

Maryland Public Broadcasting Commission
Meeting of March 19, 2024
via Zoom

Minutes

Present: *Mr. Edward Kaplan, chair; Mr. Richard Bodorff, vice chair, Dr. Debra Bright; Ms. Rebecca Hanson; 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, Maryland State Superintendent of Schools.*

The following members of the MPT management staff were also in attendance. *MPT President Larry Unger, Mr. George Beneman, Ms. Patricia Fitzhugh, Ms. Lara Hjortsberg, Mrs. Fran Minakowski, Mr. Travis Mitchell, Mr. Kayode Onalapo, Ms. Betsy Peisach, Ms. Suzie Wolfinger Schmitt, Mr. Harry Vaughn, and Mr. Tom Williams. Ms. Dionne Neblett was present to record the minutes. Mr. Max Zelalem was present for IT services.*

The chair called the meeting to order at 10:32 a.m. and welcomed Patricia Fitzhugh and Lara Hjortsberg to the group. Mr. Kaplan requested approval of the minutes of the January 23, 2024, meeting. Mr. Wahl made a motion to approve the minutes, Ms. Wang seconded the motion. The minutes were approved unanimously as submitted.

President's report

Mr. Unger introduced MPT's new chief financial officer, Patricia Fitzhugh. Ms. Fitzhugh comes to MPT with a great deal of Maryland state agency experience. Mr. Unger introduced Lara Hjortsberg, our first new principal counsel in two decades. Ms. Hjortsberg has served with the Attorney General's Office since 2010.

MPT's FY25 operating budget appropriation was threatened by two proposed actions: the repeal of the 2017 mandated funding formula (Senate Bill 1034), and a \$1 million cut to FY25 funding that was earmarked for the Center for Maryland History Films. After numerous appeals to budget committees' leadership in the Maryland Senate and House of Delegates and other communication to key legislators, MPT was able to convince the legislators not to take those actions. The funding formula was retained, the \$1 million appropriation was actually increased to \$1.5 million.

The U.S. Congress has been unable to agree on a budget for public media, and the outlook for federal funding is uncertain. Industry advocacy groups are working to resolve the problem. The president of the United States has released his 2025 budget, which includes \$595 million for public broadcasting.

The Station Activities Benchmarking Study (SABS) shows MPT as the sixth largest station of the 150 PBS members stations in revenue. MPT is the largest in total revenue of the 18 state licensees.

MPT will celebrate Chesapeake Bay Week's 20th anniversary next month. The taping of the Chesapeake Bay Summit will be held on April 12 and the program will air on April 23. Mr. Unger shared a clip of *Racing Rivals: Log Canoe of the Chesapeake Bay* and thanked Mr. Kaplan and Mr. Bodorff for their financial support of the production.

The Democratic U.S. Senatorial debate is being planned for April 23 in the Irene and Edward H. Kaplan Production Studio hosted by Chuck Todd. Jeff Salkin will serve as a panelist during the Democratic primary Baltimore City Mayoral debate at Morgan State University on April 17.

Mr. Schupak continues to lead the way on getting MPT's audience comfortable and engaged to stream content. Mr. Unger shared the Download the App video. Increasing public use of the app is essential to maintaining the station's viewership. Ms. Hanson was impressed with the step-by-step instructions on how to sign up for the app.

Commissioners viewed clips from the *Maryland Farm & Harvest's* Chicken Festival segment, *Made in Maryland* series, *MPT in the Classroom* and a clip from the PBS program *A Brief History of the World*.

The annual joint dinner of the MPBC and MPT Foundation board of directors will be held on June 13 at the Chesapeake Bay Foundation in Annapolis. A taping of *Antiques Roadshow* will be held at the Maryland Zoo in Baltimore on June 18.

Audit report

Mr. Kramer, committee chair, reported that the Audit Committee met on March 15. Ms. Fitzhugh stated MPT received a clean audit report. Mr. Kramer made a motion to accept the audit. Mr. Wahl seconded the motion. All were in favor and the audit report was accepted.

Technology Division update

George Beneman, senior vice president and chief technology officer, shared information about his 52-member team. In the summer of 1967, MPT acquired the land we occupy today, and construction started in 1968. Two additions were built in 1990. The Irene and Edward H. Kaplan Production Studio (former Studio A) expansion opened in 2022. The building has 153,200 square feet of space and MPT maintains 34 acres of land and has six transmitter locations with 289 additional acres of land.

In 1996, the Telecommunications Act required technological advances resulting in broadcasting upgrades from analog to digital. This transition cost approximately \$40 million and was funded mainly by the State of Maryland. It included six digital transmitters, four new towers, two new transmitter buildings and three new antennas. Mr. Beneman shared a video using drone photography that followed the journey the broadcast signal takes.

Harry Vaughn, senior managing director, Production Services, reported that his team is providing gavel-to-gavel streaming coverage of the Maryland General Assembly 2024 session. A four-person crew along with robotic cameras are used each day to cover the proceedings. The team provided coverage of the State of the State Address as well as the Senate President's

speech. Production Services produced 125 days of in-house closed captions, 130 control room events, 230 studio events, and 1,600 field productions using 4K cameras and drones.

Kayode Onalopo, senior director of Information Services, said core priorities include network infrastructure and cyber security as cyber-attacks have become more advanced. MPT employees had a 90% completion rate in cyber security awareness trainings. Last year, MPT doubled its bandwidth, and improved its firewall, data transfers, and quality of virtual meetings. He shared a video about wi-fi security.

Mr. Beneman stated that the digital television datacasting public alert will be running public safety tests over the coming years. Mr. Wahl expressed an interest in visiting transmitter sites. Mr. Beneman agreed to arrange the visits.

DEI update

Dr. Debra Bright serves as co-chair of the external DEI committee alongside Mr. Stanley Rodbell. The committee met on February 22. Robust discussions were held to develop action items to move DEI forward. The external committee will expand to include diverse members and voices that will include Latinos, Asians, and those from the disabled community. A Hispanic Heritage Festival will air on MPT. Mr. Mitchell will prepare a report on ways create connections with the Asian community.

Mr. Mitchell said MPT continues its commitment to DEI efforts and showcases primetime programs that address racism and inequity. MPT has suffered less viewer loss than most partners across the PBS system and viewer comments about diverse programming has been positive.

The Frederick Douglass and Harriet Tubman documentaries had cumulative viewership above 10 million. Stanley Nelson will be the executive producer of a new film, *Becoming Thurgood Marshall*, scheduled to air on PBS nationally in the fall of 2025. Mr. Mitchell shared a clip of *Ben's Ten: Chattel Slavery on Maryland's Eastern Shore* about Harriet Tubman's father, Ben Ross.

HBCU Week will expand nationally with grant funding from CPB. MPT's YouTube channel, *HBCU Week Now*, has garnered more than 1.5 million views and 10,000 subscribers since its debut.

Ms. Hanson asked if the committee is concerned about anti-DEI rhetoric. Will MPT ignore it and will it compromise any upcoming projects? Mr. Unger said that MPT has not experienced this problem and does not intend to change anything at this time. PBS looks to MPT as a leader in the area of DEI. MPT is annually recognized for implementing best practices.

Mr. Kaplan thanked Dr. Bright and Mr. Mitchell for their thorough and comprehensive report.

Old/new business

Mr. Kaplan asked if there was any old or new business. Ms. Senior thanked MPT for hosting an education event in February that showcased *Thinkport* and opened doors across MSDE. The

chair asked for a motion for adjournment. A motion was made, seconded, and approved. The meeting adjourned at 11:39 a.m.