

Maryland Public Broadcasting Commission
Meeting of November 28, 2023
via Zoom

Minutes

Present: *Mr. Edward Kaplan, chair; Mr. Richard Bodorff, vice chair; Dr. Debra Bright; Ms. Shelly Gardeniers-Pettigrew; Mr. Irwin Kramer; Dr. Lakeisha Lashley; Ms. Beth Suarez; Mr. Bruce Wahl; Ms. Ellie Wang. Ms. Erin Senior was present to represent Dr. Carey Wright, interim Maryland State Superintendent of Schools.*

The following members of the MPT management staff were also in attendance. *MPT President Larry Unger, Mr. George Beneman, Mr. Joseph Campbell, Mrs. Fran Minakowski, Ms. Kate Pearson, Ms. Betsy Peisach, Mr. Andrew Levine, Mr. Travis Mitchell, Mr. Troy Mosley, Ms. Susan Wolfinger Schmitt, Mr. Steven Schupak, Ms. Suzanne Schwertman, Ms. Linda Taggart, and Mr. Tom Williams. Ms. Dionne Neblett was present to record the minutes. Mr. Rob Jefferson and Mr. Max Zelalem were present for IT services.*

Guests: *Ms. Kate Riley, vice president, government and public affairs of America's Public Television Stations (APTS) was in attendance.*

The vice chair, filling in for the chair who was in attendance but had lost his voice, called the meeting to order at 10:31 a.m. He requested a review and approval of the minutes of the September 27, 2023 meeting. The minutes were approved unanimously as submitted.

Mr. Bodorff welcomed two new participants, Dr. Lakeisha Lashley and Ms. Erin Senior. Dr. Lashley was recently appointed to the MPBC by Governor Wes Moore. She is principal of Fairland Elementary School and has worked in the Montgomery County Public School system for the last 26 years. Ms. Senior is with the Maryland State Department of Education in Digital Learning and is Superintendent Wright's representative. Ms. Senior oversees students' online courses and has worked with MPT on its courses and instructional learning programs.

APTS update

Kate Riley reported that APTS remains focused on increasing federal funding. Over the last three appropriations cycles, public media funding has increased each year along with increases to Interconnection funding. A Next Generation Warning System infrastructure program was established to assure public broadcasters' reliability.

People across the political spectrum recognize the work of APTS. Bipartisan support has contributed to APTS' success as the goal to provide local public services in the areas of education, public safety, and civic leadership are pursued. Forty of the 50 states now provide funding to support the work of public television stations.

The U.S. House and Senate passed a short-term continuing resolution (CR) that funds the government through January 2024, averting a government shutdown. There continues to be increased volatility in Congress that present challenges for public television stations. Public media funding for the Corporation for Public Broadcasting and for Interconnection is at risk of cuts.

President's report

The state is expecting a challenging financial year in FY25. The 2024 Maryland General Assembly's legislative session begins on January 10, 2024. As in past years, Mr. Unger and Mr. Schupak will meet with members of the House and Senate budget subcommittees as well as leadership to update them on MPT's activities.

MPT's chief financial officer, Katina Conn, resigned earlier this month. Ms. Schwertman agreed to postpone her retirement and resume her role as CFO until a replacement is hired. Mr. Andrew Levine, general counsel, will retire at the end of the year. Mr. Levine provided valuable legal guidance to MPT over the past 20 years.

The legislative audit that began in June, 2023 should conclude by the first quarter of 2024. The audit is conducted every four years. MPT does not expect to have any major material findings.

Commissioners viewed video clips that included *Log Canoes*, a documentary about the iconic Chesapeake Bay log canoe racing fleet, and a new 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline spot created by MPT to address the anxiety and stress many of our viewers and members are experiencing as a result of current world events.

Mr. Bodorff commented that local content is still the future for public television and MPT does a superlative job telling local stories.

Content Division update

Travis Mitchell, senior vice president and Chief Content Officer, introduced the Content Division update. He said his team is focused on delivering stories that reflect Maryland. He shared a montage of clips from programs and events.

Joe Campbell, managing director of Creative Services said the montage was produced by members of his team. His group is responsible for providing a unified look across all MPT departments including promotions, attention grabbers, and one liners. On-air and online promotions are essential tools that tell great stories.

Kate Pearson, senior managing director of Programming & Acquisitions, reported that MPT was a national presenting station at the APT Fall Marketplace showcasing eight shows. MPT acquired content for 40 hours of documentaries, series, shorts, and specials. Although many television competitors are losing viewers, MPT has suffered less decline than most PBS stations. MPT has been one of the top 10 most-watched public TV stations nationally 42% of the time, and was the most-watched public TV station 10 times, over 50 ranking stations. The lifestyle and news shows that air at 4:00 p.m. have helped to increase viewership. Ms. Pearson shared a clip from the upcoming National Women's Hall of Fame program.

Troy Mosley, managing director of Content relayed that *Maryland Farm & Harvest* has introduced a new segment called "Farm to Skillet," during which renowned chefs shop locally for ingredients that they then use to prepare unique recipes. *Destination Maryland's* new hosts are also the producers of the popular YouTube travel channel *The Detour Duo*.

MPT has produced for TV live theatrical performances including *Hal Prince's Broadway*. Recent sports-related programs in 2023 included the Maryland 5 Star, the Maryland Cycling Classic, and the CIAA Basketball Tournament. MPT Digital Studios has produced short stories

on a wide variety of topics. *Made in Maryland* and *Maryland Farm & Harvest* will have feature stories during Women's History Month in March, 2024.

Mr. Mosley shared clips from *Chesapeake Collectibles*, the Maryland Cycling Classic, and a sneak peak of *Ben's Ten: Chattel Slavery on Maryland's Eastern Shore* about Harriet Tubman's father, Ben Ross, that will premiere during Black History Month in February, 2024.

Mr. Mitchell announced that *HBCU Week* will expand nationally with grant funding from CPB. On Sundays in September, World Channel presented *HBCU Week* programming of untold stories. MPT's Thurgood Marshall film, executive produced by Stanley Nelson, will tell the story of the U.S. Supreme Court Justice who was a Baltimore native and HBCU graduate. The film will premiere in fall, 2025. To date, MPT's new YouTube channel, *HBCU Week Now*, has garnered over 1.5 million views and 10,000 subscribers since its debut.

Mr. Bodorff commented that he is extremely proud of the quality work done by MPT. Mr. Wahl stated he is honored to serve as a commissioner with such an innovative team. Ms. Wang cannot wait to see 2024's programming and expects everyone in our viewing area to be delighted with the array of programs available.

DEI update

Dr. Bright reported that the DEI Advisory Council took a short hiatus after Ms. Colclough's retirement. Ms. Taggart will now chair the committee. The group will meet bi-monthly, on the third Thursday of each month.

New goals have been set for increased DEI-related programming and inclusive hiring for the Hispanic community and for those with disabilities. DEI training for staff will be expanded. Plans are in place to monitor and increase the percentage of procurement contracts awarded to certified minority-owned businesses. Ms. Taggart is excited to work with co-chairs Dr. Bright and Mr. Rodbell, and the entire DEI team.

MPT Foundation update

Mr. Bodorff, foundation chair, reported the three-year planned giving campaign ended in September, 2023. Approximately \$5.5 million was raised, exceeding the \$5 million goal. A number of donors have created estate plans using the FreeWill tool, resulting in testamentary gifts of over \$2 million.

Firing Line host Margaret Hoover attended a major donor special event at the National Press Club on November 3 along with 50 Leadership and Legacy Society members and other VIPs. The interactive event was well-received.

Today is Giving Tuesday. Donations received on November 28 will be matched up to \$50,000 by donations from a group of MPT members.

Old/new business

There being no old or new business, the vice chair asked for a motion for adjournment. Mr. Irwin made a motion to adjourn and Ms. Wang seconded the motion. The meeting adjourned at 11:27 a.m. and moved into a closed session.