

# Motions and Meeting Procedure

A very brief discussion and helpful hints

# Council and Boards

- First off, this is not meant to be a comprehensive presentation that will tell you everything you might need to know about parliamentary procedure. This is just meant to be a brief primer with a few basic tips for common scenarios we encounter.
- The council and city boards each have the authority to set their own rules on how to conduct meetings.
- Many meetings default to using Robert's Rules of Order or a modified version of them
- There is no requirement to strictly follow Robert's rules

# Why Rules

- The primary purpose of the rules is to ensure the orderly conduct of business.
- Provides structure for speakers so people aren't talking over each other. Ensures even those in the minority on an issue have an opportunity to discuss.
- Helps to provide a clear record of the discussion and actions.

# Role of the Presiding Officer

- Many of our boards have been in place for a long time, so they already have a presiding officer. For council, the mayor conducts the meeting. The presiding officer could also be a designated board member or even a staff member. One of the first actions for a new board is to set the presiding officer.
- The presiding officer is responsible for keeping order and ensuring the meeting's business is discussed appropriately.
- The presiding officer is in charge of recognizing speakers. None of the members or attendees should speak until recognized by the presiding officer and being granted the floor.
- The Presiding officer is also responsible for handling motions made by board members, as well as amendments, votes, etc.

# Introductory Statements

- As the body makes its way through the agenda, the presiding officer will introduce agenda items. Then there may be some brief introduction and testimony as the presiding officer grants the floor to different individuals. Generally the body will not be involved in this portion unless there is a quick question.
- Discussion can be limited as the presiding officer and body see fit. This includes limits on the discussion such as limits on time, certain subject matters, or duplicative testimony.
- Once the initial discussion is done, the floor should be opened up for the body to make a motion.

# Motions

- The council and boards must take official actions as a unit. The way to do so is by motions and votes.
- Motions can take all shapes and sizes based on the type of action the maker wants the board to take.
- Motions have a hierarchy. It's confusing and won't be discussed in depth. In general, higher priority motions need to be addressed before lower priority motions.
- Since we don't strictly follow Robert's Rules, I'm going to try and tailor my advice to procedural situations that the City's bodies most often find themselves in.

# Main Motions

- Used to take a final action regarding an agenda item. Approve, set date, appoint, etc.
- The most common motion in dealing with City business is a motion to approve a given agenda item. For example, “Motion to approve the consent agenda.” It’s a very simple motion and may only require changing a few words depending on the agenda item.
- Depending on the item, it may be necessary to state your reasoning before making the motion. For example, on a variance our code requires there to be findings that “the variance will be in harmony with the general purpose and intent of this title and will not be injurious to the neighborhood or otherwise detrimental to the public welfare.” If you plan to vote in favor of a variance, stating the facts leading to your support before the vote will act as findings if the board votes to approve.

# More on Main Motions

- Motions should be phrased in the positive, even if the maker plans to vote against it. It should almost always be a motion to approve; not a motion to deny or a motion to not approve.
- There are rare exceptions, such as if we were dealing with a bid award and we wanted to reject all the bids. You'd make a motion to reject all bids instead of making a motion to award to the low bidder and voting against it.
- Keeping motions framed in the positive helps keep the record clean, makes it easier to deal with amendments, and avoids confusion as to what is actually being voted on.

# Other Common Motions

- Motion to Amend- Intended to change a pending motion. Someone may have made a Motion to Approve. After discussion on that motion, someone wants to add a condition. “Motion to amend by adding a condition that applicant complete a fire inspection.” A motion to amend needs to be acted on before voting on the main motion.
- Motion to Table- Technically under Robert’s Rules, this kills an item. The way the City has traditionally used this motion, it would actually be considered a Motion to Postpone. It is used to bring an item back in the future on a specific date or after a specific condition has occurred. Has priority over main motions and motions to amend.

# A few other motions we might see

- Motion to Amend a Previous Action
  - Used to make a specific change to an action previously taken.
- Motion to Reconsider
  - Used to revisit an agenda item previously acted on and consider the item again as if no action was previously taken.
- Motion to Limit or Extend Debate
  - Used to place limits on the discussion for an item (time, duplicative testimony etc.) or to modify previously set limits.
- Motion to Close Debate and Vote Immediately (Call the Question)
  - If approved by 2/3 vote, ends debate and requires immediate vote on pending motions.
- Motion to Recess (and sit as different board)
- Request to Withdraw Motion
  - Can be used to allow the maker of a motion to withdraw their motion and open the floor to alternative motions. No vote needed unless a member objects to the withdrawal.

# Handling Motions

- Most motions require another member to second the motion.
- After a motion and second, generally the presiding officer will allow discussion on the motion. Usually this discussion is limited to the board members and will be focused on tailoring the action the board wants to take.
- Eventually, the board will need to vote on the motion. Most items are decided by simple majority, but some motions will require more support in order to pass. For example, a motion to call the question needs a 2/3rds vote to pass.
- Motions have a hierarchy, I've included a cheat sheet on the next page.
- Once an agenda item has been dealt with, the presiding officer will usually move on to the next agenda item.

# Motion Hierarchy

- Of the types of Motions we might see, this is the rough order that they should be handled from highest priority to lowest:
  - Adjourn
  - Recess
  - Call the Question
  - Limit/Extend Debate
  - Table/Postpone
  - Secondary Amendment
  - Primary Amendment
  - Main Motion
- This is not a comprehensive list, but should be enough to deal with nearly any situation we encounter.

# Conclusion

- The rules can be very complicated, but most of the time our discussions and actions don't fall in that category. Simple steps like framing motions in the positive and waiting to speak until recognized by the presiding officer can help prevent things from getting needlessly complex. Remember, if you aren't sure how to phrase your motion, you can always ask for help on how to do so and staff will try to help.
- The rules are meant to keep things orderly and facilitate discussion; not to unnecessarily complicate items. Avoid using procedure to intentionally bog down an item you might not support. Have an item fail on its merits, not on procedure.
- Questions