


Robert's Rules of Order for BCC's



Michael Haas

City Attorney

Madison, Wisconsin

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Who is Robert?

- ◆ General Henry M. Robert (1837-1923), U.S. Army officer and distinguished engineer.
- ◆ Began as 15-page pamphlet, first manuscript printed in Milwaukee in 1875 and first official publication 1876.
- ◆ With the passing of Henry Robert's grandson, 12th edition is the first not completely edited by a member of the Robert family.

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



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).

Sec. 33.01, MGO

- ◆ Governs City Boards, Committees and Commissions. Revised in 2009.
- ◆ Members serve 3-year terms, except Alders who serve concurrent with their term of office.
- ◆ 15 minute rule on quorum. Quorum normally is a majority of authorized members. Sec. 33.01(8).
- ◆ May establish own rules that do not conflict with ordinances or resolutions (except for reconsideration), otherwise apply Robert's Rules. Sec. 33.01(9)(b).

Sec. 33.01, MGO (cont.)

- ◆ May create and dissolve subcommittees and appoint members. Sec. 33.01(4)(d).
- ◆ Committees must allow Council members to participate in committee meetings under sec. 33.01(9)(d), MGO.
- ◆ May ask questions and participate in debate, but may not vote or make any motions.

Public Comment – Sec. 33.01(9)(e)

- ◆ Must allow public comment period at beginning of meeting for items on the agenda and not on the agenda.
- ◆ Cannot take action on matters raised that are not on the agenda.
- ◆ May allow public comment when item is taken up for 3 minutes each (6 minutes with interpreter)

Referrals

- ◆ Time limit on response to referral is normally 45 days per sec. 2.05(1).
- ◆ Referral is deemed waived if no report within deadline set by Council. Sec. 33.01(11).
- ◆ Council also has authority to act before referral is returned.

Voting -- Sec. 33.01(8)(d)

- ◆ Motions must pass by a vote of a majority of members in attendance and a majority of the quorum.
- ◆ Roll call vote required if not unanimous.
- ◆ “Abstain” or “present” does not destroy quorum; absence does.
- ◆ Example: 4 ayes, 2 nays, 3 abstentions on 9 member body. Motion fails.

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.”
- ◆ Can discuss preliminary information but motion focuses debate.

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).
- ◆ See Robert's Rules, Secs. 5-6.

Fifteen Common Motions

- ◆ Robert's lists at least 84 different types of motions, Table III.
- ◆ Adjourn. Not debatable.
- ◆ Adopt.
- ◆ Amend. Normally no more than two levels of amendment allowed. Robert's, Sec. 12.
- ◆ 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. Use by Council and some committees, is equivalent of a motion to delay or postpone indefinitely. Non-adoption without voting it down.
- ◆ Point of Information. An incidental motion to 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.

Precedence of Motions

- ◆ See “Cheat Sheet,” 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.

Role of Chair

- ◆ Obligation to run an orderly meeting.
- ◆ Recognizes members.
- ◆ Rules on votes, subject to call for roll.
- ◆ Rules on procedure, subject to appeal to body.
- ◆ Generally, not to vote except when vote decides outcome, and not to participate in debate. Committees may change by rule.

Consent

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

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

Summary

- ◆ Reaching unanimous votes is not the only, or even the primary goal, of Robert's Rules. The Rules exist to create a safe environment for healthy and thoughtful debate, without fear of expressing opposing viewpoints; to reach decisions representing a deliberate majority; and to resolve matters and proceed to the next item without rancor.

“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.