

Maryland Public Broadcasting Commission
Meeting of January 25, 2022
Via Zoom

Minutes

Present: *Mr. Edward Kaplan, chair; Mr. Richard Bodorff, vice chair; Dr. Debra Bright; Ms. Shelly Gardeniers; Ms. Rebecca Hanson; Mr. Irwin Kramer; Ms. Beth Suarez; Mr. Bruce Wahl; Ms. Ellie Wang. Ms. Valerie Emrich was present to represent Mohammed Choudhury, Maryland State Superintendent of Schools.*

The following members of the MPT management staff also were in attendance. *MPT President and CEO Larry Unger, Mr. George Beneman, Ms. Colette Colclough, Mr. Andrew Levine, Mr. Kayode Onaolapo, Ms. Betsy Peisach, Mr. Travis Mitchell, 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.*

The chair called the meeting to order at 10:32 a.m. He requested approval of the minutes of the September 28, 2021, meeting. A motion was made and seconded and the minutes were approved unanimously as submitted.

President's report

MPT continues to fare well in both delivering on its mission to the community and in solidifying its financial position. The Maryland legislature is now in session, and MPT's budget hearings are scheduled for next week. This year's budget sets MPT's allocation at just under \$10.4 million. As in past years, Mr. Unger will meet with each member of our budget committees to apprise them of what MPT is providing to the community.

The Omicron variant has delayed MPT's return to work. MPT will reassess in March to see if the return plan can be implemented in April. In the meantime, several in-person events are planned including the opening of the Kaplan Studio in late April, and, of course, the joint meeting scheduled for June 16.

Colette Colclough, vice president, Human Resources, gave an update on Diversity, Equity & Inclusion (DEI). She reported that it has been difficult to get together internally due to COVID-19 cases across the station; however, progress is being made through surveys and virtual meetings. Next steps will be reviewed to make sure targets and goals are reached. The Internal Diversity Council was surveyed about the direction of the initiative. DEI efforts will now include disabled persons including those who are hearing-impaired.

Travis Mitchell, chief content officer, announced the films on Harriet Tubman and Frederick Douglass will debut on October 4 and October 11, respectively, in partnership with PBS. There will be a robust national publicity and marketing campaign for both films. The films will air on the primetime schedule in the Maryland area at 8 p.m. and will be packaged with *Finding Your Roots* and *Making Black America*, a new special by Henry Louis Gates.

MPT is partnering with the State of Maryland in the promotion of the 200th anniversary of Harriet Tubman's birth. Governor Hogan will unveil the state's planned events on February 16, including the national release of *Harriett Tubman: Visions of Freedom*.

April is Asian American and Pacific Islander Heritage Month, and MPT will showcase the works of Asian American filmmakers. Discussions are being held with Latino filmmakers to present their work on MPT and other platforms throughout the year.

A limited animated children's series called *The Hive* is being developed to attract younger, more diverse audiences. The series will chronicle the efforts of teenagers attempting to create a TV show that discusses contemporary and cultural issues. MPT has recently signed on to be a media sponsor for the Central Intercollegiate Athletic Association (CIAA) basketball tournament. Although games will air on ESPN, MPT will air non-basketball-related events.

Mr. Bodorff inquired if there will be a statewide premiere to introduce segments of the Harriet Tubman and Frederick Douglass films. MPT is working with the State of Maryland to develop timelines for the introduction of the films and has identified several opportunities prior to the October PBS premiere.

Steven Schupak, station manager, reported the strategic planning process started in July 2021 and was completed in December. A .pdf of the plan was distributed to commissioners. Maryland State Ad Agency (MSAA) business has increased. The agency currently handles 13 active advertising campaigns and is projected to produce revenue of about \$7 million this fiscal year, 40% more than last year.

Audit report

Filling in for Mr. Rosen, Mr. Kramer reported that the Audit Committee met on January 12. He stated MPT received a clean audit report. Mr. Kramer asked for a motion to accept the audit. Ms. Gardeniers made a motion to accept the audit; Mr. Wahl seconded the motion. All were in favor and the audit was accepted.

Budget & Compensation report

Mr. Bodorff, committee chair, stated the committee met on January 19 to discuss the financial status of MPT. The FY22 budget outlook is very positive. The construction of the *Maryland Dove* is near completion; the ship will be turned over to St. Mary's City on April 26. MPT will air a special production of the ship's construction during Chesapeake Bay Week. Mr. Bodorff thanked Edward and Irene Kaplan for their support of this production.

Suzanne Schwertman, chief financial officer, presented reports on revenues and expenses. Membership will cut some pledge days which will decrease projected revenue. The MSAA is doing well. The forecasted salary amount includes the staff's 3% increase and one-time \$1,500 bonus.

Colette Colclough reported that 14% of staff and their families have been exposed to COVID-19. There will be an all-staff meeting held with Johns Hopkins specialist Dr. Panagis Galiatsatos to provide information on the latest COVID variant and dispel misinformation. Test kits have been ordered and will be distributed to employees who have the most urgent needs.

In terms of MPT staffing, there are currently 21 positions open; however, hiring has become challenging. Many applicants are not qualified, and candidates are looking for jobs with increased flexibility.

Mr. Bodorff asked if there were any questions; hearing none he turned the meeting over to the chairman. Mr. Kaplan thanked Mr. Bodorff for his report and turned to George Beneman for his update.

Technology Division update

George Beneman, chief technology officer, stated the Technology Division raised more revenue than projected and had fewer than expected expenses this year. The five departments within the division include 50 staff members; there are currently six vacancies. The division recently won an Emmy® award for its work on *Chesapeake Beacons*. MPT and MPT2 are currently streamed on the website 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

Major sources of funding for the division come from the State of Maryland and the Federal Communications Commission (FCC). Funds were provided to replace air handling equipment and to add three antennae to towers. The State of Maryland contributed more than \$1 million for this expense. In 2002, MCI WorldCom declared bankruptcy, so MPT built a statewide network that connected all of its sites with microwave and optical fiber. The federal government provided \$8.6 million to repack all six transmitters, with the state covering the balance of the expense. MPT is one of few state networks that has all of its infrastructure updated.

The Irene and Edward H. Kaplan Production Studio building was turned over to MPT by the contractors in December. Mr. Beneman shared a time-lapse video of the construction project. Although there is additional work to be done, his team is working to bring “TV magic” into the studio before the ribbon-cutting event.

The fifth-generation technology standard for broadband cellular networks (5G) is rolling out and has caused disturbances with airport approaches. C-band frequencies have been relinquished from MPT to increase air safety. Verizon and T-Mobile will add this 5G technology to homes. Elon Musk’s *Starlink* will provide high-speed internet coverage across the globe. MPT launched Next Gen TV in June along with four local commercial broadcasters. The Sinclair Broadcast Group assisted MPT by providing equipment and engineering services.

Mr. Beneman highlighted new technology from the Consumer Electronic Show including a large screen TV projector unit, a John Deere robotic tractor, a folding laptop screen, and a wireless turntable.

Kayode Onaolapo, senior director, Information Technology, said the goal of his department is to be a source of inspiration through digital transformation. There is a priority for MPT to have

increased cyber security, addressing issues before they become a problem. Other issues being addressed include MPT's cloud migration and enterprise architecture.

Harry Vaughn, managing director, Production Services, is providing streaming coverage of the Maryland General Assembly 2022 session. Mr. Vaughn is the newest inductee into the Silver Circle of the National Academy of Television Arts & Sciences' National Capital Chesapeake Bay Chapter.

Old/new business

There being no old or new business, the chair asked for a motion for adjournment. A motion was made and seconded, and the meeting adjourned at 11:45 a.m. A vote was held to move into a closed session; all were in favor.