinguished wealth of informative programming to the broadest possible audience -- not be diminished, and that its unique and distinctive characteristic Chicago identity not be sacrificed.

Noting that "Chicago Tonight" is WTTW's "crown jewel" and that host Phil Ponce and producer Mary Field are held in high esteem, the Chair observed, and as was addressed in the Annual Report, that the broadcast of the Chicago City Club sponsored mayoral debate generated controversy and raised concerns about the production team's journalistic integrity. The Chair questioned whether WTTW Management considered the matter seriously, took steps to correct any systemic problems, and if so, informed the public of such actions.

Referring to the Annual Report, the Chair identified three very serious issues that continue and affect WTTW's served communities, namely: (1) political leadership's financial mismanagement and irresponsibility at the state, county and municipal levels; (2) pervasive violent crime problems; and (3) criminal justice system and police responses. The Chair implored WTTW, as the best journalistic outlet in Chicago, to continue to keep these three issues in mind and focus on the "big picture" without getting "bogged down with local minutiae."

The Chair commended WTTW's longstanding efforts to promote informed citizens by providing candidates free airtime. He urged the station to use its web-based technological capabilities to expand candidates' opportunities for major offices as well as for local positions (e.g., school boards). By providing candidates with expanded opportunities, the Chair added, WTTW enables the public to learn about the candidates and ultimately fosters a better informed electorate.

The Chair noted that after the Annual Report was finalized, another significant issue came to CAB's attention regarding WTTW's financial difficulties. The issue arose in a personal way with the announcement of the termination of several members of the staff, including the CAB's longtime and valuable management liaison V.J. McAleer, the Senior Vice President of WTTW for Production and Community Engagement. This struck the CAB as reflective of a financial crisis so severe that it was necessary to cut not just "fat" but also "bone" and, in emergency consultations undertaken by e-mail, the CAB reached a consensus that (a) the CAB should inquire as to whether or not financial and administrative problems of the station are so dire as to affect the ability of the station to carry out its duties to the community that it serves and (b) Mr. Schmidt should be asked to address the situation in his remarks at this meeting. The Chair informed Mr. Schmidt in writing, in advance of the meeting, of the CAB's concern and of its request that he speak to it.

The Chair concluded by stating that every year CAB offers its services as a resource for reflection and advice, to Management and to the Board of Trustees (Board). The offer has been and is sincere, and although it has not been taken up, CAB renews the offer to provide considered judgment on any question that may arise for which we may provide additional, and perhaps distinctive, insight. In this regard, he referenced CAB's membership's composition, observing that their combined skills, experience, achievements and deep affection, interest and enthusiasm – were they to be monetized would be beyond WTTW's financial resources. He then invited Mr. Schmidt to address the issues raised in the Annual Report and the additional issue of the station's financial health.

**Dan Schmidt's response:** Mr. Schmidt's written response to the Annual Report was distributed electronically prior to, and distributed in hard copy at, the meeting (a copy of which is attached to the Minutes). He proceeded to address each of the Chair's opening remarks, as detailed below.

Mr. Schmidt first responded by stating it that it is too soon to predict the demise of "over-the-air" broadcast viewing. Indeed, he added that experts suggest that after the upcoming auction and "reclamation" of the broadcast spectrum followed by the issuance of revised broadcast standards, "over-the-air" viewing may increase by as much as 27%. Last year, he noted that the Board studied the upcoming FCC incentive spectrum auction, and at its past June meeting determined that WTTW would not participate. Further, he assured CAB that WTTW would retain its full 6mgh of UHF spectrum and will act in the best interests of its viewing community and its institution.

Regarding the mayoral debate, Mr. Schmidt stated that he was in the audience and was surprised at Mr. Ponce's persistent inquiry. Following the debate, Mr. Ponce recognized that he erred and that the line of questioning was not relevant to the election issues. He noted that Mr. Ponce took prompt corrective action, by making himself available for interviews with media critics and the public, and by addressing the issue in the "audience feedback" segment of Chicago Tonight that week. According to Mr. Schmidt, the Board discussed the issue, but decided against any further penalty in recognition of Mr. Ponce's distinguished career and long body of excellent work. Finally, he assured CAB that viewer complaints and criticisms were reviewed and responded to as conscientiously as possible, and that WTTW will be better prepared, informed and sensitive as it approaches this next election season.

As for the three issues the Chair identified, Mr. Schmidt absolutely agreed that they are major problems confronting our community and society. As such, he stated that they are worthy of as much scrutiny, and attention and reporting as the station can muster. Over the past years, the station has devoted countless of programming focused on these issues, and will continue to do so as assiduously as possible in a thoughtful and probing fashion.

With respect to candidate free airtime, Mr. Schmidt stated that WTTW is very proud of and has a long history of providing candidates' such access and coverage. With additional platforms available for utilization and expression, the station will devote attention to expanding opportunities for civic information development and will report to CAB next year on its achievements. He added that WTTW is proud of its ability to focus on localism, and emphasized that the station's attention has always been and will continue to be on its devotion to its local audience. He stated that WTTW's focus on original local content, as well as acquisition of programming from global resources, is one of the reasons it continues to be one of the most watched public television stations in the country.

Finally, as to V.J. McAleer's termination, Mr. Schmidt expressed difficulty in sharing details regarding personnel decisions. However, he reported that as a result of this restructuring, the station has achieved its fiscal forecast for this fiscal year and onward as it plans for 2017. To put it in perspective, he continued, WTTW is now at the point of financial equilibrium because of the actions taken and the tough decisions made. He concluded by stating that management is confident that it will be able to maintain the station's current level of programming and services and retain its strategic plan moving forward.

**CAB members' follow-up:** Responding to Ms. Goldstein's question about the availability and utilization of archival material, Mr. Schmidt explained the legal and technical issues involved. Ms. Ivers asked if areas other than personnel were analyzed for potential cost savings. Mr. Marcusson explained that the budget was scrutinized line by line to determine where savings could be realized, always with a view to insuring that these would not have an impact on programming.

**Recess:** At the conclusion of the discussion with Mr. Schmidt, the Chair briefly recessed the meeting so that the CAB could reassemble with Mr. Schmidt in the lobby of the studios for the taking of a group photograph.

**Reconvening, Roll Call, and Quorum:** The Chair called the meeting back to order. The roll was called with a brief self-introduction by each person present. The Chair announced the presence of a quorum.

**Quorum:** Following the discussion with Mr. Schmidt, the Chair declared a quorum, and those present introduced themselves.

**Approval of Minutes:** Ms Cragan moved to approve the October 2015 Minutes; Ms Avant seconded; and the motion passed unanimously. Mr. Bosco moved to approve the December 2015 Minutes; and Ms Sutton seconded the motion; and the motion passed unanimously. Ms. Ivers offered a correction to the December Minutes regarding the program proposal requesting the following addition: "The proposal would benefit from added detail before being submitted to management." The motion for approval with the revision was adopted. The Chair then re-called the motion on the table for approval, and the motion passed unanimously.

**Revision and Adoption of Agenda:** Ms Steinz moved to adopt the revised agenda, Ms Tandarcic seconded; and the motion passed unanimously.

**Public comment:** Messrs. Szczurek and Weinberg presented a proposal that advocated shifting more of WTTW's over-the-air broadcasting to more dynamic digital formats in order "to maintain its relevance to viewers of all ages in the next decade and beyond." The proposal further promotes Chicago Association for Media Production (CAMP) as a resource that would "cheaply and efficiently jumpstart" such a shift (a copy of the CAMP paper is attached to the Minutes.) Mr. Szczurek explained that by expanding its digital content, WTTW will reach new audiences because young

people largely receive their information from alternative platforms. The Chair asked if they had met with Ms Ann Gleason, who is responsible for web content and development and, if not, urged them to do so.

**WTTW's Board of Trustees President, Jim Mabie:** The Chair expressed appreciation for Mr. Mabie's unexpected presence, and invited him to address the CAB. Mr. Mabie noted his long held interest in and commitment to public broadcasting, having served as Chairman of WBEZ Public Radio for several years. He acknowledged CAB as a valuable resource, noting the quality of the CAB members and value of their ideas, contributions and suggestions. He stated that he was very impressed with CAB's members' background and achievements; he planned to visit as often as possible; and he assured CAB that he was "a friendly ear." He also thanked Trustee liaison Michael Gonzalez for attending meetings and communicating CAB's activities and concerns to the Board.

**Trustee's Liaison:** Mr. Gonzalez appreciated CAB's achievements over the past year and added his pleasure in acknowledging the first visit of Mr. Mabie to a CAB meeting. He also conveyed greetings from Ms Barbara Proctor who was unable to attend. He closed by adding that he intends to be increasingly involved in CAB activities.

**Management Liaison:** The Chair introduced Dan Soles, who adds Management Liaison to the CAB to his responsibilities.

Mr. Soles graciously acknowledged his introduction and assured CAB members that he looked forward to future meetings and the opportunity to thoughtfully respond to questions and suggestions, if not immediately, "in a timely fashion. He also encouraged members to feel free to contact him.

Mr. Soles further acknowledged CAB members' obvious interest, dedication, and sincerity. He stated that WTTW is an even-better institution, and that its never-ending growth and learning process is nourished and facilitated by CAB's insights and input. He emphasized that he wanted to increase CAB's understanding of how the organization functions and anticipates closer interaction with senior staff members, such as Reese Marcusson, Ann Gleeson, and some of the producers, particularly with Mary Field especially during the election cycle.

Following Mr. Soles remarks, the Chair invited questions. Ms. Ivers asked if it would be possible to have a tour of the station. It was agreed that the Chair and Mr. Soles would confer and offer a schedule with several time and date options for accommodating this request. Ms. Ivers also asked if the CAB could be provided with a station organization chart. The Chair agreed that this would be useful information.

#### **Officers' and Committees' Reports:**

**Membership:** Ms. Meredith reported that several interesting candidates applied and were invited to attend the April CAB meeting.

**Nominating:** Ms. Sutton reported that Mr. Moran and Ms. Bracey each received severance notices due to their excessive absences. Ms. Bracey expressed continued interest in serving CAB; Mr. Moran did not. Accordingly, Ms. Meredith moved to reconsider the Bracey situation and to vacate the Moran seat; Ms Sutton seconded; and the motion passed unanimously.

**Programming:** Ms. Cragan referenced the Program Proposal attached to the Annual Report recommending arts content for the web, which the station response did not address. Mr. Soles assured the CAB that he would attend to the oversight and report at the next meeting.

Regarding a prior preliminary discussion of an op-ed piece regarding Pledge Night content, Ms. Cragan announced that the subject would be re-visited at a later meeting.

Ms. Cragan also announced that, for the coming year, Mr. Bosco has spearheaded the Committee's plan to explore how other CABs function, with a view toward making our CAB be more effective. The Chair recalled that a similar effort was undertaken several years ago by Tom Clark, which produced an interesting report with a follow-up joint meeting between WTTW & WBEZ held at the NPR's downtown Chicago studio.

**Technical and Cultural Research and Development:** In the absence of both Chairs, the reports were deferred to the April meeting.

**Education:** Ms. Steinz reported on the exciting developments in the FIRST Robotics Competition project and continuing efforts to expand television coverage of the project. CAB members extensively and enthusiastically discussed and embraced this project, including the possibility that myriad "human interest" stories could be generated by and offer material for web production.

**Secretary:** In the Secretary's absence, no report was presented.

**Vice Chair:** The Vice Chair reported on several news item of interest, including Facebook's response to a C2N segment, as well as an update on the question of "Net Neutrality."

**Chair:** The Chair reported that his over-arching responsibility is to generate the Plenary Committee's work plan and to catalyze the activities of the Sub-Committees, with a view toward the drafting of the Annual Report. To this end, in addition to the technology issues on our agenda, he stated that CAB will focus on the following questions: (1) the utility, design, aims, and costs of Pledge Drives; (2) the Journalism Standards, which was raised generally and explored in detail in sub-committee and will be revisited with Mary Field; and (3) the financial status/concerns, which Mr. Marcusson will return to amplify.

The Chair opened the floor for further comment. Ms. Ivers expressed interest in further discussion of pledge programming and also community engagement. Responding, Mr. Soles stated that he will be available for discussion of programming decisions, and that he will invite the Director of Community Engagement to attend a future CAB meeting.

Ms. Frost reiterated her concern regarding appropriate material introduced on interactive media platforms. Responding, the Chair commended Ms. Frost for registering this concern and for pursuing it with Ms Ann Gleeson directly. In addition he determined that there was a need to create two additional standing committees and requested Ms Frost to make a motion to create a standing committee on Management, Administration, and Finance and also a standing committee on Digital and Interactive Media. Ms. Avant seconded; and the motions passed unanimously. The Chair asked Ms Frost to accept the chairmanship of the Digital and Interactive Committee, which she is considering.

Mr. Gonzalez asked when the Annual Report would be posted on the website. The Chair replied that it is posted virtually immediately upon its submission to the Management. Mr. Weinberg complimented the Chair on the Annual Report and inquired as to Management's response. The Chair replied that there had been "huge progress -- much agreement -- open issues requiring future study."

Ms. Ivers requested that CAB continue to pursue access to viewer feedback. Mr. Gonzalez and Ms. Ivers suggested there be a designated observer/reporter. Considering Ms. Ivers' suggestion, the Chair suggested that the Membership Committee recruit a candidate skilled in "social media" to heighten CAB's understanding and awareness.

**Old Business:** None

**New Business:** None

**Adjournment:** Ms. Jackson moved to adjourn; Ms Goldstein seconded; and the motion passed unanimously.

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**Next Public CAB Meeting: April 19, 2016 at 6:00 p.m.**

Respectfully submitted,  
Mary Lou Mockus  
Ava Holly Berland

Attachments: Dan Schmidt's Response to the Annual Report  
Messrs. Szczurek's and Weinberg's CAMP digital submission