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Robert's Rules Tips and Reminders for Disability Rights Commission

About Robert's Rules of Order

Robert's Rules of Order (RR) is a framework that helps a group of people, or body, make sure that their decisions reflect the majority position. It also makes sure the minority has the right to discuss the issue. RR can be flexible enough for a body to explore options and build consensus. RR also provides structure to encourage the body to focus on a specific action or decision. [Chapter 33](#) of the Madison General Ordinances tailors some parts of RR to the Madison committee process.

City BCCs may adopt other rules of procedure if they do not conflict with ordinances or resolutions (for example, the rules for a motion for reconsideration cannot be changed). MGO 33.01(9)(b). Most bodies function well using a simplified version of RR.

Quorum

MGO 39.04 requires the DRC to have 13 members including one Alder. A quorum is a majority of the members of the including vacancies. For the DRC quorum is 7 members.

A BCC must adjourn when there is not a quorum within the first 15 minutes of a scheduled meeting. The BCC may not conduct business but can set a time for the next meeting. If the Chair knows a member is on their way, the 15 minutes may be extended by unanimous consent. MGO 33.01(8).

Outside of meetings no more than 3 DRC members can discuss DRC business in person or by email without public notice. Public notice can be given for events involving DRC business so that any interested members can attend. Public notice is not required for social gatherings.

Public Comment

All BCCs must include a public comment meeting near the beginning of the agenda. This gives members of the public who register to speak at least three minutes to speak. Members of the public can talk about topics not on the agenda. BCC members may ask questions. Public speakers can answer them or not. Public comments may also be allowed when an agenda item is being discussed. A BCC may use more relaxed rules to allow for a more free-flowing discussion with the public.

Motions and Voting

1. The BCC may not take action on items not on the agenda. They should limit discussion about items not on the agenda MGO 33.01(9)(e).
2. The Chair helps members by answering questions about the motion and voting process. The Chair also makes sure the meeting has order and members are respectful.
3. Any member except the Chair and an Alder can request the body make a decision or take an action by making a motion. There are no magic words to make a motion. For example, "I move that ..." OR "I make a motion that ..." One exception is motions to return an item to the Common Council. These require a recommendation from the bodies making the referral. For example, "I move recommendation of re-referral for further discussion."
4. Any member except the Chair and an Alder can second the motion.
5. All members can discuss the motion. Members should feel free to express consensus, different perspectives, or minority opinions. Discussion and debate should focus on the merits of a proposal and avoid personalities. "The measure, not the member, is the subject of debate." Robert's Rules of Order (12th ed.) 43:21.
6. During discussion a member may ask for a change to the motion. This is called "amending the motion." When changes are minor or have broad support, the Chair can ask if there is any objection to the amendment without requiring a motion and a second.
7. After discussion, the body votes. The Chair asks for those who agree with the motion to say "yay" and those who disagree to say "nay." When everyone agrees this is called unanimous consent. To simplify voting, especially in virtual meetings, a best practice is for the Chair to state that they will assume there is unanimous consent unless a member objects. If there is no objection the motion passes unanimously. If any members vote no, that should be reflected in the vote tally. A roll call vote is recommended if more than one member objects.
8. A motion to adjourn is not discussed. However, a member may remind the body of any time-sensitive items before voting to adjourn.
9. The Chair may vote only to create or break a tie. Generally, the chair does not participate in discussion or making motions, but this rule can also be changed by the body. MGO 33.01(9)(c).
10. 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).

Referrals

A BCC can recommend a change to an item referred by the Common Council or another body. If the lead sponsor agrees, it becomes a "substitute", and the new version will be on the Council agenda. If the lead sponsor does not agree but another Alder wishes to sponsor the change, it becomes an "Alternate" and can be introduced for consideration at the Council meeting.

"Placing on file without prejudice" is a recommendation that the Council not approve the item and allow it be re-introduced at any time. The BCC may recommend that the Council re-refer the item when it wants to discuss it again at a meeting after the item's return date to the Council.