

# **ALABAMA EDUCATIONAL TELEVISION COMMISSION**

## **MINUTES**

July 18, 2023

10:00 a.m.

*Alabama Public Television, Birmingham Conference Room  
2112 11<sup>th</sup> Avenue S., Suite 400, Birmingham, AL 35205*

### **PRIOR NOTICE**

Sufficient Prior Notice was given as required by the Alabama Open Meetings Act, the FCC, the CPB, and the policies of the AETC, as reported by Mr. Phil Hutcheson, Chief Legal Counsel.

### **ROLL CALL (VERBAL)**

A verbal roll call was conducted by Mr. J. Holland, Secretary.

### **AETC COMMISSIONERS PRESENT:**

Mr. Ferris Stephens, Chairman

Mrs. Bebe Williams, Vice-Chairwoman

Mr. J. Holland, Secretary

Mr. Les Barnett

Mrs. Tijuanna Adetunji

Mr. Pete Conroy

The Alabama Educational Television Commission consists of seven members. Mr. William A. Green, Jr. was absent; however, a quorum was present and official business could be conducted.

### **CALL TO ORDER**

The meeting was called to order at 10:06 a.m. by Chairman Ferris Stephens.

### **REVIEW OF MINUTES**

Minutes of the April 18, 2023, meeting had been provided in writing prior to the meeting for review by the Commissioners.

**MOTION** by: Commissioner Les Barnett to approve the April 18, 2023 minutes

**SECOND** by: Commissioner J. Holland

**DISCUSSION:** No discussion other than those noted above

**MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY**

## **SETTING OF OTHER BUSINESS**

Chairman Ferris Stephens noted that he would like to add that the terms of Commissioner Johnny Curry and Commissioner Allen Mendenhall and that we need to reappoint them to the Alabama Education Television Foundation Authority.

Commissioner J. Holland asked about adding a discussion about *DIY Science* and classroom penetration efforts for STEM education. Chairman Stephens agreed.

Commissioner Holland made a motion that we renominate Commissioner Allen Mendenhall and Commissioner Johnny Curry to the Foundation Board and that it be effective immediately since the term has lapsed. Commissioner Les Barnett seconded the motion. Chairman Stephens agreed, but it would be retroactively approved. Chairman Stephens noted that we need to approve this in two separate votes.

Chairman Stephens called for a vote to renominate Commissioner Johnny Curry to the Alabama Educational Foundation Authority. All voted in favor, none were opposed. Motion carried.

Chairman Stephens called for a vote to renominate Commissioner Allen Mendenhall to the Alabama Educational Foundation Authority. All voted in favor, none were opposed. Motion carried.

## **NEW BUSINESS**

Chairman Stephens noted that there were no old business items to discuss.

Commissioner Holland expressed gratitude to everyone for the support and kindness shown to him and his family after the death of his father.

Julie Parker from Kassouf and Company presented the audit report. Phil Hutcheson noted that Julie is the manager of their account. The independent auditors' report confirmed an unqualified opinion, signifying that the financial statements were presented fairly in all material aspects. The combined statement of net position as of September 30, 2022, showed total assets of over \$33.5 million, consistent with the previous year. A small decrease was attributed to market performance in investments.

Julie mentioned that money was carried over from year to year, which was allowed by the state, skewing the numbers slightly. Total liabilities as of September 30, 2022, were just under \$2.5 million, reflecting a decrease from the prior year, mainly due to projects and invoices. The combined statement of activities showed total

revenues without donor restrictions for FY22 were just over \$20.5 million, with total expenses slightly over \$17.3 million, resulting in a net income of just under \$215,000.

Phil summarized that the audit resulted in an unqualified opinion, signifying strong financial statements presented fairly. Julie confirmed that APT is in a solid financial position, with \$33.5 million in assets and a small portion of liabilities.

### **Executive Director's Report – Wayne Reid**

Wayne Reid provided an overview of events from the past quarter.

Wayne started with the Nielsen ratings, which they had recently begun tracking. The key reason for monitoring these ratings was to gauge the viewership of APT and its impact on the state. In May, the most recent book, over one million people in the state watched APT at least once, demonstrating a significant impact.

Wayne also discussed the Virtual Multichannel Video Programming Distributors (VMVPD), noting APT's plans to be on Hulu within the next 90 days and acknowledged the efforts of PBS National in this endeavor.

Wayne informed the group that Windell was retiring, with his last day set for September 29. They were in the process of hiring a Chief Broadcast Officer to replace him. In addition, Phil planned to retire at the end of the year, and they were working on a succession plan, seeking permission to double fill his position for the last three months of the year.

Wayne reported that a research project previously mentioned in the last meeting is officially moving forward. The project will involve collaboration with Samford University, Troy University, UAB and the University of Alabama in the upcoming fall semester.

Wayne also shared that they had updated signage on the building's street side with the new logo and were working on updating logos and graphics at the Montgomery studio. They were exploring the possibility of moving Capitol Journal to the Madison Avenue studio, which was being prepared for use.

Wayne proudly announced that APT had won two Emmy awards at the recent Southeast Emmy Awards in Atlanta. Additionally, Wayne mentioned a new project called Southern Storytellers, funded by CPB and Arkansas PBS, which premieres on PBS and is accompanied by a \$20,000 grant for an Instagram campaign aimed at audience engagement.

Wayne shared information about various educational initiatives, including Early Childhood Education training sessions, the Andalusia Storybook Festival, and family care provider education camps were held. Wayne reported on STEM-based professional development workshops that benefited thirty-four educators, impacting over 5,000 students. APT also hosted history institutes in several locations, engaging almost 8,000 students across the state.

Wayne praised Jack's efforts in the legislature, where APT received funding for several key projects. Despite a temporary decrease in ETF funding due to one-time expenses in the previous year, the organization secured funds for equipment upgrades, including a Lamar County tower and transmitter. Negotiations with the NFHS were ongoing to secure rights for streaming high school championships.

Commissioner Holland raised a question about the tower at Mt. Cheaha and its potential relocation. Wayne explained that efforts to move the tower had not gained any traction with state legislators, and the issue had essentially been shelved. Wayne confirmed that they intended to clean and repaint the transmitter building, remove unnecessary items, and make it look more aesthetically pleasing. The possibility of adding informative plaques or designating the site as a historical or educational location was discussed.

The idea of designating the tower site as a historical site was discussed. Commissioner Holland mentioned the site's significance as the first network public broadcasting tower in the country. However, concerns were raised about potential loss of control over the site's administration if designated as a historical site. It was suggested that the site could be recognized for its status as the oldest operating tower instead, potentially through a legislative resolution.

Wayne provided a brief Human Resources report, introducing new hires, including Allison Ingram (Major Gifts/Planned Giving Officer), Savannah Kitchens (Grant Writer), and Hazel McLaughlin (Web Content Specialist). Kathy LeCroy, an Education Specialist, retired during the quarter, and her position was being filled.

Phil mentioned a substantial donation of \$166,000 received from a retired schoolteacher who had consistently donated smaller amounts over 19 years. The donation came as a surprise after 20 years of no contact. Peggy Hair, a long-time employee who passed away, had left one-fourth of her estate to APT, intended for starting an endowment for local programming.

Wayne reported that new equipment for Montgomery studios was expected to arrive around the first of December or by the end of November. The plan was to work on Studio B and bring it up to the necessary standards.

Wayne praised the Capitol Journal team for their exceptional coverage of the legislative session, particularly highlighting their final episode. They successfully hosted over 80 guest appearances, including prominent figures such as Lt. Governor Greg Reed, Senate Pro Tem, Nathan Ledbetter, and others in the last session.

There were discussions about potential upgrades to the State House studio and Mary provided information about the equipment installation, which was expected to take place in mid-December. The installation would involve new equipment and would be completed simultaneously at both the State House and Madison Avenue studios.

Commissioner Copeland inquired about the possibility of hosting educational statewide events for children, such as spelling bees, in the Madison Avenue studio. Wayne mentioned the Scholars Bowl as an existing statewide event filmed there.

Wayne highlighted three nominations for the Southeast Emmy Awards. These nominations included *Shuttlesworth* and two segments of *Monograph* focusing on pottery and cakes.

Commissioner Les Barnett proposed a motion to emphasize traditional programming, particularly around holidays and notable events, to set APT apart from other stations. The motion was seconded and opened for discussion. Commissioner Barnett clarified that his motion pertained to programming, but also encouraged production of content that reflected traditional values and honored holidays such as Independence Day, Veterans Day, Thanksgiving, and Christmas.

Several board members expressed their support for traditional programming and the positive reception of local productions like *Shuttlesworth*. They also highlighted the success of programs related to Memorial Day and Independence Day.

Commissioner Conroy suggested reaching out to Admiral Davis, the Commissioner of Veterans Affairs for Alabama, to explore potential content and funding opportunities related to veterans. There were discussions about creating content related to historical events in Alabama, such as documentaries and research, to showcase the state's heritage.

The motion aimed to promote traditional programming and content, especially around holidays, to cater to viewer preferences and enhance APT's offerings was approved.

#### I. Education

- a. Dr. Briana Morton expanded on details regarding APT's Education initiatives. She emphasized the need to increase awareness of APT's educational programs. The APT Certified Educator Program

significantly contributes to professional development for educators. APT's goal is to have all 50 educators who completed the Certified Educator program become ambassadors by May 2024. Additionally, they aim to have at least 250 certified educators within the next two years.

- b. A new program recognizing teachers of the month is in development for the upcoming school year. Excellence in Education will highlight educators who are actively engaged with APT's resources.

## II. Public Information and Programming

- a. Mike McKenzie discussed an education campaign aimed at parents to raise awareness about internet safety for children. The campaign includes one-minute spots featuring Congresswoman Terri Sewell and is scheduled to run throughout APT's programming.
- b. The documentary titled *Sink the Alabama* is scheduled for screenings. The first screening will be held at GulfQuest in Mobile, where filmmaker Robert Clem will participate in a Q&A session.

## III. Digital and Education Media

- a. Heather Daniels-Whitson discussed APT's Digital and Education Media initiatives. APT's new digital department is focusing on social media to increase engagement with its audience. The team initiated an Instagram Reels campaign, utilizing the platform's video format to reach viewers who may not already follow APT. APT introduced a series called *Garden Party* hosted by Trace Barnett, a local Alabamian known for his involvement in the culinary world.
- b. APT received Emmy Awards for *DIY Science Time* and *Yellowhammer History Hunt*, and the achievements were shared on social media platforms.
- c. APT has been collaborating with other PBS stations and personalities, such as Sean of the South, to create engaging content for social media. This collaboration aims to promote PBS programs and content.

## IV. Governmental Affairs

- a. Jack Williams was asked to discuss APT's Governmental Affairs. Jack provided an overview of APT's federal funding sources, explaining that approximately 20% of APT's funding comes from the Corporation for Public Broadcasting (CPB). APT also receives funding from other federal programs, including the Ready to Learn program, the Competitive Educational Grant Program through the Department of Education, Interconnect Funds, and Homeland Security funding for its warning system.

- b. Jack mentioned that APT could face a 5% or 10% cut in funding, or a 1% cut if an agreement cannot be reached. While budget cuts are expected, the extent of these cuts is still under negotiation.
- c. Jack highlighted that Senator Britt's office had expressed support for APT. While the funding situation may seem bleak, there is optimism that support will be maintained throughout the legislative process. Despite the challenges and initial budget proposals, Jack expressed his belief that the situation may not result in significant funding cuts for APT. The Senate will have its own version of the bill, and the final outcome remains uncertain.

V. (See attached reports for additional information.)

Commissioner J. Holland raised the question of whether APT was planning to celebrate its 70th anniversary, given that the organization was established in 1953. Mike McKenzie clarified that APT coordinates its celebrations with the broadcast anniversary, which is based on the year it went on the air, in this case, January 1955. Therefore, APT will celebrate its 70th anniversary of broadcast in 2025.

Commissioner Pete Conroy announced that the documentary *Lost Creeks* produced by JSU had won a Southeast Emmy award. Commissioner Conroy mentioned an upcoming program titled *Bluegrass on the Rim* scheduled to air on July 27. Commissioner Conroy provided updates on two projects. He mentioned that the Barber Motorsports Speedway project was progressing well. Additionally, he noted that the Arthur Shores project was also moving forward.

### **OTHER BUSINESS**

Commissioner Les Barnett commended APT for its efforts in STEM education. However, he raised a question about the classroom penetration of APT's resources. Specifically, he inquired about the percentage of classrooms using these resources and whether there was a way to track this information.

Heather responded that APT has data on user numbers, streaming numbers, and unique visitor numbers. She referred to a previous slide shown by Wayne, which indicated that there were 177,000 streams of STEM programming, with 150,000 of those being for *DIY Science Time*, which is the most widely used classroom resource. However, she clarified that these numbers represent the number of streams and not necessarily the number of students, as it is difficult to determine whether a teacher, a class, or a grade level is viewing the content. Additionally, Heather noted that these numbers were specific to a quarter and not the overall lifetime of the resources.

**SCHEDULING OF NEXT MEETING**

The next AETC meeting will be held on Tuesday, October 10, 2023, in Montgomery with a location to be determined.

**MOTION** by: Commissioner Les Barnett to approve October 10, 2023, as the date of the next meeting  
**SECOND** by: Commissioner J. Holland  
**MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY**

**ADJOURNMENT**

**MOTION** by: Commissioner J. Holland  
**SECOND** by: Commissioner Les Barnett  
**MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY**  
The meeting was adjourned at 12:44 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted,



Lorraine Fancher  
Recording Secretary

**APPROVED -- DATE:** \_\_\_\_\_



Mr. Ferris Stephens  
Chairman



Mr. J. Holland  
Secretary