

Maryland Public Broadcasting Commission
Meeting of November 22, 2022
via Zoom

Minutes

Present: *Mr. Edward Kaplan, chair; Mr. Richard Bodorff, vice chair; Dr. Debra Bright; Ms. Shelly Gardeniers; Mr. Irwin Kramer, Ms. Beth Suarez; Ms. Ellie Wang.*

The following members of the MPT management staff also were in attendance. *MPT President and CEO Larry Unger, Mr. George Beneman, Mr. Joseph Campbell, Ms. Colette Colclough, Mr. Andrew Levine, Mrs. Fran Minakowski, Mr. Travis Mitchell, Mr. Troy Mosley, Ms. Kate Pearson, Ms. Betsy Peisach, Mr. Steven Schupak, Ms. Linda Taggart, Mr. Tom Williams and Mr. Bob Wilson. Ms. Dionne Neblett was present to record the minutes. Mr. Rob Jefferson was present for IT services.*

The chair called the meeting to order at 10:30 a.m. He requested approval of the minutes of the September 27, 2022, meeting. Ms. Wang made a motion to approve the minutes, Mr. Kramer seconded the motion; and the minutes were approved unanimously as submitted. The meeting schedule for calendar 2023 was also approved.

President's report

Mr. Unger attended the APTS board retreat and APT board meeting last week. The common theme in both meetings was the concern about stations ability to compete with other streaming services as linear television continues to decline. Major market stations have been pushing PBS to devote more resources to Passport. PBS seems to agree that the video app needs improvement, but it is unknown exactly how it will proceed.

There is expected to be great value in the sale or lease of spectrum as the industry moves to ATSC 3.0. The spectrum datacasting market is forecast to eventually be in the billions of dollars annually. ATSC 3.0 has not attracted the consumer yet.

Federal funding for public media continues to increase, and there may soon be additional funding for interconnection. All six of the transmission facilities at MPT have been repacked with funding from the federal government following the spectrum auction. The almost \$10 million received updated all transmission facilities and has prepared MPT for ATSC 3.0.

APT President Cynthia Fenneman will retire on May 31, 2023. The search for her replacement will start at the beginning of the new year. Recent MPT events include the general election gubernatorial debate, Maryland 5 Star, and the national premieres of *Harriet Tubman: Visions of Freedom* and *Becoming Frederick Douglass*. Plans are in place to broadcast the new governor's inauguration ceremonies on January 18, 2023. Mr. Unger met with key legislators to request separate appropriation for "Center for Maryland History Films" and received positive feedback.

Although it has been difficult to fill positions, the Human Resources staff has cut the number of open positions in half. Mr. Unger has been meeting with all new hires—more than 30 to date.

The building reopened last spring, but there are not as many people in the building as there were pre-COVID due to the hybrid schedule option.

There will be two new reports beginning with this commission meeting; one from station manager, Steven Schupak, to provide updates on MPT's strategic plan, and one from Foundation board chair, Richard Bodorff, on MPT Foundation, Inc. Mr. Unger thanked Mr. Kramer for agreeing to chair the MPT Audit Committee.

Commissioners viewed clips that included the national pledge program for *Becoming Frederick Douglass, P.O.W.: Passing on Wisdom*, and a clip from the new season of *Maryland Farm & Harvest*.

Content Division update

Travis Mitchell, senior vice president and chief content officer, stated the Content Division produced an array of benefits for viewers, members, and supporters. MPT is positioned to achieve transformational goals outlined in the strategic plan and was nominated for a record 22 regional Emmys (winner of 7), expanded its sports coverage, expanded HBCU Week, and won a Communicator Award. Although many television competitors are losing viewers, MPT has suffered less decline than most as our network is reaching viewers on multiple platforms and growing audience by executing our mission to enrich lives and strengthen all communities through the power of media.

Kate Pearson, managing director of Programming & Acquisitions said MPT provides programming that supports Standing Against Racism efforts and seeks stars of courage against injustice. Ms. Pearson shared a clip of *12th Grade From West Baltimore*, a local program that followed five students' journey as they progressed from middle school to graduation. The program will air in February, 2023 during Black History Month. A website developed with funding from T. Rowe Price will be devoted to the five students' progress as they hope to become the first in their families to attend college.

A landmark accomplishment was the successful launch of the Tubman Douglass films. *Harriet Tubman: Visions of Freedom* confirmed carriage of 99.445% of U.S. television markets, 1,653 airings to date, and viewership of 2.5 million. *Becoming Frederick Douglass* confirmed carriage of 99.445%, 1,648 airings, and viewership of 2 million. There were 61 screenings at colleges and universities nationwide and 60 additional screenings are scheduled. There were 10 film festivals, eight museum screenings, and 19 PBS stations received outreach grants related to the films. There were more than 25 interviews of filmmakers and over 15,000 page views on the *TubmanDouglassfilms.org* website. MPT is building on our partnership with Stanley Nelson and Firelight Media to present new films about iconic Marylanders.

Mr. Mitchell shared a clip of an *Artworks: Dreamer* special. In December, there is a slate of *Artworks* prime-time specials including *Baker Artist Awards*, *Jasmine Barnes & The Baltimore Choral Arts Society*, *The Making of the Nutcracker*, and *Christmas with Choral Arts*, a one-hour annual holiday concert. MPT aired HBCU Week September 5–11 with a robust schedule of more than 22 hours of curated programs.

Troy Mosley, managing director of Content recently joined MPT from WETA with extensive experience managing and producing large-scale broadcast content. Mr. Mosley is pleased to be a part of MPT and has a goal to redouble efforts in the areas of the environment and natural history. He shared a clip of the season premiere of *Outdoors Maryland*.

Mr. Mosley emphasized MPT's commitment to be a catalyst for civic engagement through news and public affairs. Jeff Salkin will be on location at the State House for the upcoming inauguration in January with historic incoming and outgoing governors. There will be a historic State of the State address in February.

MPT will air four original productions during *Chesapeake Bay Week* in April 2023. *Chesapeake Collectibles* will begin taping in June 2023 in the Irene and Edward H. Kaplan Production Studio. The Young Artists of America (YAA) will return to the Owings Mills campus in April to record a new performance production, featuring 200 young artists and a live studio audience. Mr. Mosley shared a clip from MPT's production of YAA's *The Songs of Tim Rice* and is enthusiastic about all the new undertakings.

Joseph Campbell, managing director, Creative Services is responsible for maintaining branding and providing a unified look across all departments in the building. Several MPT shows received an updated graphic look to stay relevant with design trends.

Bob Wilson, managing director, Digital Content & Operations, is working toward reaching MPT's goal to expand operations to meet viewers on their viewing platform of choice. The Digital Cultural Accelerator (DCA) program, funded by CPB, strengthened MPT's digital transformation and improved email and social media practices. Digital content pipelines were developed and strengthened. MPT's live streaming saw an increase in traffic of more than 50% from the previous year. HBCU Week online content saw a 500% increase in traffic to HBCU Week-related website pages, and there is now a channel dedicated to HBCU Week in the online player.

Mr. Mitchell reported the goal to increase efficiency and collaboration in content practices will be reached by way of a three-pronged approach that will: 1) attract audiences with differentiated local content, 2) impact audience engagement and 3) convert audience to members. He will share a more detailed report that includes audience numbers from the Tubman/Douglass films once we have all data from PBS. Viewership of the films exceeded the *Making Black America* series as well as Ken Burns' *The U.S. and the Holocaust* Ken Burns.

Mr. Kramer asked if there would ever be an MPT menu on screen that allows him to select what he would like watch on demand. Mr. Unger replied that this can be done with the PBS app which member stations are urging PBS to enhance to be on the same level as other streaming services.

Strategic Plan update

Mr. Schupak shared the strategic plan that is intended to sharpen the organization's focus and help it achieve critical and transformative goals. The progress of each transformational goal within the strategic plan needed to be measured in bite-sized strategies. This past fall, small

groups began working on individual section goals, strategies, and tactics—Strategies on a Page or SOAPS. SOAP groups were organized around people with direct experience in each area and included employees from other MPT divisions and departments to add fresh and different perspectives to group discussions. The SOAP groups were reconfigured to include a higher percentage of people most responsible for executing the individual SOAP strategies.

Mr. Schupak stated the stable and positive relationship with the state of Maryland has helped MPT achieve a strong financial position. The Communications team is making sure the public and other key stakeholders are aware of the many things that are being accomplished by MPT.

DEI&J update

Dr. Debra Bright, committee co-chair, said the external DEI&J Advisory Council did not meet during the month of October as planned; however, the internal committee met to discuss how to further train and listen to the employee-based community. There is a need to recruit additional members to the internal committee.

The paid internship program has hired its first intern that will start employment next week and will work two semesters in Content and Production. A community event that hosted 65 attendees was held at MPT on September 15 in honor of Hispanic Heritage Month in partnership with the Maryland Hispanic Chamber of Commerce.

Ms. Colclough added that job vacancies have gone from 17 open positions to 7 open positions and a sense of community should be created within the MPT family for the new employees. Leadership training began in November and there were more than 40 participants. The Human Resources team will continue to consult with Quatt Associates to examine salary and job classifications and will listen and learn from the employee base, striving for excellence. Pathways for careers were created with a new position, senior managing director.

MPT Foundation, Inc. update

Mr. Bodorff reported that planned giving donations have paid significant dividends. Notices of nearly \$1 million was received yesterday including an estate valued at \$125,000, an estate valued at \$50,000, and a notice of a bequest in the amount of \$800,000. He encouraged board members to include MPT in estate planning commitments. The foundation officers are reviewing organizational documents including the bylaws to make sure they are up to date.

Old/new business

There being no old or new business, the chair asked for a motion for adjournment. Ms. Wang made a motion to adjourn, Mr. Kramer seconded the motion. Mr. Kaplan adjourned the meeting at 12:00 p.m.