

Robert's Rules of Order

Summary of Procedural Basics and Tips

What is parliamentary procedure?

A set of rules and ethics for conduct at a meeting that allows everyone to be heard and to make decisions without confusion.

Why is parliamentary procedure important?

It is a time-tested method of conducting business at meetings and public gatherings and can be adapted to fit the needs of any organization.

Deliberative Assembly: a gathering to which parliamentary law is generally understood to apply. A Board is a type of *deliberative assembly*

Bylaws: contain the Board's own basic rules governing its internal management. Bylaws are the most important rules which a Board must compose for itself. The content of the Board's bylaws has important bearing on the rights and duties of its members whether present or absent from the Board.

Quorum of Members: the minimum number of members who must be present at the meetings for business to be validly transacted; more than half of active membership.

Must have a quorum to conduct business.

Proceedings in the absence of a quorum: In the absence of a quorum, any business transacted is null and void, except that, if a quorum fails to appear at a regular or properly called meeting, the Board may fix the time to adjourn, recess or take measures to obtain a quorum. Transacting business in the absence of a quorum cannot be waived even by unanimous consent.

Majority: more than half of those voting (unless specified otherwise in By-Laws)

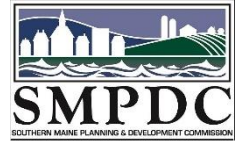
2/3 Majority: 2/3 or more of those voting (unless specified otherwise in By-Laws)

Minimum Officers: the minimum essential officers for the conduct of business are a presiding officer, who conduct the meeting and a secretary, or clerk who makes the written record.

Agenda: guiding document outlining the order of business. Changes should rarely be made at the meeting or after the agenda is adopted/accepted.

Order of Business: organizations using parliamentary procedure usually follow a fixed order of business.

Example:



1. Call to order (Chair)
2. Roll call of members present
3. Determination of quorum
4. Reading and approval of minutes of last meeting
5. Officer's reports
6. Committee reports
7. Special orders – important business previously designated for consideration at the meeting
8. Unfinished business
9. New business
10. Announcements
11. Adjournment

Pattern of Formality: a person presiding at a meeting should not be addressed or referred to by name. Mr. (or Madam) Chairman has been a long established rule. Members address only the Chair, or address each other through the Chair. A member does not speak without first having obtained the floor.

Motion: a formal proposal by a member, in a meeting, that the Board take certain action. Before a member can make a motion or speak in debate, he must obtain the floor, that is, he/she must be recognized by the Chair. The Chair can recognize the member merely by nodding to him/her. On the other hand, formal wording: "the Chair recognizes Mr. Brinks".

Individual members can:

1. Call to order
2. Second motions
3. Debate motions
4. Vote on motions

There are four basic types of motions:

1. *Main Motions:* to introduce items to the membership for their consideration. They cannot be made when any other motion is on the floor, and yield to privileged, subsidiary, and incidental motions.
2. *Subsidiary Motions:* to change or affect how a main motion is handled, and is voted on before a main motion.
3. *Privileged Motions:* to bring up items that are urgent about special or important matters unrelated to pending business.
4. *Incidental Motions:* to provide a means of questioning procedure concerning other motions and must be considered before the other motion.

There are three steps by which a motion is normally presented:

1. A member makes the motion (the words move and offer also refer to this step);



2. Another member seconds the motion;
3. The Chair states the question on the motion:
 - a. Neither the making nor the seconding of a motion places it before the Board, only the Chair can do that. When the Chair has stated the question, the motion is pending or on the floor open to debate. If the Board decides to do what a motion proposes, it “adopts” the motion or the motion is “carried”. If the motion is not carried, it is “rejected”.
 - b. If no member seconds the motion, the Chair must be sure that all have heard the request for a second, otherwise, the motion is rejected.
 - c. When a motion that is in order has been made and seconded, the Chair formally places it before the Board by “stating the question”; that is, he/she states the exact motion and indicates that it is open to debate. Here, the maker of the motion starts the debate.
 - d. The Chair may state the question by saying “It is moved and seconded to adopt the following...” and have the secretary read the motion.
 - e. If a motion is offered in a wording that is not clear or that requires smoothing before it can be recorded in the minutes, it is the duty of the Chair to see that the motion is put into suitable form.
 - f. Members debate the motion (unless no member claims the floor for that purpose).
 - g. The Chair puts the question to the Board by asking; “Is the Board ready for the question” or “Is there any further debate?”.
 - h. The Chair announces the result of the vote.
 - i. Voting can be done by voice or by show of hands.

Voting: Announcement of Voting: for a voice vote: the ayes have it and the motion is adopted or, the noes have it and the motion is lost.

A Chair may determine how the Board votes, either voice or by a show of hands. A Chair may ask for a re-vote if it’s uncertain of the outcome. Although it is the duty of every member who has an opinion on a question to express it by his vote, he/she can abstain. A member has a right to change his/her vote up to the time of the result is announced. Only through unanimous consent of the Board may a member change his/her vote.

Chair Vote: the presiding officer has the same voting right as any other member, however, the Chair protects his/her impartial position by exercising his/her voting right only when his/her vote would affect the outcome, in which case he/she can either vote and thereby change the result, or can abstain. The Chair is not obliged to vote.

Duties of the Presiding Officer:



1. Open the meeting at the appointed time and ascertain that a quorum is present;
2. Announce in order, business that comes before the Board;
3. State and put to vote all questions that legitimately come to the Board;
4. Enforce decorum within the Board;
5. Decide all questions of order;
6. Respond to inquiries of members;
7. Declare the meeting adjourned

All objections to rulings of the presiding officer regarding evidence or procedure shall be made during the course of the hearing.

If after the close of the hearing and during its deliberations the Board determines that any ruling of the Presiding Officer was in error, it may reopen the hearing or take other actions as it deems appropriate to correct the error.

All decisions of the Chair are subject to a majority vote of the Board.

The Chair shall decide all questions of order and procedure. When a member is about to speak, he/she shall respectfully address the Chair, confine him/herself to the question under debate and avoid personalities. No member speaking shall be interrupted by another, but by a call to order or to correct a mistake.

Meeting Minutes

- (1) The minutes of the meeting are normally read and approved at the beginning of the next regular meeting, immediately after the call to order. A special meeting does not approve minutes; minutes should be approved at the next regular meeting. Corrections, if any, and approval of the minutes are normally done by unanimous vote.
- (2) If the Board does not wish to carry out the reading and approval of the minutes at the regular meeting, it may, by majority vote without debate, "dispense with the reading of the minutes." This works if the Board receives the minutes in advance and may just vote on approval without reading.
- (3) If the existence of an error or material omission in the minutes becomes reasonably established after their approval (even many years later), the minutes can then be corrected by means of a motion which requires a two-thirds vote, or a majority vote of the membership. This action is called "Amend Previously Adopted."



- (4) A Board may “Rescind” an entire main motion, resolution, order, or rule that has been adopted at some previous time. The rules of voting are the same as amending.

Other thoughts:

- “When in doubt, recuse or at least declare an interest”
 - A Board member should be well advised to avoid even the appearance of a conflict of interest by abstaining.
- To avoid violations of freedom of access act and the constitutional right to due process, Board members should not have discussions with other Board members regarding an application or other Board business outside a Board meeting.
- If it is necessary for the presiding officer to vacate the chair during a meeting, the chair may, subject to approval of the Board, appoint a chairperson pro tem.
- Minutes should be signed by the secretary and can also be signed, if the Board wishes, by the presiding officer.
- Executive sessions are only allowed with the municipal attorney and only if the Board takes a vote to go into executive session during a public hearing. Boards may not make decisions in executive session.
- Courts have upheld Board’s decisions to reconsider an earlier decision. The key is to be fair and to act quickly before an applicant acquires vested interest.
 - To be vested, the applicant:
 1. Exercised due diligence to comply with the law;
 2. Demonstrated good faith throughout the proceedings; and
 3. Expended substantial unrecoverable funds.
 - Boards should not decide vested rights, leave it to the courts!
- Board of Appeals has the ultimate authority to interpret the provisions of a zoning ordinance



Robert's Rules Procedural Tips for Common Actions							
To Do This:	You Say This:	Interrupt Speaker?	Is a Second Needed?	Is it Debatable?	Can it be Amended?	Vote Needed to Pass	Can it be Reconsidered?
Adjourn / end the meeting	"I move that we adjourn"	No	Yes	No	No	Majority	No
Take a break/recess	"I move that we recess until... or for __minutes"	No	Yes	No	Yes	Majority	No
Suspend further consideration of something ¹	"I move that we table..."	No	Yes	No	No	Majority	Yes, on a negative vote only
Take up a matter previously tabled	"I move we take from the table..."	Yes	Yes	No	No	Majority	No
End a long debate and force a vote on a motion and/or an amended motion	"I move to call a vote on the question"	No	Yes	No	No	2/3	No
Amend a motion	"I move to amend the motion by..."	No	Yes	Yes, but only if the motion to be amended is debatable	Yes	Majority	Yes
Postpone consideration of something to a certain time or definitely ¹	"I move we postpone this matter until..."	No	Yes	Yes, but the debate must be confined to its merits only	Yes	Majority (2/3 if special order)	Yes

¹ **Table vs Postpone:** "Table" is used to lay a topic/motion aside temporarily when something else of immediate urgency has arisen or when something else needs to be addressed before consideration of the pending question is resumed. "Postpone" is used to put off, within limits, a pending question to a definite day, meeting, or hour, or until after a certain event.



Robert's Rules Procedural Tips for Common Actions							
To Do This:	You Say This:	Interrupt Speaker?	Is a Second Needed?	Is it Debatable?	Can it be Amended?	Vote Needed to Pass	Can it be Reconsidered?
Complain if you think the Board is doing something wrong	"Point of order"	Yes	No	No	No	No vote needed	No
Vote on a ruling by the Chair	"I appeal the Chair's decision"	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Majority	Yes
Avoid considering an improper matter	"I object to consideration of this motion"	Yes	No	No	No	2/3	Only if the motion was voted on
Request information	"Point of information"	Yes	No	No	No	No vote needed	No
Reconsideration ²	"I would like to make a motion to reconsider the application of... (name of project)"	Not once the motion has been introduced	Yes	Only if original motion was debatable	No	Majority	No

² A motion to reconsider must be made by someone who voted in the affirmative of the initial vote. The applicant must be notified and the Agenda should have the item listed as an action item. If no motion is made, the reconsideration dies.