

**Maryland Public Broadcasting Commission**  
**Meeting of March 23, 2021**  
**Via Zoom**

**Minutes**

Present: *Mr. Edward Kaplan, chair; Mr. Richard Bodorff, vice chair; Dr. Debra Bright; Ms. Shelly Gardeniers; Ms. Rebecca Hanson; 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, Mr. Andrew Levine, Mrs. Fran Minakowski, Ms. Betsy Peisach, Mr. Travis Mitchell, Ms. Krista Respass, Mr. Steven Schupak, Ms. Linda Taggart, and Mr. Tom Williams. Ms. Dionne Neblett was present to record the minutes. Mr. Rob Jefferson was present for IT services.*

Guest: *Ms. Cynthia Fenneman, president and chief executive officer of American Public Television (APT) was in attendance.*

The chair called the meeting to order and welcomed everyone at 10:32 a.m.; asked for approval of the minutes, there were no additions or corrections and the minutes were approved unanimously; and then introduced the CEO for the president's report.

**President's report**

Larry D. Unger welcomed Valerie Emrich, representing the Maryland superintendent of schools.

The federally enacted American Rescue Plan provides \$175 million for public broadcasting. The plan provides additional funding to state and local governments, hopefully reducing the risk of future appropriation cuts similar to what occurred at the start of FY21.

The threat to MPT's state appropriation funding formula which would reduce MPT's state appropriation provided in 2017's SB1034 is in the governor's BRFA legislation. Legislators have been informed as to MPT's opposition due to the negative impact on operations.

A *Standing Against Racism* internal diversity group has been established at MPT with the goal of listening and learning from employees to foster unity through dialogue. A similar external committee is being assembled as well to guide the development and implementation of the 10-point plan to increase thoughtful discussion and understanding of race-related issues in communities across the greater Maryland area. The latter will comprise several commissioners, directors from the foundation board, and outside representatives. The fourth annual Women's Leadership Forum was held virtually with 1,000 registrants.

The Irene and Edward H. Kaplan Production Studio has reached the 50% completion point, and MPT anticipates taking possession in October of this year. To allow the build-out of the front plaza, the main entrance will close on April 5 for 4 to 6 weeks.

The PBS annual meeting will take place virtually (at no cost to participants) in May. Commissioners will receive registration information.

The MPT launch of NextGen TV (ATSC 3.0) will occur June 8.

New MPT productions in the works include:

- Chesapeake Bay Week centerpiece *Creatures of the Chesapeake*
- a June 19 *Artworks* special with a new host
- a 90-minute Baltimore Symphony Orchestra production on June 19
- pilots for two new series, *Destination Maryland* and *Made in Maryland*

MPT will tape an interview with David Rubenstein on March 26 at State House. In 2022, MPT will debut a documentary on Kent County and one on the recreation of The Dove. Similarly, the documentaries on Harriet Tubman and Frederick Douglass will be delivered in 2022. The next Ken Burns production, *Hemingway*, premieres April 5.

Guest presenter Cynthia Fenneman, chief executive of American Public Television, introduced her organization, the leading distributor of content to public TV stations after PBS. It distributes 250 titles annually with a Boston-based staff of 32 and derives programs from many national and international sources, MPT among them. MPT receives more than 2,500 hours of programming from APT. MPT2 is home for APT's 16-year-old Create channel which is one of 240 stations using the service.

### **Education Division report - Betsy Peisach, Vice President; Krista Respass, Managing Director, Early Childhood Services**

MPT supports teaching and learning as part of its mission, beginning with 1970s-era K-12 instructional TV and a College of the Air service. The pandemic year was challenging as teaching and learning became remote and child care was disrupted. The early childhood team provides online and credit-bearing courses as well as numerous digital projects. Grants comprise the largest segment of the division's funding. A special broadcast service, At-Home Learning, was prompted by the pandemic and included digital, hands-on learning to supplement the telecasts, and included newly created toolkits for parents and educators. MPT's greatest impact is in the area of early childhood where the content focus is on media literacy. Currently, MPT early education work includes a broadcast schedule matched by digital resources and family engagement events in the community.

*Thinkport* is both the portal for MPT's digital learning resources and a gateway to the PBS national education website. *Thinkport* attracts four million pageviews annually. MPT partners with the Library of Congress (LOC) on several activities funded by LOC grants. A partnership with the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) will involve creation of courses.

Valerie Emrich of MSDE spoke on this course expansion project for virtual learning by student and teachers.

**Old/new business**

There being none, the chair asked for a motion to adjourn the meeting which was approved unanimously at 11:56 a.m.