

Maryland Public Broadcasting Commission
Meeting of November 26, 2024
via Zoom

Present: *Mr. Edward Kaplan, chair; Mr. Richard Bodorff, vice chair; Dr. Debra Bright, Ms. Shelly Gardeniers, 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, Ms. Eleanor Hong, Mrs. Fran Minakowski, Mr. Travis Mitchell, Ms. Kate Pearson, Ms. Betsy Peisach, Ms. Suzie Wolfinger 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 10:33 a.m. Mr. Kaplan requested approval of the minutes of the September 24, 2024, meeting. Ms. Wang made a motion to approve the minutes, Ms. Gardeniers seconded the motion. The minutes were approved unanimously as submitted.

President's report:

Mr. Unger reported that changes in the country's leadership could have an impact on public television funding. The previous Trump administration zeroed out CPB funding allocations each year only to have it restored by Congress. Public media industry advocacy groups are working hard with supporters on both sides of the aisle to retain funding. Maryland Senate Bill 1034 provides that if MPT's federal funding is reduced or cut completely, the State will replace the funding.

The outlook for state funding includes a possible deficit. There could be another attempt to repeal the law that places MPT's appropriation on a formula. MPT has successfully defended language that sought to repeal the funding formula, and will do everything possible to defeat any future threats. The Department of Budget and Management (DBM) will submit the State's budget in mid December.

MPT is currently undergoing three audits. The State of Maryland Office of Legislative Affairs audit began in June 2023. Legislative audits take place every four years. A final report was published in October, and a response was submitted by MPT. External auditors from accounting firm UHY began its annual audit of MPT Foundation, Inc. in September. MPT is also undergoing a Federal Communications Commission (FCC) EEO program audit. This audit reviews recruitment and hiring practices. All requested information will be submitted to the FCC by December 2. MPT will review all of the audits with the audit committees when they are completed.

Chesapeake Collectibles season 12 was taped in October. There will be enough material for 13 episodes which will begin airing in June of next year. The senatorial debate was conducted on October 10 at MPT. The candidates were former Governor Larry Hogan and Prince Georges

County Executive Angela Alsobrooks. The debate was moderated by NBC's Chuck Todd and drew national attention. Mr. Unger shared a clip of the debate.

MPT provided coverage of the Maryland 5 Star, an international equestrian event, at Fair Hill last month. MPT's coverage garnered nearly 125,000 gross impressions on broadcast, and nearly 40,000 views on its YouTube channel.

The Maryland Center for Media Literacy and Education was launched last week. The launch event was held in the Irene and Edward H. Kaplan Production Studio with approximately 90 in-person attendees. It was also live streamed. The event was hosted by renown journalist Frank Sesno, and speakers included Maryland First Lady Dawn Moore, FCC Commissioner Anna Gomez, and Sheppard Pratt President and CEO Dr. Harsh Trivedi. Mr. Unger shared a clip of the event.

PBS KIDS premiered its newest animated series, *Carl the Collector*, about an autistic raccoon that loves to collect things. MPT's Education Division was selected to work alongside the PBS KIDS team to develop a robust set of series-related resources to support parents and educators. Mr. Unger shared a clip of the new series.

MPT is advertising for its first production student fellow. This paid position is made possible by Commissioner Rebecca Hanson who generously funded this activity.

Mr. Unger shared clips from *Made in Maryland*, *Salute to Veterans*, and *Maryland by Air*. The *Maryland by Air* film received significant funding from Edward and Irene Kaplan and will premiere on MPT this May and in The Maryland Science Center's IMAX theatre.

Mr. Wahl, a Vietnam veteran, expressed appreciation for the specials that aired on Veterans Day. He stated MPT takes the lead in supporting veterans.

Content Division report

Travis Mitchell, senior vice president and Chief Content Officer, introduced the Content Division update. His team of nearly 50 creative professionals earned 42 Emmy nominations and 15 Emmys in June, the most in MPT's history. He shared a montage of clips from programs and events.

Eleanor Hong, managing director of Digital Operations, shared how MPT is delivering digital content to its viewers on the platforms of their choice. MPT rose to the number one spot for Social Media Station Change Rankings according to TRAC Media. Impressions from Facebook and Instagram posts reached a record nine million overall impressions. Visits to the MPT website including homepage views, sessions, and pageviews have also increased along with PBS app downloads localized to MPT. MPT has extended its reach to a multigeneration and multiplatform streaming audience. New digital and social strategies should continue to grow viewership and help MPT connect to its audiences.

Kate Pearson, senior managing director of Programming & Acquisitions, was presented with the Charles Impaglia Programmer of the Year award this past spring. MPT showcased six programs at the APT Fall Marketplace that will provide revenue to MPT through presenting station fees.

Ms. Pearson shared clips from two recent program acquisitions--*Anacostia Delta: The Legacy of DC's Telemasters* and *Deconstructing the Beatles*. Themes for the first quarter of 2025 include New Beginnings (January), Black History Month (February), and Women's History Month (March). Troy Mosley, managing director of Content, shared programming highlights from local productions.

Mr. Mitchell announced that *HBCU Week* has expanded nationally thanks to a \$1.2 million grant from CPB. In addition, three HBCU-themed original programs aired on the WORLD Channel in September. Six short films were launched on a new YouTube channel, *HBCU Week NOW*.

Becoming Thurgood Marshall will debut in the fall of 2025. The one-hour documentary about the life of Baltimore's native son, Thurgood Marshall, exploring his early years at HBCU's Lincoln University and Howard University and his legal career. Mr. Mitchell shared clips from *HBCU Week NOW* and *Becoming Thurgood Marshall*.

Mr. Kaplan thanked the Content Division for being the face of MPT and providing viewers with programs that keep them coming back for more.

Strategic Plan update

Mr. Steven Schupak, station manager, is leading efforts to provide the structural framework upon which MPT will build its annual plans, goals, and budgets over the next three years. The strategic planning process began in September and will help inform decision-making throughout the organization by clarifying priorities. Mr. Schupak is aided by consultants from Canopy Gap. Key themes of the plan include raising the profile of MPT, community engagement, and accelerating digital transformation by becoming more data driven. MPT board members are invited to attend a two-hour virtual strategic planning session on January 9. The session will be led by Canopy Gap's Todd Hoskins, who has been engaged by MPT to facilitate the multi-month process that will lead to the network's 2025-2028 strategic plan.

DEI update

Ms. Linda Taggart gave the DEI update on behalf of co-chair, Dr. Debra Bright. The external DEI committee met on November 21. The committee discussed creating a mentorship program for interns and an apprenticeship program. Ms. Wolfinger Schmitt will send out surveys to committee members in order to acquire eligible mentors. Ms. Wang, a physical therapist, volunteered to give MPT staff training on the proper use of wheelchairs, walkers, and canes to help visitors navigate the hallways. The accessibility training will also include instructions on what to do when falls occur. Mr. Mitchell and Mr. Donald Thoms connected with leaders of the Hispanic community and discussed a future Hispanic Film Festival.

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 11:28 a.m. and moved into a closed session.