

Maryland Public Broadcasting Commission
Meeting of January 21, 2025
via Zoom

Minutes

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

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

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

Mr. Unger called the meeting to order at 10:33 a.m. He requested approval of the minutes of the November 26, 2024 meeting. The minutes were approved unanimously as submitted.

President's report

The State of Maryland is expecting a challenging financial year in 2025 with fears that the new administration in Washington, D.C. will reduce or eliminate funding for public broadcasting. MPT's legislative budget hearings in Annapolis are scheduled for early February. As in past years, Mr. Unger will meet with the leadership as well as each member of the budget subcommittees to update them on MPT's activities and accomplishments. A nine-minute sizzle reel was prepared to tell MPT's story, and will be shown at the hearings.

MPT's search for a new president and chief executive officer is now underway. Recruitment began on January 2. Interviews will begin in February. A new president and CEO should be in place in advance of the July 1 target date.

The next installment in the Center for Maryland History Films, *Becoming Thurgood Marshall*, will debut nationally in the fall of 2025.

The Maryland General Assembly's legislative session began on January 8. MPT crews are providing live streams of chamber proceedings in the Senate and House of Delegates that will continue into April. Mr. Unger shared clips of a *State Circle* interview with Maryland Senate President Bill Ferguson, an interview with U.S. Senator Ben Cardin, and an *MPT Arts Minute* spot.

APTS update

Ms. Kate Riley, APTS president and chief executive officer, reported that APTS will continue to explain the value of public television to members of Congress. She said MPT is a shining star in the public television system.

There are 70 new members of Congress, and serious threats to public media funding from Congress and the new administration are expected. It is important for stations to stay engaged and take actions that help lawmakers see and understand the value of public television stations and the unique, locally focused services they provide.

All stakeholders should understand the value of public media and what is at risk if federal funding is lost. Messaging needs to remain consistent and strong in emphasizing the vital role public media plays in local communities throughout the country. Federal funding is irreplaceable and essential to public television.

Ms. Riley is excited about MPT's media literacy initiatives through the Maryland Center for Media Literacy & Education. Initiatives such as this help public media make its case that federal funding is essential for these vital services.

Ms. Suarez asked if there is anything that can be done to keep funding intact. Ms. Riley stated the pathway to success includes talking to your friends, networks, and contacts to help people understand the complexity and value of our system. The voices of community leaders show lawmakers that public television is something deeply valued. *Protect My Public Media* is a grassroots organization that urges Congress to protect and sustain public media funding.

Mr. Bodorff inquired what the current situation is with APTS memberships. Ms. Riley replied that APTS has been able to add back a handful of members that are facing risks and threats.

Ms. Riley also announced that APTS will award Mr. Unger with its 2025 Pillar of Public Service Award at its upcoming Public Media Summit for his longtime work in public TV to advance education, public safety, and community connections.

Media Literacy & Education update

Ms. Betsy Peisach, vice president, Maryland Center for Media Literacy & Education, delivered an update. The division is leading a statewide coalition for all Maryland citizens to build media literacy skills and knowledge. The Center's launch was held on November 19 in MPT's Irene and Edward H. Kaplan Production Studio. There were approximately 90 in-person attendees. The event was also livestreamed and had more than 11,000 views, 8,000 social media impressions, and 2,100 reel plays. The event was hosted by renown television journalist Frank Sesno, and speakers included FCC Commissioner Anna Gomez, Sheppard Pratt President, CEO Dr. Harsh Trivedi, and Maryland First Lady Dawn Moore, bringing MPT and the new Center additional awareness and validity.

Ms. Krista Respass, senior managing director, Early Childhood Services, said MPT is leading the effort to meet the needs of underserved pre-K-12 children. Early childhood initiatives such as *Ready to Learn* connects developmentally appropriate learning with *PBS KIDS* shows.

PBS KIDS premiered its newest animated series, *Carl the Collector*, about an autistic raccoon that loves to collect things. Ms. Respass shared a clip of the new series episode, The Fall. The episode highlighted the difficulty Carl had processing new situations. The series teaches viewers about empathy and inclusion, leading to the understanding and acceptance of autism. MPT was selected to work alongside the *PBS KIDS* team to develop a robust set of series-related resources for *Carl the Collector* to support parents and educators.

Ms. Wang thanked the team for its work and asked how she could share resources about autism. Ms. Peisach stated there are national materials available on the PBS LearningMedia website. Ms. Respass shared a link that included additional learning tools.

MSAA update

Mr. Steven Schupak, station manager, introduced Jason Cohen, MSAA's first managing director. Ms. Schupak said MPT is in its sixth year in their relationship with the Baltimore Ravens. He shared a recent spot that featured Ravens tight end Mark Andrews and the MSAA sizzle reel.

Search Committee update

Search Committee chair Richard Bodorff reported that a wide net for MPT's president has been cast. Job postings have been made on a number of platforms. The application deadline is January 31, 2025. To date, 47 candidates have applied for the CEO role. Currently, 30 applicants meet the criteria.

Old/New business

There being no old or new business, Mr. Unger asked for a motion to adjourn. A motion was made and seconded, and the meeting adjourned at 11:34 a.m.