

# **ALABAMA EDUCATIONAL TELEVISION COMMISSION**

## **MINUTES**

July 23, 2024

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. Wayne Reid, Executive Director.

### **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

Mr. Pete Conroy

Mr. William A. Green, Jr.

The Alabama Educational Television Commission consists of seven members. Mrs. Tijuanna Adetunji was absent; however, a quorum was present and official business could be conducted.

### **CALL TO ORDER**

The meeting was called to order at 10:07 a.m. by Chairman Ferris Stephens.

### **REVIEW OF MINUTES**

Minutes of the April 30, 2024 meeting had been provided in writing prior to the meeting for review by the Commissioners.

**Motion** by: Commissioner Pete Conroy to approve the April 30, 2024 minutes

**Second** by: Commissioner Les Barnett

**Discussion:** No discussion

**Motion Passed Unanimously**

## **SETTING OF OTHER BUSINESS**

Commissioner Barnett noted that he had two items he would like to be addressed. One was asking if traditional programming had been played on Independence Day, and if so, how many shows were broadcast? He also inquired about why is APT airing BBC instead of a news source such as GB News? Beverly Phillips noted that we have underwriting sponsors for BBC, but that would not preclude FB from being discussed. Chairman Stephens noted that those two items on the agenda.

## **OLD BUSINESS**

Chairman Stephens noted that there is no old business to be discussed.

## **NEW BUSINESS**

Chairman Stephens introduced Julie Parker from Kassouf accounting firm to give the Audit Report. Chairman Stephens welcomed Julie to the meeting.

### **Audit Report**

Julie Parker expressed her appreciation to the APT accounting team, particularly Wayne, Melissa, Mary Ann, and Phil, for their support during the audit. She highlighted the positive experience and looked forward to ongoing collaboration. Julie provided a concise overview of the independent audit report, noting that the audit issued an unmodified opinion for FY 2023, indicating that the financial statements were fairly presented.

Key points from the financial statement included total assets of over \$42.8 million as of September 30, 2023, a \$9.2 million increase from the previous year. This was driven by a \$3.5 million rise in cash from state appropriations, investment growth from market recovery, and a \$3.38 million right-of-use asset due to new lease accounting standards. These standards, which align with FASB requirements, reflect operating leases on the balance sheet for the first time.

Commissioner Barnett raised concerns about the complexity of the new accounting standards and asked about their tax implications. Ms. Parker clarified that the changes add reporting complexity but do not affect tax benefits or ownership status for APT.

Foundation Authority Board Member Barry Copeland inquired about the state appropriations, questioning whether the increase included one-time funding. Ms. Parker and Executive Director Wayne Reid confirmed that some funds, particularly for antenna and tower upgrades, were one-time allocations, with most already spent except \$2.5 million earmarked for the special project in Lamar County.

Commissioner J. Holland asked about the reduction in in-kind support. Director Reid and Beverly Phillips explained that in-kind contributions are strategically used to replace budget line items, maintaining a balance to ensure financial health. The decrease was attributed to fewer trade donations and discontinued media partnerships.

Julie Parker confirmed APT's strong financial position, with \$42 million in assets and \$6 million in liabilities, and noted no significant issues found during the audit. CFO Melissa Austin verified that there were no signs of fraud or internal control problems, reinforcing APT's solid financial standing. The audit report concluded with no further questions.

## **EXECUTIVE REVIEW**

Chairman Stephens asked Executive Director Wayne Reid to give his report.

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

Executive Director Wayne Reid presented updates across departments, highlighting notable accomplishments and strategic initiatives:

Nielsen APT Ratings: APT's household reach outperformed other state broadcasters by 37%, despite general rating drops across many networks. APT's strong viewership was sustained by basketball coverage, with a 12-month average of nearly 600,000 households and a peak of 1.2 million in December.

Awards: APT secured one ABBY Award, ten Telly Awards (including two Golds for Yellowhammer), and three Southeast Emmy Awards for projects such as Defending Freedom: The Arthur Shores Story.

Sports Agreement: A new five-year broadcasting deal with AHSAA and NFHS promises enhanced sponsorship for high school football and basketball through March of 2029.

Engineering Updates: A NextGen Warning Award grant from CPB will fund tech upgrades for emergency broadcasts and new systems in NOC for ASTC 3.0. Madison Avenue Studio installations for new cameras, switchers, audio equipment, and more are scheduled for installation in the fourth quarter.

Educational Services: The Certified Educator Program trained 169 educators, impacting over 181,000 students. APT's first STEM Day engaged 65 teachers, with plans for collaborations to boost educational initiatives throughout the state.

Production Updates: Data management advancements in the NOC and an FY25 budget for a NAS system will improve content management. Upcoming broadcasts include *Big Mama Thornton*.

Digital Archive Grant: A Mellon Foundation grant will assist in preserving and digitizing archives, easing administrative duties.

Great Alabama Barbecue Event: Despite rain, the BBQ Cook-Off drew strong community support, with plans for next year already in motion.

APT produced a new Engage Special featuring a debate on the topic of "Should the Use of Absentee Ballot Be Limited?" moderated by Pam Huff, demonstrating its capability to deliver live-like broadcasts. The special aired on August 30, following Capitol Journal, aligning with PBS's voting-themed programming. Director Reid noted that the Engage series will retain a national focus to facilitate wider distribution, covering timely issues like absentee ballots while maintaining a neutral stance.

Friday Cinema Classics: Classic films began airing in July, with sponsorships sought to cover expenses.

STEM Funding Report: The updated STEM spending report indicated that APT invested an additional \$11,000 in DIY Science initiatives, bringing total spending to \$152,000 on DIY and \$148,000 on STEM programs, maintaining a strong focus on educational outreach.

High School Sports Coverage: Foundation Authority member Dr. Ragland expressed appreciation for access to high school sports events and inquired about the possibility of covering high school football playoff games. The discussion revealed that while there is interest, logistics and funding are significant concerns. Governmental Affairs Manager Jack Williams mentioned that covering additional games could significantly increase costs.

Governmental Affairs: Jack Williams reported on state funding updates, legislative advocacy efforts, and the perception challenges faced by APT. He also proposed leveraging military recruitment funds and partnerships as areas for increased underwriting revenue.

Public Affairs Developments: Todd Stacy shared plans for "Capitol Journal" and updates on the new State House studio. He noted legislative interest in APT's programming and future opportunities.

Bicentennial Preparations: Discussions included a digital series on Revolutionary War documents and potential collaborations for America's 250th anniversary, including collaboration with American Village. Some of the Commissioners stated great interest

in producing a series of Heritage Moments, with the same format as the Alabama Bicentennial series APT earlier produced, but overing the heritage of the United States. It was also suggested that in the same way the legislature was successfully asked to provide additional funding for our state's Heritage Series, that special funding again be requested, for our country's Heritage Moments. There was a general consensus that this would be educational for our viewers. Other ideas for celebrating Alabama's role in the Revolutionary War were explored, including coverage of the Battle of Mobile and related local stories.

The discussion wrapped up with ideas about leveraging connections to state legislators with Alabama roots and the potential benefits of this for public broadcasting initiatives.

## **OTHER BUSINESS**

### **A. Reappointment of Barry Copeland, current term will end 9/25/24**

Board Member Barry Copeland had already left the meeting; there was a short discussion about his appointment that ends on September 25, 2024.

**Motion** by: Commissioner J. Holland to reappoint Barry Copeland to the AETFA Board of Directors

**Seconded** by: Commissioner Bebe Williams

**Motion Passed Unanimously**

### **B. Discussion about Board Books and potential new delivery method**

Director Wayne Reid addressed the cost of mailing board books, with a proposal to switch to digital copies to save over \$2,500 annually, while still providing physical copies at meetings and sending hard copies in advance for those who requested them.

**Motion** by: Commissioner J. Holland to suspend sending hard copies of the Commissioners' meeting books and to send digital copies of the board books to everyone except for a few who want hard copies in advance. Commissioners Stephens, Les Barnett, and Foundation Authority Board Member Douglas Ragland requested the hard copies be sent to them.

**Seconded** by: Commissioner Bebe Williams

**Motion Passed Unanimously**

### **C. Traditional Programming for Independence Day**

Commissioner Barnett requested a list of traditional shows that were aired on Independence Day and expressed a desire to continue this practice for Labor Day. The Commission had at an earlier meeting voted for such programming. He

emphasized the importance of traditional programming for viewers for state and federal holidays and sought confirmation from the Commission. All were in agreement. Director Reid confirmed that we would continue to air traditional programming on these types of holidays when possible and he would email a list of the programs aired on Independence Day 2024 to Commission and Board Members.

### **BBC News vs. GB News**

Commissioner Barnett inquired as why APT was carrying BBC News over GB News, pointing out that the BBC is often viewed as having a liberal stance, which may not resonate well with our conservative state. Beverly Phillips mentioned that the BBC is supported through underwriting. Commissioner Barnett explained that GB News offers a debate-driven format with diverse viewpoints but was unsure how interested our state's audience is in BBC News. Mike McKenzie, Director of Programming, added that they typically receive viewer feedback whenever BBC programming is changed. Commissioner Barnett concluded by stating that he has no objections carrying the BBC as long as funding from underwriters.

Commissioner Barnett raised concerns about all engineers being in training on the same day, questioning the availability of technical support. Daniel Black clarified that the training is a one-day session, with all engineers remaining on-call and having remote access to transmitters via computers. He added that this arrangement is consistent with how they manage quarterly engineering meetings in Birmingham.

### **SCHEDULING OF NEXT MEETING**

The group discussed scheduling the next meeting, with suggested dates of October 22 or 29. Chairman Stephens proposed delaying it slightly, allowing more time to arrange the fourth meeting. After further discussion, November 12 was suggested as the new date. Director Wayne Reid indicated that the meeting would be held at Lakeshore Foundation, a renowned facility, where attendees would have the opportunity to tour the premises afterward.

The next AETC meeting will be held on Tuesday, November 12, 2024, at The Lakeshore Foundation in Birmingham, Alabama.

**Motion** by: Commissioner Les Barnett to approve November 12, 2024, as the date of the next meeting

**Seconded** by: Commissioner J. Holland

**Motion Passed Unanimously**

Chairman Stephens noted that there was no further business to discuss and entertained a motion to adjourn the meeting. The motion was moved, seconded, and passed unanimously.

**ADJOURNMENT**

**Motion** by: Commissioner J. Holland  
**Second** by: Commissioner Pete Conroy  
**Motion Passed Unanimously**  
The meeting was adjourned at 1:19 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted,



Lorraine Fancher  
Recording Secretary

**APPROVED – DATE:** \_\_\_\_\_



Mr. Ferris Stephens  
Chairman



Mr. J. Holland  
Secretary