

Maryland Public Broadcasting Commission
Meeting of May 27, 2025
via Zoom

Minutes

Present: Mr. Edward Kaplan, chair; Mr. Richard Bodorff, vice chair; Dr. Debra Bright; Ms. Rebecca Hanson; Mr. Irwin Kramer; Ms. Beth Suarez; Mr. Bruce Wahl; Ms. Ellie Wang. Ms. Erin Senior was present to represent Dr. Carey Wright, Maryland State Superintendent of Schools.

Guest: Ms. Kate Riley, president and chief executive officer of America's Public Television Stations (APTS) was in attendance.

The following members of the MPT management staff were also in attendance: MPT President Larry Unger, Mr. George Beneman, Ms. Patricia Fitzhugh, Ms. Lara Hjortsberg (OAG), Mrs. Fran Minakowski, Mr. Travis Mitchell, Ms. Betsy Peisach, Ms. Suzie Schmitt, Mr. Steven Schupak, Ms. Ling Ling Sun, Ms. Linda Taggart, Mr. Harry Vaughn. Ms. Dionne Neblett was present to record minutes. Mr. Max Zelalem was present for IT services.

Mr. Kaplan called the meeting to order at 10:32 a.m. He requested approval of the minutes of the March 18, 2025, meeting. Ms. Wang made a motion to approve the minutes; Ms. Hanson seconded the motion. The minutes were unanimously approved as submitted.

President's report

Mr. Unger delivered his final president's report as he will retire on June 30. Selected MPT program clips will be sent to commissioners by email following this meeting.

Mr. Edward Kaplan has decided to retire from the commission on June 30. Mr. Kaplan has been a member of the commission for nearly three decades and has been chair for the past 18 years. He has served on the APTS board for six years and was presented with the David J. Brugger Lay Leadership Award in 2020. Mr. Unger thanked Mr. Kaplan and his wife Irene for their generosity to MPT over the years. They established the New Initiatives Fund in 2008 and are MPT's single largest donors. Mr. Kaplan's leadership has enabled MPT to grow and prosper.

Mr. Richard Bodorff, vice chair, will become the ninth chairman of the Maryland Public Broadcasting Commission. He has funded a number of MPT programs and currently chairs the MPT Foundation, Inc.

Mr. Unger thanked all commissioners for their support over the years; each member has helped MPT to meet and rise above many challenges. The commission made the decision to choose Steven Schupak as MPT's sixth CEO. The creation of Chesapeake Bay Week and the establishment and success of the Maryland State Ad Agency are among Mr. Schupak's many accomplishments at MPT. Mr. Unger thanked his creative and dedicated staff, including George Beneman, who is retiring on June 1. With Mr. Beneman's departure, MPT hired Ms. Ling Ling Sun as vice president of Technology. MPT is well-positioned to meet challenges it encounters.

Community Advisory Committee

Dr. Bright reported that the MPT External Community Advisory Council met on May 15. Mr. Mitchell gave updates on *HBCU Week Now* and MPT's new national documentary, *Becoming Thurgood: America's Social Architect*. MPT has awarded grants to public television stations across the country to create digital content for this year's HBCU Week. The *Becoming Thurgood* documentary will air nationally on September 9. Grants have been awarded to public television stations to create engagement and content around the documentary.

The council will invite two Latino community leaders to join its committee--Carlos Gonzalez, special projects manager from the office of Baltimore County Councilman Izzy Patoka and Marly Cortes, assistant program director for the Masters of Arts in Film and Media program at Johns Hopkins University. Mr. Donald Thoms will share names of Latino producers with Troy Mosley, managing director of content, to tell the stories and cover issues impacting Marylanders with representation from the Latino community.

Ms. Krista Respass delivered a compelling presentation on *Carl the Collector*, a new national PBS animated series with a lead character that has autism. MPT held an in-person event and hosted 250 guests that participated in a number of activities based on the series and topics related to autism.

Budget & Compensation Committee

Ms. Hanson reported that the B&C committee met on May 15, and asked Ms. Fitzhugh, vice president, Finance & Accounting, to give the financial report. Ms. Fitzhugh presented reports on revenues and expenses. State revenue for FY26 is level pending the finalized State funding in FY25 for COLA and increased healthcare costs. PBS dues are lower based on the FY26 cost-sharing formula provided by PBS.

Susan Wolfinger Schmitt, reported that MPT received six new permanent positions. There are 143 filled posts of the 151 authorized positions. MPT had 14 new hires and 10 separations with a turnover percentage of 9.3%. Average years of service is 13.1 with an age median of 51. The percentage of minorities is 32.6% and 45.1% of MPT employees are female.

On July 1, all state employees will receive a 1% cost of living adjustment. Some employees will receive a 2.5% step increase. MPT would like to recommend that all employees receive a 1% cost of living increase on September 1, including regular contractual employees. Increases will be reflected in the classification grid to accommodate this salary increase. Mr. Wahl made a motion to approve the salary increase; Ms. Wang seconded the motion. All were in favor, and the salary adjustment was approved.

Ms. Hjortsberg, Assistant Attorney General and Principal Counsel, presented recommendations with respect to the agreement between the Commission and MPT Foundation, Inc., (the "Foundation Agreement"), the General Foundation Guidelines attached to the Foundation Agreement as Exhibit A(the "Guidelines"), and the Foundation Purchasing Guidelines located in the Foundation's Business Procedures. She reported that on the 2024 Office of Legislative Audits (OLA), there was a finding that there was no evidence MPBC had reviewed policy and

procedures of the Foundation. She explained that the Foundation Agreement in the form presented for consideration simplifies the agreement itself to its most basic provisions and moves much of the detail to the General Foundation Guidelines. She noted that the board of directors of the Foundation also approve the list of ex-officio officers set forth in the Guidelines, explaining that it was expanded to include the vice president of human resources and the chief content officer. It was noted that the Foundation is scheduled to meet this Thursday, and approval is subject to this Commission taking action on the recommended changes. Ms. Hjortsberg also noted that allocation of employee time was clarified in the revised documents. She explained that MPT will offer more details on invoices. She noted that the directors of the Foundation complete conflicts of interest disclosures annually. She then explained that if there is a conflict, the Foundation is required to report the conflict to the Commission. She further explained that the revised process provides that if no conflicts exist, that fact will also be communicated from the Foundation to the Commission. With respect to the Purchasing Guidelines, Ms. Hjortsberg explained that the recommended changes align the Foundation's purchasing levels in that document with those in the State's small procurement regulations applicable to the Commission.

Mr. Bodorff asked for a motion to approve the revised Foundation Agreement, Guidelines, and Foundation Purchasing Guidelines as presented to the Commission at this meeting. Mr. Wahl made a motion to approve the changes; Ms. Hanson seconded the motion. All were in favor and the motion passed. On Thursday, MPT Foundation, Inc. will be presented with the changes for its consideration and approval.

APTS update

Ms. Kate Riley, APTS president, said Mr. Unger served on APTS' board for the past six years and she appreciated his commitment to the public television system. Public media has been a target of the Trump administration and the effort to defund PBS and NPR could prove to be the most serious. The President of the United States fired Corporation for Public Broadcasting (CPB) board members by way of an executive order. CPB believes this action is unlawful as CPB is not a federal agency. Legal proceedings are underway.

Grant payments funded through FEMA have stopped for the Next Generation Warning System (NGWS). If CPB cannot administer the NGWS, public safety in communities nationwide will be at risk as this system has been vital in providing reliable infrastructure that carries lifesaving public safety information.

The Department of Education Ready to Learn grant was terminated. Plans are in place to have the grant restarted. There is a pending rescission package being considered by Congress that would remove two years of previously appropriated CPB federal funding, totaling \$1.1 billion.

A strong nationwide mobilization effort has been launched to overcome the many challenges to public broadcasting. Approximately 1.5 million messages were sent to members of Congress in support of public media. This advocacy has helped delay the rescissions package from being delivered to Congress. Ms. Riley said a path is in place for public television to continue to be successful with the continued support of the American public.

Mr. Kaplan thanked Ms. Riley for her presentation and for her advocacy. Ms. Riley thanked Mr. Kaplan for his many years of service.

Mr. Unger added it was a monumental feat to get so many messages to Congress. Ms. Hanson stated the Protect My Public Media site is user-friendly. Mr. Unger encouraged all to visit the site to voice their support for public media.

At 11:35 a.m., Mr. Bodorff noted a closed session on the agenda pursuant to § 3-305(b)(1) of the Open Meetings Act (“OMA”), pursuant to which a public body may meet in closed session to a personnel matter that affects one or more specific individuals.

Upon motion duly made (Mr. Bodorff) and seconded (Mr. Wahl), the Commission unanimously approved entering into a closed session to discuss a personnel matter. All staff left the meeting at this time. Ms. Hjortsberg remained in the meeting at the Commission’s invitation.

A copy of the Presiding Officer’s Written Statement for Closing a Meeting is attached to these minutes of the open session of the meeting as Exhibit A.

The closed session adjourned at 11:40 a.m. Mr. Bodorff announced that the Commission had decided to rename the Executive Conference Room to the Larry D. Unger Executive Conference Room and that this decision would be announced at Mr. Unger’s retirement celebration.

The information required by §3-306 of the OMA is attached to these minutes as Exhibit B.

The meeting adjourned at 11:43 a.m.