

**Maryland Public Broadcasting Commission**  
**Meeting of January 26, 2021**  
**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; Mr. Howard Rosen; Ms. Beth Suarez, Mr. Bruce Wahl; Ms. Ellie Wang. Ms. Valerie Emrich was present to represent Dr. Karen Salmon, Maryland State Superintendent of Schools.*

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

Minutes review and approval

Mr. Kaplan called the meeting to order at 10:32 a.m., acknowledged the presence of a quorum, and sought additions or corrections to the November 24, 2020, meeting minutes. Hearing none, Mr. Wahl made a motion to approve the minutes; Mr. Rosen seconded the motion; and the minutes were approved unanimously.

President's report – Larry Unger

MPT has been able to deliver all of its services to Maryland citizens despite the challenging times.

Steven Schupak, previously chief operating officer, has become MPT station manager. The promotion recognizes his assumption of broad institutional duties along with the widening scope of his current duties.

Changes in the country's leadership will have an impact on public TV and could be financially beneficial to the industry and to MPT. There is hope that the final relief package will include funds for public broadcasting. The original CARES Act resulted in \$200,000 for MPT; this time, MPT could receive more than twice that amount.

In discussion of the state budget outlook, commissioners were reminded of the 2017 law under which, MPT's appropriation is set by a mandated formula based on state revenue forecasts. This year (FY21), MPT should receive the largest increase since the formula was mandated. The appropriation increase needs to be passed by the legislature before the legislative session ends in April.

The CEO will meet virtually with all members of the House and Senate budget subcommittees and will discuss problematic language submitted by the Department of Budget and Management that would nullify the effect of the 2017 law. A video was presented which will be shown to the budget committees.

MPT continues to operate very well under pandemic conditions. MPT membership set an all-time-high record. All MPT employees received a 2% cost-of-living salary adjustment on January 1. Overall, however, the forecast for the fiscal year shows MPT in the red. Revenue is falling short in the areas of new productions and national underwriting due to the pandemic. In addition, the state took back \$315,000 of its FY21 appropriation funding early in the fiscal year. On March 31, MPT management will evaluate when employees should report back to the Owings Mills campus.

MPT viewership surpassed that of most PBS stations with a 30% increase in viewing from a year ago. MPT2/Create increased its primetime viewership by 54%, and viewing of MPT's local productions showed growth for all programs. MPT will provide gavel-to-gavel coverage of Maryland General Assembly sessions for both chambers. A one-day inoculation clinic was held at MPT but did not include the COVID-19 vaccine. Chief Engineer Carl Wolfe retired and was replaced by the assistant chief engineer, Travys Montague.

Commissioners then viewed video clips from recent local productions *State Circle* and *Maryland Farm & Harvest* and a new PBS program *The Black Church: This is Our Story, This is Our Song*.

Mr. Kaplan said he looks forward to these new productions.

#### Audit Committee report – Howard Rosen

The opinion of the external auditing firm, Stoy Malone & Company, P.C., shows that MPT received a clean audit report. Assets and investments increased, and a healthy cash position was maintained. Mr. Rosen made a motion that commissioners accept the audit; Mr. Wahl seconded the motion; and, with a unanimous vote, the audit was approved.

Mr. Unger thanked Mr. Rosen for chairing the committee, noting this audit was more challenging than typical audits since auditors were kept out of the building due to the pandemic. Mr. Kaplan thanked all who were involved.

#### Budget & Compensation Committee report – Richard Bodorff

The committee met last week to discuss the financial situation of MPT. The Development Division is performing well in a difficult environment and that the Maryland State Ad Agency (MSAA) was proving to be a great MPT revenue stream with a bright future. Ms. Schwertman (CFO) directed commissioners to the report in their materials. MPT was expecting \$9.3 million in FY21 state appropriations; however, the appropriation was reduced by \$315,000. In the next six months, finances may improve via another federal aid package. The ad agency continues to bring in contracts and has produced revenue of \$2.6 million thus far in FY21.

There being no questions, the president called on Human Resources' Collette Colclough (VP HR) for her report.

There were few changes since the last report, mentioning the retirement of Alex Vitalo, managing director, Creative Services. The number of authorized positions is 145, and 132 of them are filled at present. No new hires have been made, but MPT seeks to fill key positions that

received state hiring freeze waivers. MPT continues to comply with all state requirements during the ongoing pandemic.

Mr. Kaplan thanked Mr. Bodorff for his report.

#### Standing Against Racism – Travis Mitchell and Colette Colclough

The dual stresses of the pandemic and race relations as contributors to a difficult year. MPT's response to the latter is a multi-faceted approach to address the subject of racial disparities and encourage reasoned conversation about race-related issues. He shared a 10-point plan, the purpose of which is to increase thoughtful discussion using content and engagement activities. Included in the plan are primetime programs regarding racism and inequities. The initiative was shared with PBS President Paula Kerger, who felt it was tremendously important and that MPT was a role model for other stations.

Ms. Colclough, vice president, Human Resources, focused on the first element of the 10-point plan. It is imperative that there be safe spaces for staff within MPT's own walls, with employees able to express themselves without penalty. A staff-populated Internal Diversity Council was formed with a goal of promoting listening and learning. MPT is now working to establish an external advisory board to work with the Internal Diversity Council. Interested commissioners were invited to join this advisory board, which itself must be informed about MPT actions since the community will hold MPT accountable for how it responds to the challenge of racism. Whereas there may be frustration within organizations regarding the lack of diversity, equity and inclusion, MPT's leaders "invested in the program" and placed dollars behind staff education programs led by experts. A pilot paid internship program was established with a community partner, and a diverse group of students has applied. MPT is working to diversify the supply chain of contractors and vendors it uses and intends to further diversify the MPT Foundation board.

Mr. Kaplan thanked Mr. Mitchell and Ms. Colclough for their work.

#### Technology Division update (George Beneman, Chief Technology Officer)

Some 50 individuals staff the division to provide infrastructure for all production and the physical plant at MPT. Revenue has fallen by \$40,000 from last year due to the pandemic, and spending was cut proportionately. MPT was unable to acquire revenue from renting space in the building as safety was a primary goal. MPT is providing personnel to stream Annapolis legislative sessions for citizens, the coverage being more challenging than before as booths were constructed around legislators' seats to minimize the spread of the virus.

The spectrum auction and resulting repacking are complete, with all six towers repacked in 37 months as FCC-mandated. All sites received new transmitters, and three were outfitted with new antennas. Federal money funded the project.

MPT is now livestreaming its main channel. A time-lapsed video of construction in Studio A was shared. With this renovation, the studio space will be increased by 50%, and there will be seating for close to 200 guests. Construction is progressing, and the new studio is expected to open in early 2022.

Baltimore will soon roll out transmission standard ATSC 3.0 television. This next generation TV will provide better pictures and videos-on-demand. MPT is working with Sinclair Communications and BitPath to be a part of this groundbreaking technology locally. Stations in Baltimore are working cooperatively to better the industry.

In response to Mr. Kaplan's inquiry about advanced ventilation systems to purify the Studio A air, it was noted that the studio will have Merv 10 high-efficiency filters that effectively trap airborne particles; there will be no UV lights. Mr. Bodorff inquired about vertical real estate and the possible sale of MPT towers as some stations have done. MPT is a state agency that retains revenue generated from its towers; however, the towers are state property. MPT has long been approached about leasing and selling towers from brokers and others, but it is not favorable for MPT to do so. MPT has tenants on a shared resource plan, but there is limited capacity because towers are a state resource, and sales have to be cleared with the state resource community.

Mr. Kaplan thanked Mr. Beneman for his thorough presentation of a complex subject.

#### Old or new business

Mr. Kaplan asked for old or new business and, hearing none, asked for a motion to adjourn. Mr. Wahl made a motion to adjourn, and Ms. Hanson seconded the motion. All were in favor, and Mr. Kaplan adjourned the meeting at 12:08 p.m.