

Maryland Public Broadcasting Commission
Meeting of May 24, 2022
Via Zoom

Minutes

Present: Mr. Edward Kaplan, chair; Mr. Richard Bodorff, vice chair; Dr. Debra Bright; Ms. Shelly Gardeniers; Ms. Rebecca Hanson; Mr. Irwin Kramer; Ms. Beth Suarez; Mr. Bruce Wahl; Ms. Ellie Wang. Ms. Valerie Emrich was present to represent Mohammed Choudhury, Maryland State Superintendent of Schools.

The following members of the MPT management staff also were in attendance. MPT President and CEO Larry Unger, Ms. Colette Colclough, Mr. Andrew Levine, Mrs. Fran Minakowski, Mr. Travis Mitchell, Ms. Suzie Schmidt, Mr. Steven Schupak, Ms. Suzanne Schwertman, 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: Mr. Patrick Butler, president and chief executive officer of America's Public Television Stations (APTS) and chair emeritus of the MPT Foundation, Inc.

The chair called the meeting to order at 10:30 a.m. He requested approval of the minutes of the March 22, 2022, meeting. Mr. Wahl made a motion to approve the minutes; Mr. Kramer seconded the motion; and the minutes were approved unanimously as submitted.

President's report

Mr. Unger paid tribute to retiring commissioner Howard Rosen for 17 years of dedicated service to MPT. With a background in accounting, Commissioner Rosen headed the Audit Committee and always labored to ensure that MPT was above reproach. Mr. Unger read a resolution from the Commission in honor of Mr. Rosen. Mr. Kramer moved to approve the resolution; Mr. Wahl seconded the motion; and the resolution was unanimously approved.

The FY22 budget bottom line projected indicates an excellent financial performance. In FY23, MPT's goal is to increase salaries to a more competitive level and use new methods to assist in recruiting and retaining employees.

Mr. Unger attended a general managers meeting with Mr. Schupak in Washington, DC last week, the first in-person industry meeting since COVID-19 began. The discussions centered around the future of public media and the best way to use limited resources. Suggestions were discussed to improve Passport, a viewer benefit that allows streaming of content on the PBS Video App.

The 2022 PBS Annual Meeting begins today, virtually. Travis Mitchell, chief content officer, will lead a programming panel discussion regarding the Tubman/Douglass films during the annual meeting.

The two events marking the opening of The Irene and Edward H. Kaplan Production Studio on April 28 and April 29 were well-attended and well-executed. The May 6 issue of *The (not quite)*

Daily contained a link to photographs from the events. In early June, MPT will host the Democratic gubernatorial debate in the Kaplan Studio.

The hybrid teleworking trial began on April 4. Although the building is more populated than before, it is not back to pre-COVID levels. MPT earned 22 regional Emmy nominations, the most in its history. The winners will be announced on June 25.

Chesapeake Bay Week programming wrapped up on April 23 with successful viewership and engagement. The bay-related programs were broadcast in many U.S. markets. There is a substantial amount of work being done to support and enhance the telecasts of *Becoming Frederick Douglass* and *Harriet Tubman: Visions of Freedom*, including community screenings of the films scheduled across the state. Two artists have been commissioned to create portraits of Harriet Tubman and Frederick Douglass.

Commissioners viewed clips that included *Chesapeake Bay Week*'s centerpiece program, *Chesapeake Decoys* funded in part by Richard Bodorff and Edward Kaplan, a *MotorWeek* segment honoring the late Pat Goss, and a *Direct Connection* segment featuring Governor Hogan. Mr. Kaplan asked if *Chesapeake Decoys* was nominated for an Emmy. Mr. Unger explained the program is not eligible for an Emmy until next year; however, *Creatures of the Chesapeake* has been nominated for four Emmys. Ms. Taggart stated duck decoy carvings will be offered as a thank-you gift during an upcoming pledge drive.

APTS update

Patrick Butler, president and chief executive officer of America's Public Television Stations (APTS), reported that in the last three years, there has been significant financial growth in public television. The FY23 funding bills propose \$697 million for public broadcasting which would be an \$82 million increase over last year's funding levels. This increase includes funding for education, public broadcasting interconnection and streaming enhancement, Ready to Learn, and the Next Generation Warning System at FEMA to support public broadcasting stations' public safety capabilities. The appropriation cycle concludes in December.

Even with the upcoming election likely to change control of Congress next year, funding should not be eliminated. Congressman Jake Elsy from Texas is a fan of public television and will be helpful in working with Congress to maintain the current funding level or provide modest increases. Susan Collins of Maine is a champion of public television and a leader who may influence funding after the elections.

The APTS organization shows how much can be accomplished by a small staff. The group is optimistic about achieving three major goals: increasing federal funding, increasing state funding, and building a multi-million dollar data distribution business. The distribution business may not have significant revenue ramifications for several years.

Mr. Kaplan thanked Mr. Butler for all he and his staff do for public television.

Budget & Compensation report

Richard Bodorff, committee chair, underscored MPT's remarkable financial performance in FY22 despite the difficult economy. The Budget & Compensation Committee made a recommendation to adopt a compensation plan to ensure employee salaries are competitive in the marketplace and the bonus plan intended to help fill vacant positions. Decreases in revenue in

the FY23 budget will not have an impact on program quality or the accomplishment of MPT's mission.

Colette Colclough, vice president, Human Resources, gave her report. Approximately 85% of employees are vaccinated and 16% have reported positive cases. There has been no known employee-to-employee transmission in the workplace as MPT performs contact tracing on reported cases. There are 127 filled posts from the 145 authorized positions. EEO percentages are above the national average; however, improvement is needed in the Hispanic and Latino communities.

Since MPT hired Quatt Associates as a consultant, salaries have increased over time; 92 out of 130 employees received salary adjustments. The majority of staff members now meet or exceed MPT's salary target based on market data, and morale has improved.

The salary plan recommendation for FY23 is to expand the salary range by 4.25% to meet market demands and to accommodate the salary adjustments by way of a 3% COLA across-the-board increase on July 1 and a 3% merit increase to be distributed on January 1, 2023.

A bonus plan was recommended to attract new employees and reward current ones in three structures: a hiring sign-on bonus of \$2,000 for hard-to-recruit positions, a recruitment referral of up to \$1000, and a performance bonus of up to \$2,000 that will include all employees except temporary and executive staff. The performance bonus will reward job excellence, customer service, teamwork, innovation, and will be decided upon by a team of executive staff. Ms. Wang inquired if there was a way to track performance for those working remotely. Ms. Colclough responded that managers have the responsibility to let their employees know if the flexible hybrid environment is not working.

Ms. Wang made a motion to adopt both the salary and bonus plan. Mr. Wahl seconded the motion, and the plans were approved unanimously.

Suzanne Schwertman, chief financial officer, presented reports on revenues and expenses for FY22. The 4% increase in state appropriation and COVID-19-related grants contributed to the favorable revenue performance. In addition, PBS dues were less than estimated. Funding from the CARES Act will expire on September 30, and the budget reflects those lost funds. Membership is projecting a decrease in contributions due to the planned decrease in the number of pledge days. There was a decline in proposed revenue for the Maryland State Ad Agency (MSAA), primarily due to pandemic advertising assignments nearing their end.

Mr. Wahl made a motion to approve the FY23 budget, Ms. Wang seconded the motion, and the budget was approved unanimously.

Old/new business

In the absence of no old or new business, the chair asked for a motion for adjournment. All were in favor, and Mr. Kaplan adjourned the meeting at 11:42 a.m.