

**EDUCATIONAL COMMUNICATIONS BOARD  
QUARTERLY MEETING  
ECB Board Room  
3319 West Beltline Highway  
Madison, WI  
Remote attendance by Microsoft Teams or phone  
January 19, 2024  
9:30 A.M.**

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MINUTES

Roll Call and Introductions

Board Chair Jim Zylstra called the meeting of the Educational Communications Board (ECB) to order at 9:32am. A roll call was taken and a quorum was verified. A complete attendance list follows:

Board Members Present: Jim Zylstra, Chair  
Paul Hammer  
Dr. Darrell Williams  
Heather LaRoi  
Alyssa Kenney  
Leah Lechleiter-Luke  
Dr. Eric Fulcomer  
Senator Romaine Quinn  
Senator Chris Larson  
Representative David Considine  
Roy Christianson

Absent: Anne Chapman  
Rep. Patrick Snyder  
Angela Adams  
Eileen Littig  
Deborah Hamlett

## **Approval of Minutes from the October 20, 2023 ECB Quarterly Board Meeting**

Paul Hammer moved, seconded by Roy Christianson, to approve the October 20, 2023 meeting minutes. The motion carried by unanimous voice vote.

### **AGENDA ITEM 1.** Report of the Board Chair – *Jim Zylstra*

Mr. Zylstra began by reminding the board that the mission of the Educational Communications Board is to provide a statewide telecommunications system and assistance in the diffusion of advanced technologies in support of education, public media, and public safety. The Board expects the agency to advance the mission and supports the services in redesigning and redefining themselves to do so.

Mr. Zylstra pointed to the upcoming changes to Wisconsin Public Radio, noting that Sarah Ashworth, Director of Wisconsin Public Radio, will present on those transformations at this meeting.

Mr. Zylstra informed the Board to hold their calendars on Thursday, March 21<sup>st</sup>, at 1:00pm for a joint meeting with the Wisconsin Public Radio Association (WPRA) to discuss these changes in detail. This will be a closed meeting; a quorum is required.

There were no other questions or comments from board members.

### **AGENDA ITEM 2.** Report of the Executive Director – *Marta Bechtol*

Executive Director Marta Bechtol informed the Board that she will be traveling to D.C. at the end of February for planned federal advocacy. She will be joined by Heather Reese, Director of Wisconsin Public Media, Roy Christianson, Chair of the WPRA, and Reed Hall, President of the Friends of PBS Wisconsin. The federal budget is now in its third continuing resolution (CR). Funding for the Corporation for Public Broadcasting is in the second phase of the current CR, expiring March 8<sup>th</sup>.

Ms. Bechtol announced that Senator Baldwin will be receiving the Champion of Public Media Award in a presentation at the Library of Congress on February 28<sup>th</sup>. Sen. Baldwin is currently the chair of the Senate appropriations subcommittee for Labor, Health, Human Services, Education and Related Agencies which oversees most of the public media funding.

Ms. Bechtol quickly touched upon strategic plan alignments.

- *Direction 1 – Strengthening the performance of the agency:* There has been an update to the core network switches that will strengthen the integrity and security of the radio networks.
- *Direction 2 – Responsible Stewardship:* Partnership engineers are working together on development of the Eau Claire disaster recovery site, creating critical redundancy and security of the radio service.
- *Direction 3 – Growing and Engaging Audiences:* the PBS Wisconsin digital team is collaborating with the DoIT center to ensure accessible experiences across the state.

There were no other questions or comments from board members.

**AGENDA ITEM 3.** Action Item: Election of Board Officers (Bylaws Article II, Section 3)

Mr. Zylstra reminded the Board that officers are elected each January.

The current officers are:

- Board Chair: Jim Zylstra
- Vice Chair: Alyssa Kenney
- Secretary: Eileen Littig

Mr. Zylstra opened the floor for nominations. Paul Hammer nominated the current slate of officers to serve another term. There were no other nominations from the Board.

Paul Hammer moved for approval, seconded by Roy Christianson. The motion carried by unanimous voice vote.

**AGENDA ITEM 4.** Presentation of FY23 Audit – John Rader and Leah Gaffney, Baker Tilly

Mr. Zylstra introduced John Rader, Managing Director at Baker Tilly. Mr. Rader began by informing the Board that Baker Tilly begins fieldwork with ECB in November of each audit year. He pointed out that ECB is unique in that Aimee Wright, Finance Director, prepares the financial statements herself which is not often the case with clients. He noted that this makes the audit work very efficient, and that Ms. Wright and her team do an excellent job preparing for it.

After this year's fieldwork, the review process began in December and resulted in two reports: the Audit Opinion and the Financial Statements which were issued on January 10<sup>th</sup>, 2024. Mr. Rader stated that an unmodified (or, "clean") opinion has been issued according to the Generally Accepted Accounting Principles (GAAP), a high bar to achieve.

Mr. Rader noted that audits are increasing in complexity with the addition of new GASB accounting standards. Last year ECB had to implement GASB 87, a new standard regarding leases, and this year's audit introduced GASB 96 regarding subscription-based information technology arrangements.

Mr. Rader stated that per the auditing standards Baker Tilly follows material entries must be reported. There was one material entry identified this year and was determined to be the result of a clerical error. Over the past several years, the Wisconsin Retirement System reported a net pension asset. That asset flipped to a liability this year and was incorrectly entered as a debit rather than credit on the balance sheet. This was the only material entry of the audit. He concluded his report with other required disclosures by stating that no fraud or cause for concern was found.

Mr. Rader then introduced Leah Gaffney, Manager at Baker Tilly to present the summarized tables from 2022 and 2023 side-by-side.

Ms. Gaffney stated that when comparing the last two years, the balance flip in the Wisconsin Retirement System created the most impact on the balance sheet. When the State provides new information on balances related to ECB's pension, it has a significant effect on not only the net pension balances, but others as well. Whenever there is a net pension asset, there is a restricted net position related to pension. In 2022, ECB had a net pension asset and a related restricted net position, whereas in 2023, ECB had a liability, which increased the non-current liabilities and removed the restricted net position.

Ms. Gaffney indicated the significant improvement in market conditions over the last two years is driving the non-current assets and the increase in total net position with the Wisconsin Public Broadcasting Foundation (WPBF) investments.

Board Chair Jim Zylstra asked how ECB's financial statements roll into the state's financial statements. Finance Director Aimee Wright explained that during the audit, she is simultaneously working on the entries for the State's financial statements. These entries are sent to State Controller's Office at DOA. ECB fund entries get rolled up into the State's general fund. The WPBF also has a set of entries that are sent to the State Controller's Office which get rolled up as a blended component unit in the State's financial statements.

Mr. Zylstra shared his appreciation for seeing investments bounce back.

Mr. Rader shared his appreciation for working with ECB's Finance Team each year.

Mr. Zylstra thanked the Finance Team – Ms. Wright, Natalia Sutyagina, and Dawn Okon – for the work they put in, and congratulated them on another smooth, successful, and timely report.

There were no other questions or comments from board members.

**AGENDA ITEM 5.** Presentation of WPR.org Redesign – *Sarah Ashworth, Director of Wisconsin Public Radio; Noah Ovshinsky, Director of Content*

Mr. Zylstra introduced Sarah Ashworth, Director of Wisconsin Public Radio. Ms. Ashworth began by reminding the board that the WPR team has been focused on optimization for the last two years and has begun with the redesign of [wpr.org](http://wpr.org). Web development has been undertaken with an audience-centered approach to expand digital and accessible offerings in the palms of the listeners' hands.

WPR hired Alley, a national firm that has worked with other public media stations, to assist with the initial redesign. The new site launched on January 16, 2024. Ms. Ashworth introduced Noah Ovshinsky, Director of Content, to give the Board a tour of the new features.

Mr. Ovshinsky shared two primary goals with this rebuild: 1) a site that increases the chance of audience return, and 2) for the audience to stay longer upon visiting the site. The rebuild focused on a contemporary look, a persistent player, and greater emphasis on accessibility. Mr. Ovshinsky urged the Board to give feedback, noting that the site is in a constant state of evolution and refinement.

There were no other questions or comments from the board.

**AGENDA ITEM 6.** Presentation of FY24-27 Strategic Plan Draft – *Marta Bechtol*

ECB Executive Director Marta Bechtol shared the first draft of the FY24-27 Strategic Plan with the Board which was based on the advice from the Board at the October 20, 2024 meeting; feedback from annual staff surveys; and collected information from our partners at UW. Ms. Bechtol also took into consideration ECB’s capital projects plan, the environment of public media nationally, as well as knowledge from the National Education Telecommunications Association (NETA) where she serves on the Executive Committee, and the Organization of State Broadcasting Executives (OSBE) of which she is the Vice Chair.

Input was also compiled from state initiatives such as the State Emergency Alert System Committee, the Governor’s Council for Cybersecurity, and the Broadband Access Taskforce. As a reminder to the Board, the mission statement is a distillation of state statutes which, along with the vision statement, has not changed.

The role of ECB has grown to include Milwaukee PBS master control and the addition of WEPP-FM which will go live this summer. Our core focus is the network transmission of public radio and TV, along with the uninterrupted distribution of the statewide Emergency Alert System (EAS) which includes AMBER and NOAA alerts. As technology changes, these services – and the agencies ECB coordinates with – have become more critical to the work that is done.

The actions under each direction are aligned with ECB’s published goals and objectives. They serve as guideposts to ensure executive decisions result in the safest, most effective and most economical outcomes.

There were no other questions or comments from the board.

**AGENDA ITEM 7.** Information Item: Q2 financial report – *Aimee Wright, Director of Finance*

Aimee Wright, Director of Finance, informed the Board that through December 2023, ECB’s financials are right in line for where they should be.

75% of CPB grants have been received to date. The remainder will be received after the financial and service reports have been approved. The salary line reflects the approval of the state compensation plan and retroactive payments to staff.

There were no other questions or comments from the board.

**AGENDA ITEM 8.** Adjournment

Roy Christianson moved, seconded by Dr. Fulcomer to adjourn. The motion passed by unanimous voice vote. Jim Zylstra announced the meeting adjourned at 10:41am.