



Robert's Rules of Order

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Sources

- ◆ Robert's Rules of Order (12th Ed.): 650 pages
- ◆ Robert's Rules Abridged: 200 pages
- ◆ Robert's Rules In Short ("May's Manual"): 7 pages.
- ◆ Chapter 2, and sec. 33.01, MGO

Who is Robert?

- ◆ General Henry M. Robert (1837-1923), distinguished engineer.
- ◆ First codified in 1876. Now in its 12th edition.
- ◆ First edition not completely edited by a member of the Robert family.



Purposes of Robert's Rules

- ◆ Run meetings efficiently.
- ◆ Protect the rights of the majority, the minority, individual members and absent members.
- ◆ A careful balance to allow action, and in some cases to halt action.

Meeting Agenda

- ◆ Governed by Wisconsin's Open Meeting Law (sec. 19.81, *et seq.*, Stats.) and sec. 3.71, MGO
- ◆ Agenda items must clearly apprise the public of the matter to be considered.
- ◆ No action if not on agenda and properly noticed (normally 24 hours).

Chapter 2, MGO

- ◆ Chapter 2 constitutes the standing rules for the Common Council.
- ◆ Except as modified by Chapter 2, Robert's Rules govern Council meetings. Sec. 2.32.
- ◆ Standing Order of Business, sec. 2.04.
- ◆ Introduction of Business at a prior meeting, secs. 2.05, 2.24 and 2.25, with exceptions.

Ch. 2, MGO (cont.)

- ◆ Majority vote of all members, sec. 2.18.
- ◆ $\frac{3}{4}$ majority to change budget, sec. 2.19.
- ◆ Reconsideration, sec. 2.21.
- ◆ Time limits on speaking, sec. 2.29.
- ◆ Rules often suspended by $\frac{2}{3}$ vote to take out of order.
- ◆ Use of the Consent Agenda.

Role of the Chair

- ◆ Obligation to run an orderly meeting.
- ◆ Recognizes members.
- ◆ Rules on votes and procedures, subject to call for roll
- ◆ Rules on procedure, subject to appeal to body.
- ◆ Mayor may only vote in the case of a 10 – 10 tie.

Proceed by Motion!

- ◆ The most basic rule of Robert's Rules: proceed by motion.
- ◆ No magic words: “I move that _____”, “I move adoption of _____”, “Move referral.”
- ◆ Matters before Council usually have a recommendation which becomes the motion.
- ◆ Substitutes and Alternates may be introduced.

Classes of Motions

- ◆ Main motion. Underlying matter before the body.
- ◆ Subsidiary motions. To do something with or to the main motions (e.g., amend, refer).
- ◆ Incidental motions. Procedural matters related to the main motion that take precedence (e.g., point of order, suspend the rules).
- ◆ Privileged motions. Limited number that take precedence (recess, privilege, adjourn).

Fifteen Common Motions

- ◆ Adjourn. Not debatable.
- ◆ Adopt.
- ◆ Amend. Normally no more than two levels of amendment allowed. Robert's, Sec. 12. Friendly amendments are accepted without objection from the Council. MGO 2.08(3)
- ◆ Division of Assembly/Roll Call. Granted when asked, not debatable.
- ◆ Division of Question/Separation. Separates votes on different issues or paragraphs. Requires a second, but is not debatable.

15 Motions (cont.)

- ◆ Lay on Table/Take off Table. Temporarily delay taking action. Not debatable.
- ◆ Place on file. Equivalent of a motion to delay or postpone indefinitely. Non-adoption without voting it down. 60-day rule and placing on file without prejudice. MGO 2.05(5)
- ◆ Request for Information. A request for non-procedural gain information before taking further action. No second required, a member simply states “Point of information” and is recognized.

15 Motions (cont.)

- ◆ Point of Order/Procedure. Another incidental motion, no second required. It raises a question about the procedure being used. The Chair rules on the point, subject to an appeal (which does require a second) to the full body.
- ◆ Point of Privilege. A privileged motion, no second. Relates to a personal matter.
- ◆ Previous Question. Ends debate and proceeds to an immediate vote. Requires a second, not debatable and requires a 2/3 vote.

15 Motions (cont.)

- ◆ Recess. A privileged motion. The length of the recess should be stated. Not debatable.
- ◆ Reconsideration. Asks that a matter be reconsidered. Must be made at the same or next meeting by a member who voted for the winning side or had an excused absence.
- ◆ Referral. The matter is referred to another body or a later meeting of the same body. Commit in RR.
- ◆ Suspend the Rules. Requires a 2/3 majority.

Consent

- ◆ Use of unanimous consent is a way to quickly move through non-controversial items.
- ◆ “Is there any objection to _____?”
- ◆ Council uses an extensive consent agenda.

Precedence of Motions

- ◆ See Robert's Rules Sec. 5 and Chart I.
- ◆ A motion is not in order when a motion with higher precedence is under consideration. The motion with precedence must be disposed of before the other motion is allowed.
- ◆ Following charts show precedence; a motion is not in order if it has a higher number than the pending matter.

Undebatable Motions

- ◆ 1. Adjourn.
- ◆ 2. Recess.
- ◆ 3. Question of Privilege.
- ◆ 4. Lay on the Table.
- ◆ 5. Previous Question
- ◆ 6. Limit or Extend Debate.

Debatable Motions

- ◆ 7. Postpone to a definite time.
- ◆ 8. Refer or commit.
- ◆ 9. Amend.
- ◆ 10. Postpone indefinitely/place on file.
- ◆ 11. Main motion.

Incidental Motions

- ◆ Incidental motions are not included in the list of precedence because they are subject to individual rules. Generally, whenever an incidental motion is in order, it takes precedence over all other matters. Key incidental motions are Point of order or information, Suspend the Rules, Division of the Assembly or the Question).

Meeting Decorum

- ◆ Chair is responsible for maintaining order.
- ◆ Members can also raise point of order.
- ◆ Productive and civil debate requires focusing on the issue and proposal, not personalities and motivations.
- ◆ Direct remarks to the Chair, not at members of the body.

Meeting Decorum

- ◆ “Debate must be confined to the merits of the pending question. Speakers must address their remarks to the chair, maintain a courteous tone, and . . . avoid interjecting a personal note into debate. To this end, they must never attack or make any allusion to the motives of members.”

Robert’s Rules, (12th edition) 4:30

Meeting Decorum

- ◆ When a question is pending, a member can condemn the nature or likely consequences of the proposed measure in strong terms, but they must avoid personalities, and under no circumstances can they attack or question the motives of another member. The measure, not the member, is the subject of debate.

Robert's Rules (12th edition) 43:21

“May’s Manual”

- ◆ Available on the City Attorney’s web page.
- ◆ <http://www.cityofmadison.com/attorney/>
- ◆ Contains a “Cheat Sheet” on common motions.



Questions?



- ◆ Call us at 266-4511
- ◆ Michael Haas or Patricia Lauten with questions related to Robert's Rules and legislative procedures.