

Maryland Public Broadcasting Commission
Meeting of April 25, 2023
via Zoom

Minutes

Present: *Mr. Edward Kaplan, chair; Mr. Richard Bodorff, vice chair; Dr. Debra Bright; Ms. Shelly Gardeniers-Pettigrew; Mr. Irwin Kramer; Ms. Beth Suarez; Mr. Bruce Wahl; Ms. Ellie Wang.*

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

The chair called the meeting to order at 10:30 a.m. He requested approval of the minutes of the March 28, 2023, meeting. The minutes were approved unanimously as submitted.

President's report

The 2023 Maryland General Assembly's legislative session has ended. For FY24, MPT received the largest state appropriation in more than a decade. A separate appropriation was provided for The Center for Maryland History Films, MPT's newest division.

With a new administration in place, meetings began with members of the governor's cabinet to make them aware of MPT's activities. Mr. Unger will meet with additional cabinet members in May and June.

In mid-April, Twitter labeled PBS' main Twitter page as "government-funded media" claiming varying degrees of government involvement in editorial content. PBS and several stations including MPT stopped using their main Twitter pages. Twitter subsequently removed the government-funded label, and both PBS and MPT have resumed engagement on the social media site.

The Organization of State Broadcasting Executives (OSBE) held its spring meeting at MPT last week. This was the first time in more than 20 years that this group has met at MPT. General managers of licensed public television stations discussed editorial integrity, the public media workforce, and advocacy. Many station representatives expressed an interest in the Maryland State Ad Agency.

MPT hosted a performance featuring the music of Hal Prince in The Irene and Edward H. Kaplan Production Studio. The production was performed by Young Artists of America (YAA) that included a cast of more than 175 including a full orchestra, choir, and featured singers. The production will air this fall. Mr. Unger shared a clip from the live performance.

Several technical staff employees attended the National Association of Broadcasters meeting in Las Vegas. Discussions included the "Future of Television," a new public-private initiative, to help work through outstanding obstacles faced by consumers. This initiative will gather

industry, government, and public interest stakeholders to establish a roadmap for the transition to ATSC 3.0.

The PBS Annual Meeting will take place May 15 – 17 in San Diego. This is the first in-person meeting since the pandemic began. The annual joint meeting of the MPBC and MPT Foundation board of directors will be held on June 8 at Historic Savage Mill. The season 11 taping of *Chesapeake Collectibles* will take place on June 24 - 25 at MPT.

The 19th annual Chesapeake Bay Week occurred last week and included more than 20 hours of bay-related programming. Four new MPT-produced films were introduced.

Commissioners viewed video clips that included a Chesapeake Bay Week sizzle reel, excerpts from *Direct Connection with Jeff Salkin*, and a clip from MPT's oral history project that featured Senator Barbara Mikulski.

Mr. Wahl complimented MPT's staff for the fine work done on Chesapeake Bay Week. Mr. Kaplan added that he viewed many of the bay-related programs and is proud of the work done by MPT.

Communications update

Tom Williams, senior managing director, Communications, shared information “you ought to know” about his team, comprised of four employees who have 100+ years of experience in publicity and public relations. It is the goal of the Communications Department to protect and enhance MPT's reputation and to build knowledge about and interest in MPT content and services.

MPT engages with its external audience in a number of ways. Last year, the team prepared and issued 52 news releases and media advisories. It also handled inquiries from journalists and coordinated interviews for MPT senior leaders and producers. In 2022, this publicity and media relations activity helped generate more than 630 items of media coverage.

In the area of institutional communication, the team prepares each year's annual report, fact sheets, infographics, organization charts, sales brochures, one-sheets, as well as copy and artwork for resolutions and awards. The group is also responsible for the submission of many award entries as well as copy and artwork development for commission- and foundation-issued resolutions.

Michael MacFee, director, Communications Services, discussed how the team keeps internal stakeholders connected and informed. In 2022, MPT published 350 articles in 40 issues of *The (not quite) Daily* (NQD), which is distributed to employees, board members, industry friends and MPT alumni. The team also shares with staff monthly media coverage summaries and is responsible for the scheduling of staff headshot photos.

Communications coordinates several awards programs including the Wall of Fame honoring men and women who have brought distinction to MPT broadcasts. To date, 22 individuals have been honored. The Alumni Honor Wall honors employees who are not on-air personalities. The team also handles the MPT Champions awards, given to thank friends and advocates of MPT.

Fran Minakowski, senior advisor to the president, stated the team also supports communications with MPT's single largest donor -- the State of Maryland. Communications' efforts keep federal

and state legislators and state agency heads informed through budget testimonies, legislator visits, and other correspondence. An e-newsletter to keep government leaders informed about MPT, the *Government Leaders Bulletin*, will be launched later this year.

Other Communications work is seen in:

- MPT *Salutes Vietnam Veterans* launched in 2012 and continued through 2016.
- MPT's 50th anniversary with activities throughout 2019.
- MPT's hallways and walls that feature displays.
- MPT Archives, a repository for five decades worth of material.

The department acts as ghost writer and speechwriter for Mr. Unger; providing approximately 100 documents each year. "We thought you ought to know" on-air messages began in 2011 to make viewers aware of things they should know. Mrs. Minakowski shared a clip of one such CEO on-air message.

Mr. Kaplan thanked the team for the incredible job it does in presenting MPT to the public.

Member benefits update

Linda Taggart, vice president, Development, said member benefits had not received a comprehensive review in a number of years. In order to enhance the member experience, the benefits package needed to be more cohesive and attractive to donors.

Erin Chrest, senior managing director, Major & Planned Giving, shared research that revealed the top three desired member benefits are: 1) invitations to exclusive events, 2) access to on-demand public tv programming (Passport), and 3) monthly program guides. Leadership Society benefits have been adjusted and condensed to three levels: Leader, Champion, and Visionary. Ms. Chrest shared a personalized programming update recorded through Gratavid. Her department now has a staff member dedicated to caring for the Legacy Society. Donors who include the station in their estate plans will now be honored during their lifetime.

Vera Turner, managing director, Membership, received input from station colleagues and consultants and proposed four new member levels to increase donor engagement and giving. The four membership levels are Basic, Producer, Director, and Family. The membership packages should grow and diversify membership, attract younger families, and create positive memorable experiences that increase revenue. She shared a "Happy Birthday" video that will be included in the future family experience during the child's birthday month. Ms. Taggart announced that the enhanced member benefits will begin on July 1, 2023.

Mr. Kaplan thanked the Development team members for their presentation.

Old/new business

There being no old or new business, the meeting was adjourned at 11:38 a.m.