

# Rules of procedure for municipal councils

by William L. Steude and Shirley S. Smith  
edited by Sue A. Jeffers

Council rules of procedure for home rule cities and villages are generally authorized by city/village charter. A general law village is required by the General Law Village Act, 1895 PA 3 as amended, to adopt "rules of its own proceedings." MCL 65.5. Rules of procedure help a council to run an efficient meeting and to deal with the public and the media in a positive manner.

The council should review its rules of procedure at its first meeting after councilmembers have been elected, have taken office and when a quorum is present. Following discussion and any amendments, the council should adopt the rules of procedure. This sample provides suggestions on what can be included in the rules of procedure. It may be modified locally as appropriate.

## Sample rules of procedure

### A. Regular and special meetings

All meetings of the city/village council will be held in compliance with state statutes, including the Open Meetings Act, 1976 PA 267 as amended, and with these rules.

#### 1. Regular meetings

Regular meetings of the city/village council will be held on \_\_\_\_\_ of each month beginning at \_\_\_\_\_ p.m. at the city/village office unless otherwise rescheduled by resolution of the council. Council meetings shall conclude no later than \_\_\_\_\_ p.m., subject to extension by the council.

#### 2. Special meetings

A special meeting shall be called by the clerk upon the written request of the mayor/president or any three members of the council on at least 24 hours' written notice to each member of the council served personally or left at the councilmember's usual place of residence. Special meeting notices shall state the purpose of the meeting. No official action shall be transacted at any special meeting of the council unless the item has been stated in the notice of such meeting.

#### 3. Posting requirements for regular and special meetings

- a. Within 10 days after the first meeting of the council following the election, a public notice stating the dates, times and places of the regular monthly council meetings will be posted at the city/village offices. [Villages without a principal office must post in the county clerk's office.]

- b. For a rescheduled regular or a special meeting of the council, a public notice stating the date, time, and place of the meeting shall be posted at least 18 hours before the meeting at the city/village office. [Villages without a principal office must post in the county clerk's office.]
- c. The notice described above is not required for a meeting of the council in emergency session in the event of a severe and imminent threat to the health, safety or welfare of the public when two-thirds of the members of the council determine that delay would be detrimental to the village's efforts in responding to the threat.

[The Michigan Open Meetings Act requires that copies of the notice of public meetings be provided by first-class mail upon request and payment of a reasonable yearly fee for the costs of printing and postage. Section d. could be added here to indicate the fee determined by the council for these costs.]

#### 4. Minutes of regular and special meetings

The clerk shall attend the council meetings and record all the proceedings and resolutions of the council in accordance with [Section 64.5 of the General Law Village Act of 1895 as amended and] the Open Meetings Act. In the absence of the clerk, the council may appoint one of its own members or another person to temporarily perform the clerk's duties.

Within 15 days of a council meeting a synopsis showing the substance of each separate decision of the council or the entirety of the council proceedings shall be prepared by the clerk and shall indicate the vote of the councilmembers. After the mayor/president approves this document, it shall be published in a newspaper of general circulation in the city/village or posted in three public places in the city/village.

A copy of the minutes of each regular or special council meeting shall be available for public inspection at the village offices during regular business hours.

## 5. Study sessions

Upon the call of the mayor/president or the council and with appropriate notice to the councilmembers and to the public, the council may convene a work session devoted exclusively to the exchange of information relating to municipal affairs. No votes shall be taken on any matters under discussion nor shall any councilmember enter into a formal commitment with another member regarding a vote to be taken subsequently.

## B. Conduct of meetings

### 1. Meetings to be public

All regular and special meetings of the council shall be open to the public, and citizens shall have a reasonable opportunity to be heard in accordance with such rules and regulations as the council may determine, except that the meetings may be closed to the public and the media in accordance with the Open Meetings Act.

All official meetings of the council and its committees shall be open to the media, freely subject to recording by radio, television and photographic services at any time, provided that such arrangements do not interfere with the orderly conduct of the meetings.

### 2. Agenda preparation

An agenda for each regular council meeting shall be prepared by the mayor/president with the following order of business:

- a. Call to order and roll call of council
- b. Public hearings on ordinances under consideration
- c. Brief public comment on agenda items
- d. Approval of consent agenda
- e. Approval of regular agenda
- f. Approval of council minutes
- g. Submission of bills
- h. Communications to the council
- i. Reports from council committees
- j. Reports from officers as scheduled, e.g. manager, attorney, etc.

k. Unfinished business

l. New business

m. Announcements

n. Adjournment

Any councilmember shall have the right to add items to the regular agenda before it is approved.

### 3. Consent agenda

A consent agenda may be used to allow the council to act on numerous administrative or noncontroversial items at one time. Included on this agenda can be non-controversial matters such as approval of minutes, payment of bills, approval of recognition resolutions, etc. Upon request by any member of the council, an item shall be removed from the consent agenda and placed on the regular agenda for discussion.

### 4. Agenda distribution

[This section should explain when and how councilmembers will receive their agendas.]

### 5. Quorum

A majority of the entire elected or appointed and sworn members of the council shall constitute a quorum for the transaction of business at all council meetings. In the absence of a quorum, a lesser number may adjourn any meeting to a later time or date with appropriate public notice.

### 6. Attendance at council meetings

Election to the city/village council is a privilege freely sought by the nominee. It carries with it the responsibility to participate in council activities and represent the residents of the city/village. Attendance at council meetings is critical to fulfilling this responsibility. A general law village council is empowered by Section 65.5 of the General Law Village Act as amended to adjourn a meeting if a quorum is not present and compel attendance in a manner prescribed by its ordinance.

The council may excuse absences for cause. If a councilmember has more than three unexcused successive absences for regular or special council meetings, the council may enact a resolution of reprimand. In the event that the member's absences continue for more than three additional successive regular or special meetings of the council, the council may enact a resolution of censure or request the councilmember's resignation or both.

## 7. Presiding officer

The presiding officer shall be responsible for enforcing these rules of procedure and for enforcing orderly conduct at meetings. The mayor/president is ordinarily the presiding officer. The council shall appoint one of its members mayor/president pro tempore, who shall preside in the absence of the president. In the absence of both the mayor/president and the mayor/president pro tempore, the member present who has the longest consecutive service on the council shall preside.

## 8. Disorderly conduct

The mayor/president may call to order any person who is being disorderly by speaking out of order or otherwise disrupting the proceedings, failing to be germane, speaking longer than the allotted time or speaking vulgarities. Such person shall be seated until the chair determines whether the person is in order.

If the person so engaged in presentation is called out of order, he or she shall not be permitted to continue to speak at the same meeting except by special leave of the council. If the person shall continue to be disorderly and disrupt the meeting, the chair may order the sergeant at arms to remove the person from the meeting. No person shall be removed from a public meeting except for an actual breach of the peace committed at the meeting.

[It is suggested that there be an ordinance governing disruption of public meetings, prepared with advice of the municipal attorney and the municipal liability insurance carrier on the risks, limits and force allowed to eject members. This ordinance should stipulate the procedure to be followed and the resource to be used for the sergeant-at-arms function, e.g. local police, county sheriff, etc. By planning in advance how to handle attempted disruptions, you can keep the meeting in order.]

## C. Closed meetings

### 1. Purpose

Closed meetings may be held only for the reasons authorized in the Open Meetings Act, which are the following:

- a. To consider the dismissal, suspension, or disciplining of, or to hear complaints or charges brought against a public officer, employee, staff member or individual agent when the named person requests a closed meeting.
- b. For strategy and negotiation sessions connected with the negotiation of a collective bargaining agreement when either negotiating party requests a closed hearing.

- c. To consider the purchase or lease of real property up to the time an option to purchase or lease that real property is obtained.
- d. To consult with the municipal attorney or another attorney regarding trial or settlement strategy in connection with specific pending litigation, but only when an open meeting would have a detrimental financial effect on the litigating or settlement position of the council.
- e. To review the specific contents of an application for employment or appointment to a public office when a candidate requests that the application remain confidential. However, all interviews by a public body for employment or appointment to a public office shall be held in an open meeting.
- f. To consider material exempt from discussion or disclosure by state or federal statute.

## 2. Calling closed meetings

At a regular or special meeting, the councilmembers, elected or appointed and serving, by a two-thirds roll call vote may call a closed session under the conditions outlined in Section C.1 of the Open Meetings Act. The roll call vote and purpose(s) for calling the closed meeting shall be entered into the minutes of the public part of the meeting at which the vote is taken.

## 3. Minutes of closed meetings

A separate set of minutes shall be taken by the clerk or the designated secretary of the council at the closed session. These minutes will be retained by the clerk, shall not be available to the public, and shall only be disclosed if required by a civil action, as authorized by the Michigan Open Meetings Act. These minutes may be destroyed one year and one day after approval of the minutes of the regular meeting at which the closed session was approved.

## D. Discussion and voting

### 1. Rules of parliamentary procedure

The rules of parliamentary practice as contained in the latest edition of [Robert's Rules of Order or an alternative source of procedural rules] shall govern the council in all cases to which they are applicable, provided that they are not in conflict with these rules, city/village ordinances or applicable state statutes. The mayor/president may appoint a parliamentarian.

The chair shall preserve order and decorum and may speak to points of order in preference to other councilmembers. The chair shall decide all questions arising under this parliamentary authority, subject to appeal and reversal by a majority of the councilmembers present.

Any member may appeal to the council a ruling of the presiding officer. If the appeal is seconded, the member making the appeal may briefly state the reason for the appeal and the presiding officer may briefly state the ruling. There shall be no debate on the appeal and no other member shall participate in the discussion. The question shall be, "Shall the decision of the chair be sustained?" If the majority of the members present vote "aye," the ruling of the chair is sustained; otherwise it is overruled.

## 2. Conduct of discussion

During the council discussion and debate, no member shall speak until recognized for that purpose by the chair. After such recognition, the member shall confine discussion to the question at hand and to its merits and shall not be interrupted except by a point of order or privilege raised by another member. Speakers should address their remarks to the chair, maintain a courteous tone and avoid interjecting a personal note into debate.

No member shall speak more than once on the same question unless every member desiring to speak to that question shall have had the opportunity to do so.

The chair, at his or her discretion and subject to the appeal process mentioned in Section D.1., may permit any person to address the council during its deliberations.

## 3. Ordinances and resolutions

No ordinance, except an appropriation ordinance, an ordinance adopting or embodying an administrative or governmental code or an ordinance adopting a code of ordinances, shall relate to more than one subject, and that subject shall be clearly stated in its title.

A vote on all ordinances and resolutions shall be taken by a roll call vote and entered in the minutes unless it is a unanimous vote. If the vote is unanimous, it shall be necessary only to so state in the minutes, unless a roll call vote is required by law or by council rules.

## 4. Roll call

In all roll call votes, the names of the members of the council shall be called in alphabetical order. [Names may be called with all names in alphabetical order or alphabetical order with the president voting last or the council may select another system.]

## 5. Duty to vote

Election to a deliberative body carries with it the obligation to vote. Councilmembers present at a council meeting shall vote on every matter before the body, unless otherwise excused or prohibited from voting by law. A councilmember who is present and abstains or does not respond to a roll call vote shall be counted as voting with the prevailing side and shall be so recorded, unless otherwise excused or prohibited by law from voting.

Conflict of interest, as defined by law, shall be the sole reason for a member to abstain from voting. The opinion of the city/village attorney shall be binding on the council with respect to the existence of a conflict of interest. A vote may be tabled, if necessary, to obtain the opinion of the city/village attorney.

The right to vote is limited to the members of council present at the time the vote is taken. Voting by proxy or by telephone is not permitted.

All votes must be held and determined in public; no secret ballots are permitted.

## 6. Results of voting

In all cases where a vote is taken, the chair shall declare the result.

It shall be in order for any councilmember voting in the majority to move for a reconsideration of the vote on any question at that meeting or at the next succeeding meeting of the council. When a motion to reconsider fails, it cannot be renewed.

## E. Citizen participation

### 1. General

Each regular council meeting agenda shall provide for reserved time for audience participation.

If requested by a member of the council, the presiding officer shall have discretion to allow a member of the audience to speak at times other than reserved time for audience participation.

### 2. Length of presentation

Any person who addresses the council during a council meeting or public hearing shall be limited to \_\_\_\_\_ minutes in length per individual presentation. The clerk will maintain the official time and notify the speakers when their time is up.

### 3. Addressing the council

When a person addresses the council, he or she shall state his or her name and home address. Remarks should be confined to the question at hand and

addressed to the chair in a courteous tone. No person shall have the right to speak more than once on any particular subject until all other persons wishing to be heard on that subject have had the opportunity to speak.

## F. Miscellaneous

### 1. Adoption and amendment of rules of procedure

These rules of procedure of the council will be placed on the agenda of the first meeting of the council following the seating of the newly elected councilmembers for review and adoption. A copy of the rules adopted shall be distributed to each councilmember.

The council may alter or amend its rules at any time by a vote of a majority of its members after notice has been given of the proposed alteration or amendment.

### 2. Suspension of rules

The rules of the council may be suspended for a specified portion of a meeting by an affirmative vote of two-thirds of the members present except that council actions shall conform to state statutes and to the Michigan and the United States Constitutions.

### 3. Bid awards

Bids will be awarded by the council during regular or special meetings. A bid award may be made at a special meeting of council if that action is announced in the notice of the special meeting.

### 4. Committees

#### a. Standing and special committees of council

The city/village shall have the following standing committees:

[Committees should be listed by name and with a definition of their purposes and scopes.]

Committee members will be appointed by the mayor/president. They shall be members of the council. The mayor/president shall fill any committee vacancies. The committee member shall serve for a term of one year and may be re-appointed.

Special committees may be established for a specific period of time by the mayor/president or by a resolution of the council which specifies the task of the special committee and the date of its dissolution.

#### b. Citizen task forces

Citizen task forces may be established by a resolution of the council which specifies the task to be accomplished and the date of its dissolution. Members of such committees will be appointed by the mayor/president, subject to approval by a majority vote of the council and must be residents of the city/village. Vacancies will be filled by majority vote of the council in the same way appointments are made.

### 5. Authorization for contacting the city/village attorney

The following officials (by title) are authorized to contact the city/village attorney regarding municipal matters:

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_ ◆

These Sample Rules of Procedure for Municipal Councils may be downloaded from the Michigan Municipal League's web site at [www.mml.org](http://www.mml.org). We highly recommend that you consult your municipal attorney for assistance in modifying these rules to suit your municipality's individual needs.

You may also wish to contact the League's Member Resource Services staff for more information about running effective council meetings, 800-653-2483 or email [info@mml.org](mailto:info@mml.org).

**Sue A. Jeffers** is the Michigan Municipal League's associate general counsel. You may contact Sue at 734-669-6306 or 800-653-2483 or by email at [sjeffers@mml.org](mailto:sjeffers@mml.org).

**William L. Steude** is the retired general counsel of the Michigan Municipal League, and remains of counsel to the League.

**Shirley S. Smith** served nearly 30 years on the staff of the Michigan Municipal League in a number of positions. She is now a consultant to the League.