

WTTW COMMUNITY ADVISORY BOARD

MINUTES of the PUBLIC MEETING of the
WTTW Community Advisory Board (CAB)

Tuesday, June 18, 2019

WTTW Studios, 5400 N. St. Louis Ave., Chicago, Illinois

The Chairman called the meeting to order at 6:00 PM with a quorum present.

The following CAB members were present: Chairman Joseph Morris (Chair); Secretary Rita Tandaric; Barbara Cragan; Maryileen Blondell; Leatrice Campbell; Dr. Simuel Hampton; Susan Ivers; Linda Jackson; Gene Koprowski; Nancy Koprowski; Peter Kraus; Sinhue Mendoza; Lennette Meredith; Mary Lou Mockus; Kristin Mount; Nancy Simon; Carlton Triolo-Sapp; Iqbal Shariff; Dr. Sheila M. Wicks; Carmella Wimberly.

Note the following CAB members were absent: Vice Chairman Kimberly Frost; Joe Bosco; Aaron Lawler; Sinhue Mendoza; Sharon Meroni; Maggie Steinz; Bruce Sutchar.

The following persons also were present: Tim Russell, VP of WTTW Community Engagement, Lisa Tipton, Senior Director of Programming, and Yvonne Davis, Administrative Assistant to “Chicago Tonight” and Staff Liaison. Dan Soles, Senior Vice President and Chief Television Content Officer, was present before roll call for a short farewell gathering.

And, the following members of the public were present: Katie Koprowski.

The Chair called the meeting to order and called for self-introductions of the CAB members. Also present at the meeting were WTTW employees Lisa Tipton and Tim Russell. The Chair declared a quorum. The Chair then commented on the loss of Dr. Herbert Sohn, a doctor and lawyer, and a person very active in the civic life of Chicago. He practiced medicine in Chicago for about 50 years and was a leading physician at Weiss Hospital on the north side of Chicago. He was a native of New York, was a veteran of both the U.S. Navy and the U.S. Marine Corps. He was a strong advocate of WTTW and public television and became a Member of CAB just over two years ago. Various CAB members spoke about their impressions and interactions with Dr. Sohn. He was always trying to bring groups together and was very interested in the culture of the city. The CAB remembers Dr. Sohn and will miss him.

The Chair moved to the Minutes of the CAB meeting of May 14, 2019. The Chair asked for additional corrections and changes. There being none, the Chair asked for a motion to adopt the minutes as presented. Mr. Koprowski so moved, seconded by Mr. Kraus. The motion carried unanimously and the May 14th minutes were adopted.

The next item for consideration was the agenda for the current meeting. The Chair asked for changes or corrections. There being none, the Chair moved that the agenda be adopted as presented.

Only one member of the public was present – Ms. Katie Koprowski. The Chair complimented Ms. Koprowski on already making a difference at the CAB as she was the person who brought up the issue of YouTube in conjunction with WTTW content. Such was recorded in the CAB’s minutes and thus brought to the attention of the public and WTTW management.

The Chair encouraged Ms. Koprowski to bring her friends to attend a CAB meeting and take advantage of the public comment period. Public comment has brought important issues to the CAB's attention.

Chairman's Statement: In the effort to rebuild the CAB's committee structure, there is a fine report from the new chair of the Cultural Committee. The Chair further encouraged other CAB members to participate in the various committees. The CAB only meets 6 times a year; the committees meet via email and are capable of accomplishing a great deal of work. The Chair further commented that he would send a summary of this meeting in the next day or so which would include a number of action items which should be considered by all CAB members. Ms. Wimberly inquired as to the procedure for having items added to a meeting's agenda. The Chair responded that items should be communicated to the Chair by telephone or email, although email is probably better. No particular format is required. The Chair reminded everyone that the CAB best communicates to WTTW management and the world via its written reports, particularly its annual reports. It is never too early to consider material for the annual report and to present those ideas and materials to the Chair throughout the year.

The Chair further commented that the station has been working on a strategic plan for the past months since Sandra Cordova Micek was named President and CEO of WWCI (Window to the World Communications, Inc.) , the parent of WTTW and WFMT (a commercial, fine-arts radio station). Ms. Micek met with CAB within the first months of her joining the organization. She wanted to start new with a fresh strategic planning process. She ambitiously hoped that the plan would be completed with six months, and encouraged the CAB to provide its ideas. At Ms. Ivers's suggestion, the CAB formed an ad-hoc committee, chaired by Ms. Ivers, and produced a report to management in which it set forth its ideas for the strategic plan. Prior to the meeting's roll call, Mr. Soles informed the CAB that he expects that a public document on the strategic plan would likely be ready for discussion by the CAB with Ms. Micek at the next CAB meeting in August. The main business of the August meeting will likely be the strategic plan.

The Chair further commented that Mr. Soles departure from WTTW will leave a huge hole in the day-to-day operations at WTTW. He was responsible for internal production, including "Chicago Tonight" and well as the acquisition of content produced by PBS sources and independent producers. He has been with WTTW for 24 years. A new Senior Vice President will be needed, but Mr. Soles leaves behind a talented staff, including Tim Russell and Lisa Tipton, who together will be delivering the Management Liaison's report tonight. Mr. Soles is headed to the East Coast to pursue new opportunities. The CAB wishes him well.

The Chair also delivered the news that Mary Field, the executive producer of "Chicago Tonight" has announced that she will retire in the next month. While Ms. Field was not the first executive producer, she was producer for John Callaway who created "Chicago Tonight" as we know it today. Ms. Field's departure will also leave a hole at WTTW, and the CAB wishes the station well in finding her successor for what is not only a broadcast position but a serious journalistic editing position. It requires a sense of what is newsworthy and the how to produce with scarce resources and how to do so in a professional and ethical way. No other public television station has a program like "Chicago Tonight" and it is Mary Field who is the "spider at the center of the web" which is "Chicago Tonight".

Trustee Liaison Report: There was no Trustee liaison present, so no report was presented. Ms. Blondell asked when the last liaison representative attended a CAB meeting. The Chair responded that two liaisons have been assigned to the CAB. Regrettably, one, Ms. Proctor, recently passed away. The other, Mr. Gonzalez, has been ill and unable to attend. The Chair has spoken to Mr. Mabie, the Chairman of the Board of Trustees, about the strong desire for a trustee's liaison for the CAB. Mr. Mabie himself attended a CAB meeting within the past year.

Ms. Cragan wondered what the CAB might do to improve the situation as she believes that the CAB functions better when it knows what the Trustees are doing and thinking. Likewise, it's important that the Trustees know what the CAB is thinking. Attending trustee meetings was suggested, but Mr. Russell commented that Trustee meetings are not open to the public. Permission can be requested, but there is only a short period of time in which the guest may attend. Ms. Ivers asked if permission has ever been denied. The Chair responded that permission has not been denied to a CAB member who asked to attend a Trustee meeting. The Chair encouraged anyone who wants to attend a Trustee meeting to communicate that interest to the Chair who will then contact the Secretary of the Board of Trustees' to make arrangements. Mr. Kraus asked if Trustees have access to documents produced by CAB; the Chair answered yes. Mr. Kraus then asked if the Trustees produce documents that might be made available to the CAB. The Chair responded that we would have access to any public documents produced but not to the general workflow of the Board. Ms. Simon asked how often the Board of Trustees meets. The Chair responded that it meets every other month.

The Chair asked for further comments. Ms. Campbell returned to the Mary Field retirement announcement. Ms. Campbell commented that she had been surprised to learn that the day's "Chicago Tonight" program is done on the day of broadcast, not several days in advance. The Chair responded that it is a daily endeavor and the goal is to make sure the news presented and the panel discussions are important "today". It is a headlong rush to get the show produced.

Mr. Shariff asked if virtual connectivity had been explored in regard to having a Trustee liaison attend the CAB meetings. The Chair responded that there has been powerful resistance from the company to use modern technology in CAB meetings, including for the purpose of CAB members attending via conference call. There are various obstacles including the CAB By-laws attendance requirements. The discussion could be re-opened. With no further comments expressed, the Chair turned to Mr. Russell and Ms. Tipton for the Management Liaison report.

Management Liaison Report: Ms. Tipton commented that Dan Soles had asked her to discuss upcoming programming highlights. The Chair asked Ms. Tipton to explain a bit about her background before beginning her discussion of upcoming programming.

Mr. Tipton is from Chicago and started as an intern. She was in production and she always wanted to schedule a TV station, and she's been doing it for 15 years now. She spends her days screening PBS offerings. She just started screening Ken Burns' new film on country music. It is an 8-part film which will air on Sept 15. She also screens offerings from American Public Television and independent producers. The producing community is always welcome to contact Ms. Tipton.

Upcoming promotions include the summer-long focus on space, starting with an "American Experience" 3-part series entitled "Chasing the Moon". All throughout July and August there will be space-related programming. There is also an "American Experience" film commemorating the 50th anniversary of Woodstock. September's major programming will be the Burns documentary on country music.

Local items of note in August include a Jim Lovell interview by Bob Sirott. There is also a documentary about Augustus Tolton, the 1st African-American Catholic priest who founded St. Monica's parish in Chicago. Producers are at work on "Chicago by 'L" which is planned for March 2020 broadcast. "Independent Lens" has reached out with two Chicago-based films: one is the 1st Rainbow Coalition movement about the Black Panther Party and its forming of alliances across ethnicity and color lines and other community-based movements across the city; the other is called "Cooked: Survival by Zip Code" about the 1995 heat wave that resulted in the deaths of hundreds of Chicagoans. The Rainbow Coalition film is expected in February 2020. There is no date set for "Cooked: Survival by Zip Code".

Ms. Blondell asked if the CAB was aware of the Douglas Brinkley's recently published book American Moonshot: John F. Kennedy and the Great Space Race which discusses the Kennedy administration and the beginning of the space race. Ms. Blondell knows the author. The Chair suggested that the information be passed on to Mary Field for consideration.

Mr. Koprowski asked Ms. Tipton if she likes the Ken Burns film. She stated that she started watching from the end, but that she finds it riveting.

Ms. Ivers asked about the "Independent Lens" films and whether the station will be holding screenings prior to broadcast. Ms. Tipton and Mr. Russell answered yes. Mr. Russell proceeded to list upcoming screenings. The July screening will be "Roll Red Roll" by Nancy Schwartzman about the Stuebenville High School Big Red cover-up of the rape of a high school student by football players. The cover-up involved not only the high school but the community as well. "Cooked: Survival by Zip Code" will be shown next year. Mr. Russell will send out a list of additional screenings.

WTTW is looking to bring in "College Behind Bars", a film about prisoners who earn college degrees while incarcerated. The panel discussion will include former prisoners who were in the program. Some of the program participants debated Harvard debaters and defeated Harvard. This may be screened in October or November. Community Engagement continues to look for ways to bring such films out into the community.

There is a new connection with "Nature Cat" and the Girl Scouts. A patch has been created and can be earned by the scouts after conducting certain nature-related activities. There is also an exhibit at the Kohl Children's Museum which centers on "Nature Cat". A patch is also available for this activity. The exhibit will be available for about 6 months.

The strategic plan will be presented to the Board of Trustees at the next meeting of the Trustees. After that, a high-level executive-type summary will be available. Anne Gleason is working on the project.

In relation to the upcoming "College Behind Bars" film, the Chair mentioned seeing a recent "Chicago Tonight" segment on the beekeepers and gardeners at the Cook County Jail.

The Chair called for questions. Ms. Simon asked if films are selected based on a Chicago connection. Ms. Tipton answered yes. Mr. Russell interjected that while "College Behind Bars" was filmed in upstate New York, the organization is based in Chicago. Community Engagement actively seeks a Chicago connection when scheduling films for screening. For instance, "Lavender Scare", which is airing tonight, and which chronicles the treatment of LGBTQ individuals during the Eisenhower administration in the 1950s, Tracy Bain, a leader in the LGBTQ community, was selected for the panel discussion.

Mr. Kraus asked whether there would be an opportunity for public comment once the strategic plan is publically available. Mr. Russell could not answer and said that he would obtain an answer.

Ms. Wimberly commented that during the CAB's retreat meeting in December there were discussion about ways to engage the community. Ms. Wimberly asked if there are any surveys that could be released in various communities to ask about the types of programming desired by those communities. Mr. Russell responded that he did not attend the December meeting, but offered to have discussions with the CAB about the subject. The Chair interjected that the subject is one for Anne Gleason as it is her area that does a variety of surveying of public interests. Mr. Russell commented that he believed that Chicago residents were surveyed during the strategic planning process. He offered to confirm the survey issue and report his findings.

Ms. Campbell commented that she is a home care nurse. She finds that many patients who require home care are not aware of what is expected or required when one has that need. She also believes that communities should also be made aware of various programs to assist with vaccinations for dogs. Further, Ms. Campbell thanked Mr. Russell for an email regarding the “Nature Cat”/Girl Scouts program. Additionally, she mentioned a program called True Visions which recruits young people to be taught about production. Ms. Campbell feels that the public should know more about such programs.

Dr. Wicks graduated from Whitney Young High School. She was contacted by Whitney Young’s principal and informed that former First Lady Michelle Obama is going to be honored with the naming of a building (on August 12) and there will be a block party connected with the ribbon cutting. Dr. Wicks is wondering if this could somehow be recognized by WTTW. The Chair asked if the Whitney Young principal would be the contact person and suggested that Mr. Russell pass this information on to Mary Field for possible coverage.

Mr. Koprowski mentioned that he does volunteer work with Kolbe House Jail Ministry, a prison ministry which provides services to ex-offenders and conducts monthly meetings. Mr. Koprowski suggested that this might be a possible venue for a screening of the “College Behind Bars” film. Mr. Koprowski offered to email the executive director of Kolbe House. Mr. Russell thanked him and commented that he has spoken to the film’s director and they are definitely interested in getting the film in front of people who have been released from prison.

Membership Committee: The Chair noted that Ms. Meredith, chair of the Membership Committee, had to leave the meeting early due to a family emergency. The Chair explained that the CAB has one vacancy due to the death of Dr. Sohn, and will likely have another vacancy upon the expected resignation of Vice Chairman Kim Frost. There will be discussions at the next meeting regarding the vacancies. The Chair will follow-up with other CAB members who have not been in attendance regularly.

Cultural Committee: The Chair introduced the new chair of the Cultural Committee, Ms. Blondell, and referred attendees to the committee’s written report. Ms. Blondell commented that WTTW is heavily linked to the cultural arts. Ms. Blondell asked for a quick survey of CAB members to name their favorite cultural shows on WTTW. Responses included “Check, Please”, “Great Performances”, “Austin City Limits”, “Masterpiece Mystery”, “American Masters”, “American Experience”, Rick Bayless’ cooking shows, nature programs, Geoffrey Baer programs, and “My Neighborhood: Pilsen”. The Chair directed attention to the Cultural Committee’s mission statement.

Ms. Simon commented that Chicago Mayor Lightfoot’s wife, Amy Eshleman, is likely to be serving the city in a cultural capacity in the near future.

Unfinished Business: The Chair called attention to Mr. Kraus’ document itemizing underreported topics. Mr. Kraus summarized the document by explaining that there are apparent alliances between manufacturers and major news organizations that prevent dissemination of critical information to the public, particularly on issues concerning vaccinations and autism. Mr. Kraus cited various sources for his contentions and explained the alleged conflicts of interest between pharmaceutical companies and government agencies, such as the Centers for Disease Control. Mr. Kraus cited statistics of studies that seem to indicate that children today are given too many vaccinations. Mr. Kraus directed to Mr. Russell the suggestion that WTTW should increase the amount of time devoted to a possible children’s disease epidemic.

Mr. Russell responded that WTTW’s focus has been on kindergarten readiness and social, emotional and healthy living issues, particularly in the African American and Hispanic communities. Mr. Kraus responded that children who are chronically unwell (autism and allergies) are not going to perform well.

Ms. Mockus believes that this should be a topic for “Nova” or “Frontline” for exposure to the public. It needs heavy-duty research. Ms. Ivers suggested that this discussion should appear in the CAB’s annual report.

Mr. Triolo-Sapp commented that there are many important topics that are worthy of exposure, but WTTW has limited resources. Mr. Triolo-Sapp asked where the line is drawn between informing on a topic and advocating a position on a topic. The Chair commented that the question is excellent and that the answer is that it is entirely up to the CAB on how much time and energy is committed to a particular matter. However, the CAB is not a public policy forum, and the 27 members of the CAB are not scientists.

Ms. Campbell commented on the issue of pregnancy and measles, which has been known for many years. There are a number of people who consciously choose to not vaccinate their children.

Ms. Koprowski commented that she agreed with Mr. Triolo-Sapp. She believes we’re taking too much time on this subject.

Ms. Blondell asked what the CAB By-laws say about the amount of time taken to cover a topic. This topic has been covered at multiple CAB meetings. The By-laws state that programming topics are to be communicated in a particular way.

Ms. Wimberly agreed with Ms. Koprowski but suggested that Mr. Kraus provide the information to CAB members to be considered outside CAB meetings.

The Chair stated that the CAB is very free forum – any member can discuss anything he or she chooses, subject to the sufferance of CAB colleagues. If the body as a whole wants to pursue a subject, such will be facilitated. The Chair stated that as a process matter, he has forwarded to Mary Field at “Chicago Tonight” every document, link to information, etc. provided by Mr. Kraus.

Mr. Koprowski recommends that it might be better to reach out to the Chicago Academy of Science and request that it debate the topic. The Chair also suggested the American Medical Association, which happens to be headquartered in Chicago.

The Chair commented that the CAB members understand that the use of vaccinations can be dangerous; likewise, the lack of vaccinations can be dangerous. There is a lot of controversy on the subject. The Chair asked Mr. Kraus: How profitable would it be for this body (the CAB) to dive deeply into these issues beyond what we have already done, and beyond forwarding additional information to the station for additional consideration?

Mr. Kraus answered that he has a source that does not advocate the elimination of all vaccinations, but for adjustments to the protocol.

The Chair asked Mr. Kraus: What do you want the CAB to do?

Mr. Kraus responded that he would like to see the CAB present these issues to management.

The Chair answered that everything has been passed on to the news staff. The Chair countered with an offer that the information be conveyed through the CAB’s annual report. Mr. Kraus answered that there are resources that show that there is a growing epidemic of childhood disease.

The Chair asked Mr. Kraus if there is anything preventing Mr. Kraus from sending such information to Mary Field. The Chair offered to act as middleman and send such information if Mr. Kraus so desires. Mr. Kraus stated that he could send such information but that he believes it would be more effective for management to be made aware of the information. Mr. Kraus would like to see it as part of the strategic plan.

Ms. Blondell believes that the issue is that one CAB member is presenting his opinion as the collective opinion of the entire CAB. Ms. Blondell moved that the discussion end and any action Mr. Kraus wants to take should be taken on his own.

The Chair restated the Blondell motion: This is a formal motion that requires a second. The motion is in the nature of a privileged parliamentary motion which will terminate the debate on this topic and establish a rule of germaneness before this topic may come before the CAB again, and it will require a approval of the CAB on motion for the topic to be reintroduced. The Chair asked if he had accurately stated Ms. Blondell's motion. Ms. Blondell responded that the motion was correctly restated by the Chair. The Chair called for a second to the Blondell motion; Mr. Koprowski so seconded.

The question before the CAB as stated by the Chair: "If you vote yes, you are voting to terminate the discussion of this topic tonight and to instruct the Chair (whoever is in the Chair whether it's me or anybody else going forward) that if this topic is to be returned to discussion it will be ruled non-germane as a parliamentary matter unless first there is a motion put on the floor to reopen the discussion."

The Chair called for a vote; there was one nay vote, all others voting aye. The Blondell-Koprowski motioned was passed. The discussion of the topic was closed. The Chair asked if there was any other unfinished business.

Ms. Blondell suggested that at some point there should be a review of the By-laws regarding the amount of time that can be devoted to one topic. The Chair stated that he would take this suggestion under advisement.

Ms. Simon asked the Management Liaisons how they receive suggestions. Ms. Tipton responded that she acquires programs; she does not create programs. She will take any communicated interests under advisement.

The Chair commented that for years he and Ms. Campbell have promoted a content acquisition agenda, which would be a public statement issued by WTTW as to what the station would like to see in the near future. Dan Soles was always skeptical of the content acquisition agenda but it may have a new opportunity for consideration.

Mr. Kraus asked if the topic of autism can ever be discussed again. The Chair responded that the topic cannot be discussed as the CAB majority has decided that CAB has reached the outer limits of what it can do. It has forwarded all information provided to those who are in a position to make decisions on the matter. The CAB is not prepared to come down on one side of the issue or another. The topic may come up in the annual report; it has been well-noted in the meeting minutes.

Ms. Mockus asked if Mr. Kraus had received any response from the "Chicago Tonight" office. Mr. Kraus answered no.

New Business: Dr. Hampton asked about the process for program proposals. The new Englewood school, Englewood STEM High School, which will be made up of four existing high schools and will have its first freshman class entering in the Fall of 2019, might be an interesting topic for WTTW coverage, perhaps discussing the development of the school. There's been a lot of controversy over the school.

The Chair answered that if the CAB had an active Education Committee, the topic would be turned over to the committee. Meanwhile, the Chair noted that Ms. Tipton and Mr. Russell had been taking notes as Dr. Hampton spoke. The Chair commented that the former chair of the committee, Ms. Steinz, has been ill over the past year. There is a need for a new Education Committee chair. Dr. Hampton volunteered for the position

Ms. Ivers asked if the idea would be appropriate for the Program Committee's rubric. Ms. Cragan responded that she has had discussions with Dr. Hampton and that he has the rubric.

Good and Welfare: The Chair noted that Katie Koprowski has been shadowing Dr. Hampton at the animal hospital.

Adjournment: The next public meeting of the Community Advisory Board will be held on Tuesday, August 20 at 6:00 PM. The principal topic should be a meeting with WWCI President and CEO Sandra Cordova Micek and a discussion of the new strategic plan.

The Chair called for a motion to adjourn. Ms. Cragan so moved, seconded by Ms. Jackson.

The meeting was adjourned at 8:06 PM.

Next Public CAB Meeting: Tuesday, August 20, 2019 at 6:00 PM.

Respectfully submitted,
Rita E. Tandaric, Secretary

Attachments: