

Maryland Public Broadcasting Commission
Meeting of March 18, 2025
via Zoom

Minutes

Present: *Mr. Richard Bodorff, vice chair; Dr. Debra Bright, Mr. Irwin Kramer, Ms. Shelly Gardeniers, 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 Onaolapo, Ms. Betsy Peisach, Ms. Susan Wolfinger-Schmitt, Mr. Steven Schupak, Ms. Linda Taggart, Mr. Harry Vaughn, and Mr. Tom Williams. Mr. Max Zelalem was present for IT services.*

Vice Chair Richard Bodorff called the meeting to order at 10:33 a.m., a quorum being present. He first asked for additions or corrections to the minutes of the January 23 commission meeting and, hearing none, declared those minutes adopted.

President's report

Mr. Bodorff called on President and CEO Larry D. Unger for the President's Report. Mr. Unger expressed his thanks to the commission's Search Committee and to the commission as a whole for its selection of Steven Schupak as president-elect. Mr. Unger asked Mr. Schupak for comments, and the latter also thanked the Search Committee and commission for their votes of confidence. He also expressed thanks to MPT's Human Resources team for its organizing and conducting the national search. Finally, Mr. Schupak thanked outgoing CEO Unger for the latter's guidance and mentorship.

Resuming his report, President Unger gave an overview of current challenges being faced by MPT on the federal level as funding for public broadcasting has once more come under scrutiny. Mr. Unger noted, the just-passed continuing resolution does provide level funding for public media through September 2025, and its passage gives public TV's national advocacy organization APTS more time to work to change the minds of those who oppose federal funding for public TV and radio.

Turning to the state budget, Mr. Unger reported that the proposed FY26 budget includes language that would repeal the 2017 law that contained a funding formula for MPT appropriations. The repeal of that law and the proposed cut of \$800,000 to MPT's FY26 appropriation would be a serious loss to the network. The state's own financial position deteriorates daily, Mr. Unger said, adding to the concern. Mr. Unger did advise the commission that he'd been told the Maryland Senate did remove the repeal language from its funding bill but

the House of Delegates has not yet done so. Mr. Unger noted that the legislature does value the work of MPT and has been supportive in recent conversations and visits.

Mr. Unger also cited a bill being discussed in the General Assembly that would impose a tax on data brokers. A portion of the tax that would be collected would be earmarked to come to MPT for K-12 digital literacy education.

Mr. Unger reported that public TV's advocacy organization, APTS, has asked MPT to provide a video that captured Maryland legislators' comments about MPT, and Mr. Unger shared that video with commissioners. At its end, Mr. Unger observed that the testimonials in the video represented "both sides of the aisle." Mr. Unger then showed video clips from upcoming shows *Becoming Thurgood Marshall*, *Key Bridge Disaster: Reflect, Recover, Rebuild*, and *Resurrecting Poplar Island*.

Mr. Bodorff and APTS President Kate Riley gave an outstanding address as the new chief executive of the organization. Mr. Bodorff also told the commissioners about Mr. Unger's honor—the Pillar of Public Service Award—presented during the summit.

Audit report

Mr. Bodorff then turned to commissioner Irwin Kramer, chairman, for a report from the Audit Committee. Mr. Kramer indicated that MPT had received a "clean audit" from MPT's external independent auditors. He reminded commissioners that MPT also periodically undergoes other audits including the quadrennial state legislative audit and the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) audit. Mr. Unger said that MPT has now committed to fully resolving all outstanding legislative audit items no later than June 30, 2025.

Mr. Kramer then called on Vice President Susan Wolfinger-Schmitt for comment on the FCC audit. Ms. Wolfinger-Schmitt noted that the FCC randomly audits up to 5% of broadcast stations for EEO compliance every year. She noted that for the period of June 2022 to May 2024, MPT accounted for 36 recruitments, information uploaded to the FCC's public file. MPT received no FCC feedback on its submission and will, therefore, ask outside counsel to request that the FCC indicate by letter that audit is closed.

Mr. Kramer asked for a motion that the commission accept the external auditors' report for the period ending June 30, 2024. Ms. Wang made the motion, and it was seconded by Ms. Gardeniers. The audit report was then accepted unanimously by the commission.

Budget & Compensation report

Mr. Bodorff noted that Rebecca Hanson was out of town and that, therefore, the Budget & Compensation Committee report would be given by Ms. Fitzhugh, vice president, Finance & Accounting, and by Ms. Wolfinger-Schmitt. Ms. Fitzhugh led with a revenue and expense

summary for MPT and the MPT Foundation as of January 31, 2025. She then reviewed the budget forecast summary report as of the same date.

Technology Division update

Mr. Bodorff called on George Beneman, senior vice president and chief technology officer for his division's annual report. Mr. Beneman began by crediting the State of Maryland for the funding of air conditioning, driveway, transmitter improvements as well as for the \$9 million Kaplan Studio renovation. He said that in the last decade, MPT had received \$10 million from the state for such improvements. He also thanks the state and the FCC for funding equipment (transmitters, antennas, etc.) valued at \$9.1 million. He noted that rental income from users of MPT tower space reached \$9 million in the last decade.

Mr. Beneman then introduced Vice President Harry Vaughn, Production Services, who discussed studio and field equipment and other production aspects of his team's work, citing several upgrades. He told commissioners about a new sound studio that is under construction. Kayode Onaolapo, senior director, Information Technology was introduced next, and he pointed to several I.T. shared performance metrics, in particular citing new websites as well as privacy and security concerns that are part of employee training.

Mr. Beneman talked next about Next Gen TV or ATSC 3.0 and the benefits that could come from the new technology. He said the National Association of Broadcasters has petitioned the FCC to mandate a shutdown of the ATSC 1.0 standard for terrestrial television broadcasting by 2030.

Turning to the topic of artificial intelligence (AI), Mr. Beneman said AI is being used at MPT at present for such functions as data analysis, and he observed that the new technology can also be used for criminal purposes. He said that Generative AI (GenAI)—a type of artificial intelligence that can create new content such as images, videos, and text—can be less costly to use but it poses a threat to creative persons and can be used to make fake images or videos.

Mr. Beneman ended his report by discussing consumer electronics. Ms. Wang complimented George and team and wished Mr. Beneman well on his upcoming retirement.

Mr. Bodorff asked if there was any rental space available on MPT towers, and Mr. Beneman said the demand for space is location-based and that there is indeed space available on some of the MPT towers.

Old/new business

Mr. Bodorff then thanked all the presenters. He then asked if there is any new or old business for the commission. Hearing none, Mr. Bodorff adjourned the meeting at 11:41 a.m.