

Maryland Public Broadcasting Commission
Meeting of September 24, 2024
via Zoom

Present: *Mr. Edward Kaplan, chair; Mr. Richard Bodorff, vice chair; Dr. Debra Bright, Ms. Rebecca Hanson, Dr. Lakeisha Lashley, Mr. Bruce Wahl, Ms. Ellie Wang.*

The following members of the MPT management staff were also in attendance. *MPT President Larry Unger, Ms. Patricia Fitzhugh, Ms. Lara Hjortsberg, Ms. Betsy Peisach, Ms. Kristen Penczek, Ms. Suzie Schmitt, Mr. Steven Schupak, Ms. Linda Taggart, 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 10:29 a.m. Mr. Kaplan requested approval of the minutes of the May, 28, 2024, meeting. The minutes were approved unanimously as submitted.

President's report

The U.S. House and Senate are working to pass a continuing resolution to avoid a government shutdown. The outlook for federal funding will be impacted by the results of the upcoming election. The State of Maryland is expecting a more challenging financial year in 2025.

MPT is preparing a response to the State of Maryland legislative audit that began in June 2023. The audit is required by state law. External auditors from UHY began an audit of the MPT Foundation, Inc. this month and will conduct an audit of MPT in October.

MPT earned 15 Capital Emmy Awards from the National Capital Chesapeake Bay Chapter of the National Academy of Television Arts & Sciences. Mr. Steven Schupak, station manager, was named to *The Daily Record's* 2024 list of Influential Marylanders. A reception celebration was held on September 18. Mr. Unger shared a clip of the event.

Antiques Roadshow returned to The Maryland Zoo in Baltimore on June 18. Nearly four dozen MPT employees and volunteers assisted thousands of visitors during the 12-hour taping. MPT's fifth annual HBCU Week ran from September 2 to 8. HBCU Week continues to expand and launched the YouTube channel HBCU Week NOW. Mr. Unger shared a clip.

The general election senatorial debate will be held on October 10 at MPT with former Governor Larry Hogan and Prince Georges County Executive Angela Alsobrooks. The debate will be moderated by NBC's Chuck Todd and there will be no studio audience.

Mr. Unger shared an MSAA Maryland Corps spot from the Governor's office, clips from *Outdoors Maryland, Maryland Farm & Harvest*, and a clip about riding the rails with Robert Van Camp in Cumberland, Maryland.

Budget & Compensation report

Mr. Bodorff, committee chair, reported that FY24 did not end with the anticipated surplus. There was a full discussion of the events causing the shortfall. The Development Division exceeded its financial expectations.

Ms. Wolfinger Schmitt, vice president, Human Resources, reported there were 139 filled positions out of the approved 144 permanent positions. There were 15 new hires and 14 separations. The turnover percentage was higher than previous years as there were a number of retirements and separations in the best interest of MPT. The average years of service is 13.6. The EEO percentage of female employees increased to 45.3%, and the percentage of minorities is 30.5%. Six new permanent positions were awarded to MPT in 2024. This is first time in more than 10 years that MPT received additional PIN positions.

Mr. Bodorff noted that the longevity of employees is remarkable and speaks to the quality of the workplace. He also stated that the EEO numbers are extraordinary.

Development update

Linda Taggart, vice president, Development Division, reported that there are 32 employees that make up her six-department team. In FY24, Major & Planned Giving exceeded its budgeted goals. The Leadership Society has grown to more than 500 members. Vehicle donations brought in nearly \$200,000 from 102 vehicles. The membership team has more than 25,000 sustainers (donors that give to MPT on a monthly basis). In FY24, 194 donor gifts were matched by employers.

While many colleagues in the PBS system have experienced a decline in Passport revenue, MPT's percentage of revenue from Passport has increased. The number of members who stream regularly and the number of hours Passport is streamed have also increased.

After a number of delays from the state's procurement office, the canvassing request for proposal (RFP) is complete and a vendor has been selected. MPT will go before the state Board of Public Works on October 2. Once approved, recruitment will begin on November 1 with canvassers knocking on doors in January, 2025. The door-to-door method to acquire members has proven successful throughout the public television system and delivers younger members, sustaining members, and families. At least 20 stations in the system are currently canvassing.

Pledge days have been intentionally reduced from 116 to 83 days to prevent program interruptions. Although pledge days have been cut, pledge revenue has increased. MPT airs live and pre-taped pledge breaks and does not use generic breaks produced by other stations. MPT is a producing station and raised more than \$55,000 in FY24 from a number of MPT-produced national pledge events.

The Maryland Oral History Project captures stories of important, influential, and inspirational figures from across the state. Interviewees have included Dr. Carla Hayden and Barbara

Mikulski. Four interviews have been scheduled in FY25 and will include David Rubenstein and Rheda Becker.

Kristen Penczek, senior managing director, Audience Engagement, reported that in FY24 her team held 110 events including station tours, screenings, grant-funded events, and an annual flea market. Unique events included genealogy workshops, a virtual Rick Steves wine tasting, the *Antiques Roadshow* taping, and a Bob Ross paint night.

The Special Events team partnered and collaborated with other organizations, setting up an MPT booth at four different locations. The MPT Travel Club provided domestic and international trips including long day trips. An online raffle and two auctions were held; both were financially successful. A number of members increased their giving level and became Leadership Society members.

The Download the App initiative included a seven-part interactive webinar series. The webinars were posted on YouTube and more than 3,000 viewers have watched the Download the App recordings.

Mr. Kaplan thanked the Development Division for its thorough report and was impressed by its many accomplishments.

Maryland Center for Media Literacy & Education

The Education Division is developing a responsible and comprehensive statewide approach to media literacy to ensure that individuals have skills and knowledge to navigate the complexities of our digital world. Today's constant flow of information across devices and platforms is interwoven with misinformation, and the lines between fact and fiction are often blurred. Teenagers are online an alarming amount of time. Social media, including one-minute TikTok bites, are their main source of news.

The Center will lead a statewide coalition for all Maryland citizens building media literacy skills and knowledge. The official launch will be held in MPT's Irene and Edward H. Kaplan Production Studio on November 19 and will also be livestreamed on YouTube.

Download the App Campaign

Mr. Schupak stated many MPT viewers have shifted from linear viewing to streaming, but some households are unclear on how to stream PBS and MPT programs. MPT is focused on getting its audience comfortable and engaged to stream content.

To maximize on-demand streaming of its shows, MPT has dedicated station-wide resources to a Download the App campaign. The campaign focuses on increasing downloads, sign-ons, and TV activations of the PBS app. PBS currently supports 20 apps on different platforms.

The campaign underscores MPT's promise to provide content anytime from multiple devices. Campaign messages have clear language about getting the free PBS app, which includes access

to PBS and MPT shows utilizing streaming on-demand services. More national and local programs will be acquired for the on-demand service. In the future, new TVs will have the PBS app pre-loaded.

MPT was one of only two stations that took on the Download the App campaign and has exceeded its goal of 5% growth from the first year's baseline. There were over 40,000 downloads localized to MPT; a 10% increase of its total number of app downloads. MPT will continue to survey its audience to learn what compelled them to Download the App to inform future decision-making.

Ms. Hanson said this is an enormous breakthrough and offered her congratulations. She inquired if the PBS app forces you to choose a station. Mr. Schupak said the PBS app does require that you select a local station.

Mr. Wahl has a Samsung TV and was not able to find the PBS app. He asked for instructions to download the app. Ms. Penczek will have a member of her team contact Mr. Wahl. Mr. Schupak encouraged everyone to download the PBS app.

Old/New business

Mr. Kaplan asked for old or new business. Mr. Wahl had the opportunity to visit two of three MPT transmitter sites and is looking forward to seeing transmitters in the western part of the state. Mr. Kaplan asked for a motion to adjourn the meeting. Mr. Wahl made the motion. Ms. Wang seconded the motion. The meeting adjourned at 11:56 am.