

Maryland Public Broadcasting Commission
Meeting of September 27, 2023
via Zoom
Minutes

Present: *Mr. Edward Kaplan, chair; Mr. Richard Bodorff, vice chair; Dr. Debra Bright; Ms. Shelly Gardeniers-Pettigrew; Ms. Rebecca Hanson; Ms. Beth Suarez, Mr. Bruce Wahl; Ms. Ellie Wang.*

The following members of the MPT management staff were also in attendance. *Mr. George Beneman, Ms. Erin Chrest, Ms. Katina Conn, Ms. April Martin, Mrs. Fran Minakowski, Mr. Eric Neumann, Ms. Betsy Peisach, 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 was present for IT services.*

Guests: *Ms. Pat Harrison, president and chief executive officer of the Corporation for Public Broadcasting (CPB), Mr. Brendan Daly, vice president of Communications, CPB, and Ms. Elise Garfinkel, Senior Director, CPB were in attendance.*

Chairman Kaplan called the meeting to order at 10:33 a.m. after noting the presence of a quorum. He announced that MPT President Larry Unger would not be in attendance due to illness. The minutes were approved unanimously as submitted. The chair welcomed Pat Harrison, president and chief executive officer of the Corporation for Public Broadcasting (CPB).

President's report

Steven Schupak, executive vice president and Station Manager, delivered the President's report. In FY23, MPT has exceeded its budget and projections. The state is expecting a more difficult financial year in 2025, and the outlook for public broadcasting federal funding is uncertain.

Ms. Susan Wolfinger Schmitt has assumed the role of vice president of Human Resources. Ms. Katina Conn assumed the chief financial officer role and began work last week. Ms. Suzanne Schwertman, former CFO, will retire later this year.

MotorWeek's John Davis and Linda Taggart, vice president of Development, will be inducted into the National Academy of Television Arts & Sciences National Capital Chesapeake Bay Chapter's (NATAS-NCCB) prestigious Gold and Silver Circles, respectively, during ceremonies to be held on October 7 in Richmond, Virginia.

The Maryland Oral History Project, created by the Development Division, shares stories and reflections of extraordinary Marylanders. Interviews posted on the MPT website feature former U.S. Senator Barbara Mikulski, journalist Marvin Kalb, and renowned sculptor Toby Mendez. A number of additional interviews have been scheduled.

The Maryland State Ad Agency (MSAA) has been awarded a grant for consulting services to help plan the ad agency's future growth. This in-kind service grant is being provided by Compass Pro Bono and is valued at \$200,000.

MPT's fourth annual HBCU Week ran from September 4 to 10. It featured more than 27 hours of content about HBCUs in our viewing area and across the country. There will be a national expansion of HBCU Week thanks to a collaboration with CPB and the WORLD Channel.

The Maryland Cycling Classic that hosted 112 cyclists in a 121-mile competition, was held on September 3. Six hours of live coverage was broadcast on the MPT Sports Desk. Both Richard Bordorff and Steven Schupak participated in a 35-mile charity ride a day earlier. The 3rd annual Maryland 5 Star, an international equestrian event, will be held at Fair Hill in Cecil County on October 19 – 22. MPT will carry nine hours of live coverage.

Commissioners viewed clips from the Maryland Cycling Classic, Maryland 5 Star, *MotorWeek* Season 43, excerpts from HBCU Week, *Ask the Governor: Examining Education*, and the pledge program *Jewish Delis: Something to Kvell About!*

Mr. Schupak introduced Pat Harrison, CPB's longest serving president and chief executive officer.

CPB update

Pat Harrison said she enjoyed the overview of the wonderful things MPT is doing. She thanked the commission for its service as the governing body of MPT. She said Mr. Unger's great leadership has been the driving force behind MPT's success.

CPB is the steward of the federal government's investment in public broadcasting. It is their responsibility to report how funding is used to benefit the public. CPB distributes approximately 70% of its funding to more than 1,500 public radio and television stations.

With its 3D plan—digital, diversity, and dialogue, CPB strives to support diverse programs and services that inform, educate, enlighten and enrich the public. Through grants, CPB encourages the development of content that addresses the needs of underserved viewers. CPB funds multiple digital platforms used by thousands of public media producers and production companies through the country.

CPB has worked with MPT on national opportunities including HBCU Week, interactive education series, and the Harriet Tubman and Frederick Douglass documentaries. CPB will enhance local stations' community initiatives around the U.S. Semiquincentennial using content from the Ken Burns documentary *The American Revolution*. Grants will be available for stations to participate in this initiative.

The public media initiative *American Graduate* was launched in 2011 to help young people stay on path to a high school diploma and has since evolved into explaining career pathways for students exploring postsecondary education and employment. More than 124 local stations,

including MPT, became part of the American Graduate initiative. *American Graduate: Jobs Explained* is exploring how to use public media to meet students where they are with information they need to make informed choices about their future beyond high school.

Mr. Kaplan thanked Ms. Harrison for her presentation and commented that CPB's work continues to benefit the entire country.

Budget & Compensation report

Mr. Bodorff, committee chair, reported that the 2023 year-end results were impressive. Although salary compensation costs increased substantially, the additional costs were met with a combination of increased state appropriation and exceptional financial performances from the Development and Education divisions. He turned to Ms. Schwertman for her report.

Outgoing CFO Suzanne Schwertman presented reports on revenue and expenses. A large bequest was received at the end of the fiscal year. Development had less expenditures than expected, and exceeded revenue goals. The governor awarded State employees a 4% cost of living adjustment that was not budgeted.

Change orders were completed for modified contracts that exceeded \$1 million, as requested by legislative auditors. Contracts that needed Commission approval included Journey Films, Smartypants Pictures, and AC Nielson Corporation. Mr. Wahl made a motion to approve the contracts, Ms. Hanson seconded the motion, and the motion was unanimously approved.

Mr. Bodorff thanked Ms. Schwertman for her years of service and welcomed Ms. Conn. He also welcomed Ms. Wolfinger Schmitt in her new role and turned to her for the human resources report.

Ms. Wolfinger Schmitt, vice president, Human Resources, reported that there were 138 filled posts out of the 144 permanent positions. This is the largest number of employees since 2010. There were 20 new hires and 11 separations during the year. The turnover percentage is lower than the national average. The EEO percentage of female employees is 44.9%, and the percentage of minorities increased to 37.7%.

Ms. Wang inquired about the reasons for the separations. Ms. Schmitt responded that there were retirements, opportunities for promotion at other organizations, and some employees moved out of the area.

Development Division update

Linda Taggart, vice president, Development Division reported that there are 32 employees that make up her six-department team. In FY23, Major & Planned Giving exceeded its goals and has already exceeded its FY24 budgeted goal. The matching gift program that was launched in FY14 has yielded over 1,300 donor gifts. MPT's vehicle donation program that launched in 2004 has raised approximately \$2 million since its inception. MPT Passport, MPT's video-on-demand

streaming service, continues to grow. Audience engagement conducted 131 events this year raising over \$224,000.

Member benefits received a comprehensive review in order to enhance the member experience. Leadership Society benefits were adjusted to offer three levels of benefits: Leader, Champion and Visionary. Adjusted membership packages were designed to grow and diversify membership, attract families, and create positive experiences that increase revenue.

The canvassing request for proposal (RFP) received one bid. The door-to-door method to acquire members has proven successful throughout the public television system and delivers younger members, sustaining members, and families. Canvassing recruitment should begin in January, 2024 with canvassers knocking on doors in July.

Eric Neumann, managing director, On-Air Fundraising & Development Productions, reported that there are four pledge drives held each year that contain approximately 45 hours of local pledge breaks. Pledge days have been intentionally reduced from 116 in FY15 to 83 days this year as too many program interruptions can be a source of frustration for viewers. MPT produced six national pledge events at cost for stations unable to create their own pledge breaks. *MPT & Your Community* segments bring organizations into the studio to tell their stories and *MPT Arts Minute* spots promote the work of arts and culture organizations statewide.

Mr. Kaplan thanked the team for its hard work. Ms. Wang complimented the staff for the wide variety of activities that MPT was engaged in.

Old/new business

There being no old or new business, the chair asked for a motion to adjourn. Mr. Wahl made a motion, Ms. Wang seconded the motion. The meeting adjourned at 12:10 pm. The next meeting will be held on November 28.