



Summary of Meeting with Mary Turck

Civic Caucus, 8301 Creekside Circle, Bloomington, MN 55437

Friday, March 16, 2007

Guest speaker: Mary Turck, editor, *Twin Cities Daily Planet*

Present : Verne Johnson, chair; Chuck Clay, Paul Gilje, Jim Hetland (by phone), Jim Olson (by phone), and Wayne Popham (by phone)

A. Context of the meeting : As part of its inquiry into the democratic process, the question of quality public affairs information has repeatedly been raised with the Civic Caucus. Last week the Civic Caucus met with a panel of former and retired journalists. Based on a comment last week, today the Caucus is learning about a new online daily "newspaper", the *Twin Cities Daily Planet*.

B. Introduction: Paul introduced Mary Turck, new editor of the *Twin Cities Daily Planet*. Previously, Turck was editor of *Connection to the Americas*, monthly newsletter of www.americas.org, providing information on human rights in a global economy. Turck has written several books on history, human rights, health, religion and other topics. She has a law degree from Loyola University, a master's in pastoral studies from the University of St. Thomas, and a bachelor's in psychology from the University of Chicago.

C. Background on *Twin Cities Daily Planet*—The *Twin Cities Daily Planet* is a daily on-line newspaper, www.tcdailyplanet.net. The *Daily Planet* is a community newswire and syndication service, involving professional journalists and private citizens. It is a project of the Twin Cities Media Alliance, a non-profit organization promoting the quality, accountability and diversity of the local media. Members of the board of directors of the Media Alliance include Ann Alquist, former news director, KFAI Community Radio; Laretta Dawolo, current news director, KFAI; Richard Broderick, journalism professor at Anoka-Ramsey Community College; Jeremy Iggers, former writer and columnist, *Star Tribune*, and Dan Nordley, owner of Triangle Park Creative graphic design and publishing company. A complete list of the board of directors and its advisory board may be found at <http://www.tcmediaalliance.org/about.php>.

Funding is provided by Headwaters Foundation for Justice, Otto Bremer Foundation , Still Ain't Satisfied foundation, J-Lab—the Institute for Interactive Journalism at the University of Maryland, and other foundations, local and national.

The *Daily Planet* began in May 2006. It is strictly online; it has no print version. It has partnerships with some 40 community, ethnic and neighborhood newspapers and online publications. In addition it accepts essays and commentary from columnists, community leaders and citizen journalists. Every

day of the week the *Daily Planet* features three major articles on its front page, plus a host of other articles on its inside pages.

D. Discussion —During Turck's presentation and in discussion with the Civic Caucus the following points were raised:

1. Need for better coverage —Turck said she agrees with comments at previous Civic Caucus meetings that a serious, seemingly irreversible, decline in the extent and quality of local and state news has occurred in the traditional media. The *Daily Planet* was started to help fill the gap. Turck highlighted recent publicity about 24 or 25 veteran journalists at the *Star Tribune* who have opted for early retirement.

2. Importance of *Daily Planet* media partners —Turck stressed that the *Daily Planet's* own paid staff consists only of Turck herself, and she is part-time. It relies heavily on partnerships with some 40 groups with their own online or print publications. The *Daily Planet* selects which articles from those publications to feature. Among the partnerships are a variety of ethnic and community publications, plus *The Minnesota Daily*, *KFAI radio*, and *Session Weekly*, a non-partisan publication of the Minnesota House of Representatives. A complete list of partners is available at <http://www.tcdailyplanet.net/about/partners>. Partners are granted the right to publish selected material that is written for the *Daily Planet*.

3. Access to national and international news outlets —Using a free service known as Really Simple Syndication (RSS), the *Daily Planet* also features articles from the BBC, Reuters, the *New York Times*, and other national and international outlets. A person who clicks on a headline from one of these outlets is taken directly to the outlet's web site. An RSS feed is advantageous to these major outlets, because of the opportunity to get more readers clicking on their sites, Turck said.

4. Search for more media partners —The *Daily Planet* is anxious to develop partnerships with more organizations, including, for example, the *Southwest Journal* in Minneapolis, a publication that covers 21 neighborhoods. In effect, the *Daily Planet* wants to make it possible for a person to obtain news from as many local outlets as possible, by highlighting articles that are deemed to have broader appeal, so that it isn't necessary for a person to check all outlets' websites, Turck said.

Neither the *Star Tribune* nor the *Pioneer Press* is included among the RSS outlets, Turck said. She said she doesn't know if those papers will be added. In response to a question she said she knows about public interest journalism at Minnesota Public Radio, but the *Daily Planet* has no arrangement with that effort. A prime objective of the *Daily Planet* is to provide news that doesn't appear in the traditional medial outlets in the Twin Cities area, she said.

5. Seeking "citizen" journalists —So far, Turck said, the *Daily Planet* relies heavily on its media partners for coverage. But a larger objective is to enlist a large cadre of citizen journalists, who would be available to handle free-lance assignments. The Twin Cities Media Alliance conducts media skills workshops for volunteer citizen journalists. Turck said that *OhmyNews International*, an on-line English daily in Korea, is probably the outstanding example of the impact of citizen journalism. Its 40-person professional staff is augmented by up to 40,000 citizen journalists, who prepare most of the copy for *OhmyNews*.

The *Daily Planet* already has some interns from journalism programs at local universities, and hopes to have more in the near future.

6. Making a clear distinction between reporting and opinion —Readers at the *Daily Planet* website can see immediately which articles represent opinion as distinct from factual reporting, Turck said. The *Daily Planet* does not have an editorial page as such, she said, although Turck puts her opinions on her blog. The *Daily Planet* opinion articles will appear to have a progressive, or liberal, bent, Turck said, but she is not interested in personal attacks or overheated commentary.

7. Need for a good financial base —Turck would very much like the opportunity to hire three or four professional journalists as well as having citizen journalists and media partners, but that will require more financing. More foundation support will be needed and advertising. Visitors to the site will see beginning results in advertising. The *Planet* will not be a print media. Its emphasis on citizen journalism will be paramount. In response to a question Turck said that three to five years out she hopes to see a secure funding base and close connections with universities, which she hopes will provide courses for citizen journalists. She said leaders of the Media Alliance board, including Iggers and Broderick, have the best handle on financial needs.

8. Selection of feature articles —Readers of the *Daily Planet* each day will see three top articles highlighted, mostly coming from its media partners. In addition about three to six additional articles are highlighted as inside pages. All articles are reprinted in full. The reader clicks on headlines to see the text of the other articles.

9. Size of the audience —Currently the *Daily Planet* is receiving between 1,800 and 2,100 unique visitors per day, she said. Three months ago the number was about 1,400 a day. The *Planet* doesn't have demographic information on its visitors.

10. Articles welcomed from volunteers —Turck stressed that it is easy for anyone to register as a citizen journalist contributor to the *Daily Planet* and to submit articles. In response to a question Turck said that the *Planet* would consider articles about the weekly meetings of the Civic Caucus, but such articles would need to be written in the form of news stories, not in the form of summaries as are currently prepared. She said, for example, that the *Planet* would have been interested in a news article about the Civic Caucus' meeting last week with former journalists.

11. "Objective" reporting —Turck was asked about the objectivity in reporting by the traditional media in the Twin Cities area. She replied that she prefers identifying the point of view of a media outlet, rather than whether it is biased or not. Highlighting the fact that many media partners with the *Daily Planet* represent different ethnic and immigrant groups, Turck said she doesn't like if the *Star Tribune* uses the term "illegal" immigrants. She prefers "undocumented" or "unauthorized" as more neutral terms.

12. Stories not captured by mainstream media —Repeating a central objective of the *Daily Planet* to get stories that aren't covered by the mainstream media, Turck wondered why the daily papers have a business section but no labor section and a sports section but no education section.

13. Reporting the "substance" of campaigns, not the "horse race "—The *Planet* will be reporting on races in Minnesota, but not the presidential race, she said. Also the *Planet* will focus on the substance of the issues being discussed, not on how well candidates are doing in the polls.

14. Concluding remarks —Turck urged Civic Caucus members to go to www.tcdailyplanet.net every day and click on news being presented.

15. Thanks —On behalf of the Civic Caucus, Verne thanked Turck for meeting with us today.

The Civic Caucus is a non-partisan, tax-exempt educational organization. Core participants include persons of varying political persuasions, reflecting years of leadership in politics and business.

A working group meets face-to-face to provide leadership. They are Verne C. Johnson, chair; Lee Canning, Charles Clay, Bill Frenzel, Paul Gilje, Jim Hetland, John Mooty, Jim Olson, Wayne Popham and John Rollwagen.