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Robert's Rules Tips and Reminders for Boards, Committees and Commissions

1. Robert's Rules of Order (RR) provides an orderly framework to ensure that the majority of a body ultimately determines a decision or action while protecting the minority's rights to discussion and debate. RR are flexible enough for a body to explore options and opinions and build consensus, and also provide structure encouraging the body to formulate and focus on a specific action or decision. [Chapter 33](#) of the Madison General Ordinances modify some parts of RR and tailor them to the Madison committee process.
2. City BCCs may adopt rules of procedure that do not conflict with ordinances or resolutions adopted by the Common Council (for example, the rules for a motion for reconsideration cannot be altered). MGO 33.01(9)(b).
3. Most bodies function perfectly well without the use of more complicated provisions of RR, simply by making a motion, seconding the motion, conducting discussion and debate, possibly amending the motion, and holding a vote. Procedures can be further simplified by the use of unanimous consent. When the chair entertains requests that are minor or appear to have broad support among members, the chair can simply ask if there is any objection to the request being granted or the proposal being adopted, without requiring a motion and a second.
4. There are no magic words to make a motion except that items to be returned to the Common Council require a recommendation from the referral bodies. For example, the maker of the motion can say "I move that the proposed ordinance be recommended for adoption" OR "I make a motion that the resolution be placed on file" OR "Move recommendation of re-referral for further discussion."
5. A BCC can recommend a change to an item referred to it by the Common Council or another body. If the lead sponsor agrees with the recommended change, it becomes a Substitute and appears as the recommended action on the Council agenda. If the lead sponsor does not agree but another alder wishes to sponsor the recommended change, it becomes an Alternate and can be introduced for consideration at the Council meeting.

6. "Placing on file without prejudice" is a recommendation that the Council not approve the item and allows the item to be re-introduced at any time. If a BCC wishes to further discuss an item at a future meeting that is scheduled beyond the item's return date to the Council, the BCC may recommend that the Council re-refer the item.
7. Common Council members may participate in the discussion at a BCC meeting but may not make motions or seconds and cannot vote. Alders may not participate in quasi-judicial hearings or deliberations after hearings. MGO 33.01(9)(d).
8. All BCCs must include a public comment meeting near the beginning of the agenda, allowing members of the public who register to speak at least three minutes to speak on any topic, even if it is not on the agenda. BCC members may ask questions of public speakers which they may or may not agree to answer. The BCC may not take action on items that are not listed on the agenda and should limit discussion regarding those items when they are mentioned in public comments and may be matters that come before the body in the future. MGO 33.01(9)(e).
9. BCCs may also permit public comments when agenda items are taken up. A BCC may also establish more relaxed rules to allow for a more free-flowing discussion with the public during consideration of items.
10. The chair of a BCC is responsible for assisting members with process questions and has authority to maintain order and decorum. The chair may vote only to create or break a tie, and does not participate in making motions or discussion, although this rule can also be modified by the body. MGO 33.01(9)(c).
11. A quorum is a majority of the members of the BCC established by ordinance or resolution, including vacancies but excluding alternates. If a quorum is not achieved within 15 minutes of the scheduled start time, the BCC must adjourn without taking any action other than setting a time for the next meeting. If the chair is aware that a member is traveling to a meeting or attempting to connect virtually, the 15 minutes may be extended by unanimous consent. MGO 33.01(8).
12. Motions must be passed by at least a majority of the members present and a majority of the quorum for the BCC. MGO 33.01(8)(d).
13. A motion to adjourn is not debatable except that a member may remind the body of any items that may require timely action.
14. It is the responsibility of all members of the body to assist the chair in maintaining decorum. Discussion and debate should focus on the merits of a proposal and avoid personalities and questioning the motives of another member. "The measure, not the member, is the subject of debate." Robert's Rules of Order (12th ed.) 43:21.