

Robert's Rules of Order for City of Madison Boards, Commissions & Committees

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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



Robert's Rules Simplified

- The most basic rule: Proceed by Motion.
- Motion → Second → Discuss → Vote
- No magic words:
 - *"I move that____",*
 - *"I move adoption of____",*
 - *"Move referral"*



Role of the Chair

- Run an orderly meeting
- Recognize members
- Rules on votes, subject to request for roll call vote
- Rules on procedure, subject to appeal to body



Unanimous Consent

- Use of unanimous consent is a way to quickly move through non-controversial items
- “Is there any objection to _____?”
- In virtual meetings, Chair asks to raise virtual hand if object, otherwise, rules as unanimous vote



Common Motions

- Adjourn
 - Not debatable
- Amend
 - Up to two levels of amendment allowed
 - “Friendly” amendments can be accepted without objection
- Point of Order
 - Raises question about procedure
 - Chair rules on the point, subject to an appeal to the full body
- Point of Privilege
 - A privileged motion, no second required
 - Relates to personal matter



Other Motions

- Previous Question or Call the Question
 - Ends debate and proceeds to an immediate vote
 - Requires a second, not debatable, and requires a 2/3 vote
- 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
 - Referred to another body or later meeting of the same body



Precedence of Motions

- 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
- Motion to Adjourn takes precedence over all motions except a “main motion” that is pending



Undebatable Motions

- Adjourn
- Recess
- Question of Privilege
- Previous 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

- *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



"Robert's Rules in Short"

- 8-page .pdf on the Common Council's web page:
<https://www.cityofmadison.com/council/documents/onboarding/attorney--roberts-rules-handout.pdf>
- "Cheat Sheet" on the last page of the document

"Cheat Sheet" for Robert's Rules						
Motion	In Order When Another has the Floor?	Second Required?	Debatable?	Amendable?	Vote Required for Adoption	Can be reconsidered?
Main Motion	N	Y	Y	Y	Majority unless other spec'd by Bylaws	Y
Adjournment	N	Y	N	Y	Majority	N
Recess (no question before the body)	N	Y	N	Y	Majority	N
Recess (question before the body)	N	Y	Y	Y	Majority	N
Accept Report	N	Y	Y	Y	Majority	Y
Amend Pending Motion	N	Y	If motion to be amended is debatable	Y	Majority	Y
Amend an Amendment of Pending Motion	N	Y	See above	N	Majority	Y
Change from Agenda to Take a Matter out of Order	N	Y	N	N	Two-thirds	N
Limit Debate Previous Question / Question	N	Y	N	Y	Two-thirds	Yes, but not if vote taken on pending motion.
Limit Debate or extend limits for duration of meeting	N	Y	Y	Y	Two-thirds	Y
Division of Assembly (Roll Call)	Y	N	N	N	Demand by a single member compels division	N
Division of Ques/ Motion	N	Y	N	Y	Majority	N
Point of Information	Y	N	N	N	Vote is not taken	N
Point of Order / Procedure	Y	N	N	N	Vote is not taken	N
Lay on Table	N	Y	N	N	Majority	N
Take from Table	N	Y	N	N	Majority	N
Suspend the Rules as applied to rules of order or, take motion out of order	N	Y	N	N	Two-thirds	N
Refer (Commit)	N	Y	Y	N	Majority	Neg. vote only

Questions?

- Contact City Atty Michael Haas or Deputy City Atty Patricia Lauten with questions related to Robert's Rules.
- City Attorney's Office
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