

Effective Meeting Management for Local Units of Government



Municipal Attorney's Association
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If you haven't felt this way at a City/Council meeting... you will



Councils* in conflict

(*Used to designate local governing bodies)

The three most common reasons councils are in conflict:

1. Board members not "staying on their page"
2. Forgetting that individual board members have no authority
3. Ineffective and chaotic board meetings

**The reasons may vary,
but many times...**

**We have met the enemy
and he is us!!**

Pogo Comic Strip
Walter Kelly, 1971

The most basic concept of Robert's Rules of Order

**No rule can take the place of tact and
common sense on the part of the
members of a group. . .**

Section 47, Robert's Rules of Order (10th edition)

Basic Principles of Robert's Rules of Order

- One thing at a time, one person at a time, one time per meeting
- All discussions should be germane to the pending question
- No interruptions
- Majority rules – usually
- The board is paramount to the individual board member
- All decisions of the chair may be appealed
- Silence Implies Consent
- No surprises
- Right to know what will be discussed
- Everyone is equal (including the chair)
- Over and under dedication to Robert's Rules can be disastrous

The Chairman

All animals are equal,
*but some animals are more
equal than others*

Animal Farm
George Orwell
1945

Common mistakes made by local governing bodies

1. The chairman dominating the body
2. Improper handling of motions
3. Forget to manage the pace of the meeting
5. Discussion on multiple issues at same time
6. Poor agenda planning
7. Allow surprises..adding items to the agenda
8. Allow member to speak without recognition
9. Allowing discussions without a pending motion
10. Allowing too much informality

Some informality is acceptable ... *but not much!!*

- Speak only after being recognized
- Some limits on debate are good
- Chair may make motions .. cautiously
- Motions to close debate should be used
- Keep discussions prior to a motion to a minimum
- Liberal use of “unanimous consent”
- Consent agendas
- Controversy **requires** a high level of formality

Finding the Balance Between Efficiency and Democracy

Parliamentary Tools that Support Efficiency

- Properly planned agendas
- Using a Consent Agenda
- Reconsideration and other "re-do" motions
- Close Debate
- Postpone or table a motion
- Refer to committee
- Using "without objection" instead of motions
- Being repetitive to assure clarity

Parliamentary Tools that Support Democracy

- All decisions of the chair may be appealed
- All council members are equal (including the chair) unless given authority
- Only the council as a whole has authority
- Advance notice of items to be discussed
- Council meetings must be held in public... they are not meetings of the public

Public Input Policies Should Be Clear

- Have sign-up procedure
- Limit comments to items on agenda
- Time limit – stick to it
- Comments limited to issues
- Don't allow response
- Establish follow-up procedures

Effective meeting management starts long before the meeting starts

The agenda ...

- Consent agendas
- Be careful of an agenda item called "general comments by members"
- Be careful about indicating "action" items versus "information" items
- Adding items to the agenda the night of the meeting no longer allowed (*Lambries v. Saluda County Council*)

A word about minutes

- date, time and place of meeting
- board members present
- all motions and their disposition
- discuss how to record the votes of individual members
- members (including Chair) should vote or abstain
- record of what was done, not what was said

Minutes are critical

- Minutes are legally binding once approved
- Minutes are a record of actions of the board and not of an individual
- Everyone's job to ensure the minutes accurately reflect actions of the board
- The "I didn't mean it" council member

A few time-savers

- Please state your motion prior to discussion
- Without objection, we will ...
- The Chair making a motion can save time... but do so cautiously
- Are you ready to vote?
- Your comments are out of order at this time
- What is the pleasure of the group
- Postponing consideration can save time

Adopting Motions

Let's see how to handle the adoption of motions ...

with a few detours along the way

Adopting a Motion

There are six steps for adopting a motion.

Step 1 **A member makes a motion**

Step 2 **A member seconds a motion**

Step 3 **The chair states the question**

Step 4 **The members debate**

Step 5 **The members vote**

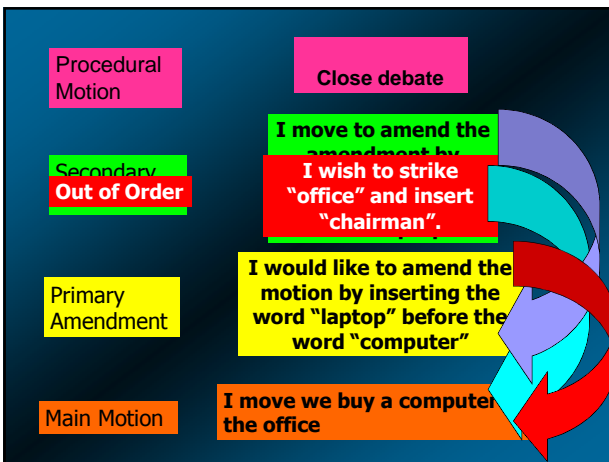
Step 6 **The chair announces the vote**

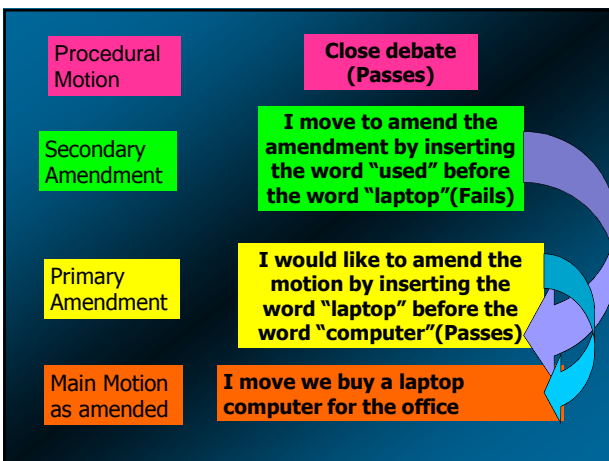


Improper Handling of Amendments

- A motion to amend modifies main motion, requires second & is subject to debate
- Three types of amendments..strike, delete, or strike and delete
- Main motion limited to an amendment and an amendment to an amendment
- Amendments limited to immediately pending motion and must be germane
- Friendly Amendments

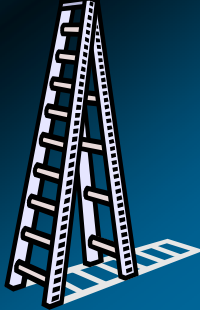
You Must Know if a Motion is "IN ORDER"





The 10 "Must-Know" Motions

1. Adjourn
2. Recess
3. Lay on the table
4. Close Debate
5. Limit or extend debate
6. Postpone to a certain time
7. Refer to Committee
8. Secondary amendment
9. Primary amendment
10. Main motion



Specialty Motions Make All the Difference

Motions to Control Debate

- Set Limits on Debate
- Close debate on immediately pending motion (2/3 vote)
- Close debate on all pending motions (2/3 vote)

Procedures to Protect Rights

- Point of Order
- Appeal the decision of the Chair
- Point of information
- Parliamentary inquiry

Motions to Delay Actions

- Refer to committee
- Adjourn
- Postpone to a definite time
- Object to consideration (2/3 vote)
- Recess
- Lay on the table

Motions to Vary Procedures

- Suspend the rules
- Division of the question
- Consider by paragraph

Re-Do Motions

- Reconsider
- Rescind
- Amend item previously adopted

Simplified Chart of Parliamentary Motions

| Motion | Debatable | Amendable | Vote |
|---------------------|-----------|-----------|----------|
| Adjournment | no | no | majority |
| Recess | no | yes | majority |
| Lay on the table | no | no | majority |
| Close debate | no | no | 2/3 |
| Limit/Close Debate | no | yes | 2/3 |
| Postpone definitely | yes | yes | majority |
| Refer to committee | yes | yes | majority |
| Amend amendment | yes | no | majority |
| Amend main motion | yes | yes | majority |
| Main motion | yes | yes | majority |

Simplified Chart of Procedural Motions

| Motion | Debatable | Amendable | Vote |
|--------------------------|-----------|-----------|----------|
| Point of order | no | no | none |
| Inquiry | no | no | none |
| Object to consideration | no | no | 2/3 |
| Roll call | no | no | none |
| Appeal decision of chair | yes | no | majority |
| Divide question | no | yes | majority |
| Suspend rules | no | no | 2/3 |

Points to Ponder

- You've carefully thought out all the angles.
- You've done it a thousand times.
- It comes naturally to you.
- You know what you're doing, it's what you've been trained to do.
- Nothing could possibly go wrong, right?

Think Again!