

Maryland Public Broadcasting Commission Meeting Minutes

Date: Tuesday, March 24, 2026

Time: Meeting called to order at 10 a.m.

Location: Virtual (Zoom)

Commissioners in attendance:

- Richard Bodorff (Chair)
- Rebecca Hanson (Vice Chair)
- Bruce Wahl
- Ellie Wang
- Beth Suarez
- Dr. Lakeisha Lashley
- Dr. Kimberly Moffitt
- Dr. Carla Hayden
- Dr. Debra Bright
- Bob Douglas
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MPT Staff in attendance:

- Steven Schupak
- Chuck Roberts
- Fran Minakowski
- Max Zelalem
- Harry Vaughn
- Linda Taggart
- Tom Williams
- Travis Mitchell
- Betsy Peisach
- Susan Wolfinger Schmitt
- Patricia Fitzhugh
- Dionne Neblett

Guests and representatives in attendance:

- Erin Senior (representing Dr. Carey Wright)
- Lara L. Hjortsberg (Principal Counsel and AAG, Office of the Attorney General)
- Craig Fuller (Chair, MPT Foundation)
- Athina Ramphal (member of the public)

I. Call to Order and Chair's Remarks

- Chair Richard Bodorff called the meeting to order at 10 a.m. and confirmed the presence of a quorum.

- Mr. Bodorff noted recent good news: the network is faring well with the state legislature regarding the "safety net" 2017 legislation, and contributions and paid members have increased to 80,000.
- Mr. Bodorff mentioned MPT's fifth national Emmy award for the Maryland Center for Media Literacy & Education Division's *Carl the Collector* work.
- The minutes from the November 18, 2025, meeting was adopted with no additions or corrections.
- Mr. Bodorff introduced new commissioners Dr. Carla Hayden and Kimberly Moffitt, noting a full complement of 11 commissioners.
- Mr. Bodorff stated that three commissioners (Messrs. Bodorff, Wahl, and Douglas) are nearing the end of their terms and will take steps to be appointed to new terms.
- Mr. Bodorff thanked former commissioner Irwin Kramer, who will be a candidate for foundation board membership and recognized at the June joint commission-foundation board dinner.

II. President's Report (Steven Schupak, CEO)

- Mr. Schupak welcomed the new commissioners.
- Mr. Schupak reported that MPT is financially stable despite the loss of federal funding, with successes being recorded.
- The State of Maryland law MD Code, Education, 24-204 (d) protects MPT from any decline in federal funding, and MPT is exercising fiscal austerity.
- MPT Foundation, Inc. will use reserved funds to bridge the two-year delay in the fulfillment of the State's funding reimbursements.
- **Upcoming Events:**
 - *An Evening with Ken Burns* on May 14.
 - Annual joint commission-foundation board dinner on June 18.
- Commissioners viewed video clips, including segments on the Buddhist monks' appearance in Annapolis, the *Henry David Thoreau* documentary, and a *Maryland Farm & Harvest* catfish feature.
- Mr. Schupak discussed the importance of streaming and cited the achievement of *Carl the Collector*, showing an excerpt from the Emmy ceremony.

III. Operations Report (Chuck Roberts, EVP & COO)

- **Streaming Presentation:**
 - Mr. Roberts explained that streaming extends MPT's reach statewide and allows viewers to select content and viewing times.
 - Mr. Roberts showed the channels and platforms that host MPT's streaming presence and noted that streaming is growing nationwide as over-the-air broadcast viewing declines.
 - **Next Steps** include possibly hosting MPT's own streaming platform and continually looking for new outlets.
 - **Q&A Highlights:**
 - Mr. Bodorff asked about missed over-the-air broadcasts; Mr. Roberts explained PBS constraints on content available on PBS Passport.

- Ms. Hanson asked about monetizing streaming; Mr. Roberts stated MPT searches for ways to monetize streaming and monitors statistics to stay ahead of viewer trends.
- Ms. Wang questioned a future MPT streaming channel being an “MPT Plus” feature; Mr. Schupak said MPT prefers to “keep all eggs in the PBS basket” to avoid audience confusion but is weighing options.
- Mr. Fuller asked if other organizations could use MPT's streaming to push out e-publications; Mr. Roberts confirmed MPT wishes to be involved in this activity.
- **Center for Maryland History Films Presentation:**
 - Mr. Roberts explained the center's role and showed an introductory video.
 - Mr. Roberts recapped the center's funding, named producers, and cited upcoming 2026 and 2027 programs, including the Maryland State House documentary.
 - Commissioners had received a promotional flyer used in recent legislative visits.

IV. Budget & Compensation Committee Report (Rebecca Hanson, Chair of the Committee)

- Ms. Hanson complimented staff on the early-March all-staff memo and the recent communications report.
- Ms. Hanson referenced the March 13 committee meeting, citing the growth of the Maryland State Ad Agency (MSAA) and the good work of Development.
- **Chief Financial Officer Patricia Fitzhugh's Report:**
 - FY26 mid-year revenue reached \$34 million.
 - CPB Community Service Grant revenue reflects a deferral of FY25 CSG income to be used for FY26 expenses.
 - Strong cost management is curtailing expenses.
 - Door-to-door membership canvassing (launched April 2025) has added 4,217 members to date.
 - MPT is operating conservatively and prioritizing spending for the final quarter of FY26.
 - Ms. Fitzhugh is working with Development (due to the surge in donations from the loss of federal funding), the Technology Division (for infrastructure building), and the Content Division/Travis Mitchell (for expense control and software improvements).
 - For MSAA, she stressed the importance of ensuring correct profit margins by competitive pricing.
- **Human Resources Report (Susan Wolfinger Schmitt, VP):**
 - Staffing: 142 employees on staff with 151 approved positions available. Two contractual employee positions were recently converted to permanent MPT state jobs.
 - Contractual Hires: 58 at present (including freelancers), providing flexibility and controlling salary expense.
 - Internship Program: 12 students are currently on board for the Spring semester (paid and unpaid).
 - Apprentices are partially funded by outside sources.

- MPT was selected to receive two fully funded A.I. interns for summer 2026.

V. Foundation Report (Craig Fuller, Chair)

- Mr. Fuller stated that fundraising and development are relationship-building efforts.
- The Leadership Society has grown markedly, including growth in sustainers.
- For the first two quarters of FY26, MPT has raised \$2 million.
- The MPT Foundation has set aside \$3 million in reserve for future uses, including covering the federal funding shortfall.
- **Partnership:** Mr. Fuller highlighted the partnership with Eastern Shore organizations (Chesapeake Bay Maritime Museum, the Avalon Theatre, and the Talbot Spy).
 - On April 16, this partnership will host a premiere of *Lifeblood: Chesapeake River Stories*.
 - The second film, *Racing Rivals: Log Canoes of Chesapeake Bay*
- New strong candidates are being identified for board membership to replace those who have termed out.
- Ms. Hanson proposed discussing replicating the Eastern Shore partnership experience in the Bethesda area at the Foundation board meeting on Thursday, March 26, at 10 a.m. Mr. Fuller agreed the model could be replicated.

VI. Old/New Business

- Mr. Bodorff called for old or new business, and hearing none, called for a closed session.
- Ms. Athina Ramphal, a member of the public in attendance at the meeting, introduced herself and requested collaboration with MPT. She was asked to provide her email address, and Mr. Roberts will follow up with her.

VII. Closed Session

- 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, specifically to discuss the performance review of MPT’s chief executive officer.
- Upon motion duly made (Mr. Wahl) and seconded (Dr. Bright), approved entering into a closed session to discuss a personnel matter. All staff left the meeting at this time. Dr. Moffitt remained in the meeting as an appointee to the Commission; Ms. Senior remained in the meeting as Dr. Carey Wright’s representative at the Commission meeting; and Ms. Hjortsberg and Ms. Wolfinger-Schmitt remained in the meeting at the Commission’s invitation.
- The Commission entered closed session at 11:24 a.m.
- 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 meeting adjourned in closed session at 11:34 a.m. The information required to be disclosed by OMA §3-306 for the closed session will be included in the minutes of the next open session of the Commission.