

Maryland Public Broadcasting Commission
Meeting of November 23, 2021
Via Zoom

Minutes

Present: *Mr. Edward Kaplan, chair; Mr. Richard Bodorff, vice chair; Ms. Shelly Gardeniers; Ms. Rebecca Hanson; Mr. Irwin Kramer; Ms. Beth Suarez; Mr. Bruce Wahl; Ms. Ellie Wang.*

The following members of the MPT management and staff also were in attendance. *MPT President and CEO Larry Unger, Mr. George Beneman, Mr. Joseph Campbell, Mr. Michael English, Mr. Andrew Levine, Mrs. Fran Minakowski, Ms. Kate Pearson, Ms. Betsy Peisach, Mr. Travis Mitchell, Ms. Susan Schmitt, 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.*

Guest: *Mr. Patrick Butler, president and chief executive officer of America's Public Television Stations (APTS) and chair emeritus of the MPT Foundation, Inc., was in attendance.*

The chair called the meeting to order at 10:31. He requested approval of the minutes of the September 29, 2021, meeting. Irwin Kramer moved for the approval and Rebecca Hanson seconded; the minutes were approved unanimously as submitted. The chair requested approval of the meeting schedule for calendar year 2022; the schedule was approved as presented.

President's Report

Maryland's hiring freeze is still in effect, and the filling of long-time vacant positions could be delayed. Once filled, these open and new positions will provide the first staff expansion in many years.

The Maryland legislature meets in January for its 2022 session. Mr. Unger will meet with members of the Maryland House and Senate budget subcommittees. He met with Speaker of the House Adrienne Jones and discussed a possible Maryland History Fund that will enable MPT to produce and distribute a series of productions that draw attention to the state's historic roots and place in American life.

MPT plans to begin a 90-day trial of its hybrid back-to-work plan on January 12. The COVID-19 variants will be monitored and necessary precautions will be in place before employees return to work. The Maryland State Ad Agency (MSAA) continues to grow and expects to hit the \$7 million mark in billings at the end of the fiscal year.

Harry Vaughn, managing director, Production Services, and Steven Schupak, station manager, will be inducted into the Silver Circle of the National Academy of Television Arts & Sciences' National Capital Chesapeake Bay Chapter. Mike English, managing director, Content, a 28-time winner of regional Emmy awards, will retire at the end of the year. Dr. Debra Bright joined Howard University as associate vice president of student affairs. Bruce Wahl had an amazing

recovery from a recent heart transplant. Mr. Wahl thanked commissioners for their well wishes during his recovery and hopes his strength and abilities will return over time.

The Irene and Edward H. Kaplan Production Studio is near completion, and MPT should take possession of the studio at the end of this year. Production Services personnel will have a punch list to complete including lighting, wiring, and essential equipment. A ribbon cutting ceremony is being planned for April/May 2022.

APTS update

Regarding federal funding, Patrick Butler, president and chief executive officer of America's Public Television Stations, reported that a \$20 million increase was secured for the Corporation for Public Broadcasting (CPB) last year. This is a record increase and also included funding for Ready To Learn, interconnection, and system infrastructure. In addition, \$175 million was secured through the American Rescue Plan. The House of Representatives current proposed budget includes a \$90 million increase for CPB and the Senate appropriations chair proposed an identical \$90 million increase.

It was anticipated that state funding would be reduced by 10-15% due to the pandemic; however, an 11% increase for public broadcasting was secured. ATSC 3.0 standards will provide an opportunity for stations in the spectrum leasing business better picture and sound quality for public television. MPT converted to this standard in June.

Currently 85% of public television stations are members of APTS. The organization has continued to pursue a diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) strategy, conveying best practices throughout the system to represent the society we serve.

Susan Collins of Maine is a champion of public television and Gerry Moran, also a friend of public broadcasting, may be leaders who can influence funding after the 2022 elections. The long-time chairman from Oklahoma has reached terms as chairman and could be replaced by Chuck Fleishman who also is a supporter of public television.

Mr. Unger stated that since Mr. Butler has been in place at APTS, there have been substantial increases to public broadcasting funding -- nearly \$1 billion was secured in 2021. Mr. Butler said that MPT is one of the public TV stations that make APTS successful and gave encouragement to keep up the good work.

Strategic Plan update

Steven Schupak led efforts to provide the structural framework upon which MPT will build its annual plans, goals, and budgets over the next three years. He shared the strategic plan, now in its second draft, and stated the planning process is nearing completion. The plan is intended to sharpen the organization's focus and help it center on critical and transformative goals.

Content Division update

Travis Mitchell, senior vice president and chief content officer, delivered the Content Division update. He shared photos of members of his team and a PowerPoint presentation highlighting growth of MPT's audience. He congratulated Mike English for over 35 years of service.

MPT held its second annual historically Black colleges and universities week (HBCU Week) September 6-12 with documentaries, interview programs and online discussions. HBCU programming has the potential for national expansion through support from CPB and PBS, and MPT will lead the effort as a model for the public television system. Bowie State University was the first HBCU to be a premiere sponsor. Mr. Mitchell shared clips from the Maryland 5 Star event and the debut of the Maryland Sports Desk.

Kate Pearson, managing director of Programming & Acquisitions, stated MPT continues to provide programming that supports *Standing Against Racism* efforts with local and national content. MPT is committed to DEI through partnerships with content creators who reflect the demography of our network's viewing area. More than 70 independent programs have aired with over 30 programs focusing on Maryland's region. Ms. Pearson shared a clip of *10th & 11th Grade West Baltimore*, a local program that received high praise from PBS President Paula Kerger. She also shared a clip of *Finding Fellowship*, a story presented by MPT and picked up by APT for national release. Since many viewers were at home in 2020 due to the pandemic, viewership increased and currently maintains levels higher than those of 2019.

Mike English shared that the national films on Harriet Tubman and Frederick Douglass are scheduled to debut on PBS in fall 2022. MPT is proud to be the presenting station as both productions go beyond the ordinary storytelling approach. Each film will have educational outreach components. He shared clips of pilots for two new series, *Destination Maryland* and *Made in Maryland*.

Bob Wilson, managing director, Digital Operations & Content, shared that new titles have been added to MPT Classics library. This library offers older "favorite" productions from the vault for modern screens. His work with the Digital Cultural Accelerator (DCA) program has improved email and social media practices. Joe Campbell, interim director of Creative Services, explained that MPT grows its audiences with the use of long-lead promotions using a number of platforms to inform viewers of upcoming content. Since content is viewed in a variety of ways, the goal is to recognize those differences and learn new approaches to reach audiences.

Mr. Mitchell stated Content will be adding new staff members to its team in the upcoming months and looks forward to their new ideas and energy.

Old/new business

There being no old or new business, the chair asked for a motion for adjournment. All were in favor, and Mr. Kaplan adjourned the meeting at 11:55 a.m.