

Parliamentary Procedure

Local government officials need a working knowledge of parliamentary procedure—how to make a motion, what is expected during debate, and how a vote is taken. The purpose of parliamentary procedure is to expedite business, maintain order, ensure justice, and make sure that the will of the organization is accomplished properly and fairly. There are basic concepts that are common to all organizations: a quorum must be present to take legal action, only one main proposition can be on the floor at a time, only one member can speak at a time, the issue and not the person is always what is under discussion, and usually, a majority vote decides.

Meetings of governmental bodies are regulated by federal and state laws, which take priority, local charters, and any procedural rules that your municipality has adopted. (If you have adopted the current version of *Roberts Rules of Order*, it should be consulted as a last resort if nothing else applies.)

Motions

A motion is handled in the following manner:

1. A member is recognized and makes a motion by stating “I move...” (Never use “I want to...” or “I think we should...” or “I motion...” or “So moved.”)
2. Another member “seconds” the motion, without waiting for recognition. This means that another person thinks the subject is important enough for discussion and vote.
3. The chair states the question: “It is moved and seconded that...” The motion now belongs to the assembly for discussion.
4. The chair asks: “Is there any discussion?” or “Are you ready for the question?” The motion is opened for debate, and the member who made the motion has first priority in speaking to the question.
5. The chair states “The question is on the adoption of the motion to...” the vote is taken by whatever means is established in your community. If by voice vote, “All those in favor say ‘aye’. All those opposed, say ‘no’.”
6. The chair announces the results of the vote. “The ayes have it and the motion is adopted.” Or “The noes have it, and the motion is lost.”

The five classes of motions and when to use them:

1. Main motion
 - To introduce a subject, *make a main motion*
2. Subsidiary motions assist the members in treating or disposing of a main motion
 - To kill or reject a main motion without a direct vote on it, *move to postpone indefinitely*
 - To change a pending motion, *move to amend*
 - To send a pending question to a small group for further study, *move to commit or refer*
 - To put off action or a decision until later in the same or next meeting, *move to postpone definitely*
 - To change the rules of debate, *move to limit or extend limits of debate*
 - To close debate, *move the previous question*
 - To set aside the pending question temporarily in order to take up more pressing business, *move to lay on the table*
3. Privileged motions deal with rights and privileges of members and do not directly affect the main motion.
 - To return to the printed agenda, *call for the orders of the day*
 - To secure a privilege, such as insuring your ability to see or hear, *raise a question of privilege*
 - To take a short break in the meeting, *move to recess*
 - To close a meeting, *move to adjourn*
 - To set a time to continue the business to another day without adjourning the current meeting, *move to fix the time to which to adjourn*
4. Incidental motions are incidental to the business at hand

- To endorse the rules, *rise to a point of order*
 - To reverse or question the decision of the chair, *appeal*
 - To question the correctness of a voice vote as announced by the chair, *call for a division of the assembly* (rising vote)
5. Motions that bring a question again before the assembly allow the assembly to reopen a completed question
- To give members a chance to change their minds, some motions can be debated and revoted. The move must come from the prevailing side (yes if it was adopted; no if it failed), *move to reconsider*
 - To change what was adopted at a previous meeting, *move to amend something previously adopted*
 - To change the outcome of an affirmative vote, *move to rescind*

Each motion has its own rules regarding when it is in order, if it must be seconded, if it is debatable or amendable, and what vote is required for adoption; and even if it can be reconsidered.

Council Rules of Procedure

Adopting rules of procedure may be one of the most important actions a council takes. Rules assist in making meetings efficient and genial, and provide guidelines for dealing lawfully and effectively with the public and the media. Typically, council rules contain provisions for:

- notification of meetings
- attendance at meetings
- meeting information packets
- agenda preparation
- voting
- public hearings
- parliamentary procedure
- conduct of meetings (decorum of council members; disorderly conduct)
- public participation
- minute preparation
- committees (establishing; appointments; duties and responsibilities)
- resolutions
- ordinances (introduction; public hearing; publication; amendments)

Rules of procedure should indicate the sequence of the meeting agenda as well as the procedure for holding public hearings. They might also include restrictions on abstentions, how items are added to the agenda, and how the agenda is distributed.

Agendas

An agenda is a guide for conducting an official business meeting. A sample agenda outline might look like this:

1. Call to order (pledge of allegiance, if there is to be one)
2. Roll call
3. Approval of (regular/special) minutes of the last meeting
4. Approval of agenda
5. Public comments—reserved time (for items listed on this agenda)
6. Petitions and communications
7. Consent Agenda
8. Introduction and Adoption of Ordinances and Resolutions; Public Hearings
9. Reports of officers, boards and committees; routine monthly reports from departments
10. Unfinished business (unfinished or pending matters)
11. New Business
12. Miscellaneous
13. Public comments— general
14. Recess—work session
15. Closed session
16. Adjournment