

City of Rohnert Park

Bicycle & Pedestrian Advisory Committee



HANDBOOK

Adopted by the
Rohnert Park Bicycle and Pedestrian
Advisory Committee
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**CITY OF ROHNERT PARK
BICYCLE AND PEDESTRIAN ADVISORY COMMITTEE (BPAC) HANDBOOK**

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Introduction

While the City Council is charged with overseeing the general policies and governance of the City, there are also official civic bodies in Rohnert Park, all of which are important to the functioning of our City government and the well-being of our citizens. In addition to their oversight duties, some of these commissions, committees, and boards also provide direction and recommendations to the City Council on specific issues. Virtually all citizens of Rohnert Park benefit from the efforts of the dedicated citizens who willingly give their time to serve on these important civic bodies.

About the Bicycle and Pedestrian Advisory Committee

The Rohnert Park Bicycle and Pedestrian Advisory Committee (BPAC) is comprised of five committee members. The committee has a liaison member from the Rohnert Park Parks and Recreation Commission (non-voting) and a City staff liaison (non-voting).

The BPAC is primarily an advisory body to the City Council. Like the other City committees and commissions, the BPAC does not set or establish City policy, budgets or administrative direction. However, it does provide guidance to others who are making decisions that impact bicyclists and pedestrians and creates a focal point for community discussion of bicycle and pedestrian issues. The BPAC is most effective when it:

- Acts as a check for our elected officials and City staff
- Provides input to City staff on major projects (e.g. street repaving, comprehensive plan)
- Provides constructive guidance on bicycle and pedestrian issues
- Ensures residents have an opportunity to give input and receive a response

The BPAC is distinguished from other types of bicycle and pedestrian organizations, being part of the structure of local government. The BPAC is not an advocacy group like the Sonoma County Bicycle Coalition. However, the BPAC does advance walking and biking by providing an ongoing forum and accountability mechanism to the community and showing elected officials that there is interest and concern about pedestrian and bicycle issues, and engaging with City staff to address facilities, safety, programs and planning.

Committee Relationships

Relationship to the Public

In the public sphere, individual BPAC members should be very clear about whether the views they express are individual opinions as “private citizens”, or views or recommendations approved by the majority of the BPAC. Public statements should not include promises that may be construed to be binding on the BPAC, City Council, or staff. When making a public statement, members should indicate that the BPAC actions are recommendations and that final action will be taken by City Council.

BPAC members should avoid political involvement or endorsing candidates (i.e. members can act as individuals, but cannot represent the BPAC)

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Relationship with Other Commission Members

The association with other BPAC members is very important as you serve on the BPAC. Work to establish a good relationship with other BPAC members. The success or failure of BPAC efforts may be dependent upon the degree of cooperation evident among the individual BPAC members.

BPAC members come from various backgrounds - education, occupational, religious, social, economic, physical, and cultural – and differences do exist.

It is important to recognize the reason for serving on a BPAC will vary and perhaps some will have a special interest. Each member will contribute in his/her way and is an important part of the decision-making process. Do not expect each BPAC member to give of his/her time, talent and knowledge to the same degree. Some will give more, and some will give less, but in the end, the community will benefit.

Keep in mind:

- Always respect other individuals' viewpoints even though it may be opposite of your own.
- Allow the other individual to articulate his/her own views and then attempt to make an objective evaluation of those views.
- Evaluation of our fellow member's viewpoint should be based on what is best for the total community and what is best for all concerned.
- Be open and honest at all times.
- Each BPAC member has a responsibility to recognize new BPAC members and see that they are made welcome and become oriented to their duties as a BPAC member.
- BPAC members may be asked to additionally volunteer their time toward subcommittee meetings; City or regional planning or transportation-related meetings, forums, and workshops; community outreach related to alternative transportation; or other related events.

How to Conduct a Successful Meeting

When running a meeting, a comfortable and productive environment should be maintained throughout the meeting. Group members have certain responsibilities when participating in a meeting. It is important that each member of the group share their ideas. It is easy to share ideas when three steps are followed: be prepared, practice good communication skills, and give your peers the common courtesy you would expect.

In order to be prepared for a meeting, group members should understand the purpose of the meeting. It is best if each group member reviews the meeting agenda and does any research before the meeting. It is also important to ask questions in order that any unclear issues are explained.

Good communication skills are critical to a meeting's success. When speaking, it is important to express yourself clearly, include everyone and summarize as needed. When someone else is speaking, it is important to give him or her your full attention, and to listen to him or her with an open mind.

As a group member, there are many things one can do to practice common courtesy during a meeting. It is always best to arrive on time and stay for the entire meeting. It is a good idea to avoid unnecessary interruptions and distractions. Also, one should stay on the subject and stick to the agenda. As a speaker, one should be aware of, and respect, specified time limits for speaking.

OPERATIONAL GUIDELINES of the BICYCLE AND PEDESTRIAN ADVISORY COMMITTEE

Section 1 – NAME

The name of this committee shall be the Rohnert Park Bicycle and Pedestrian Advisory Committee (BPAC).

Section 2 – PURPOSE AND FUNCTIONS

The BPAC was initially formed for the specific purpose of fulfilling requirements of Metropolitan Transportation Commission (MTC) Resolution No. 4108. MTC establishes policies and procedures for local cities and counties to access funds through the Transportation Development Act, Article 3 (codified in Public Utilities Code Sections 99233.3 and 99234). MTC Resolution No. 4108 requires that a City or County Bicycle Advisory Committee comprised of both bicyclists and pedestrians, three of whom live in the jurisdiction and are appointed by the jurisdiction's governing body, reviews projects proposed to receive TDA Article 3 funds.

The role of the Rohnert Park Bicycle and Pedestrian Advisory Committee has been expanded to include:

- advising the Rohnert Park City Council and City of Rohnert Park staff on the implementation of Rohnert Park's Bicycle and Pedestrian Master Plan;
- providing feedback to staff on projects relating to walking and bicycling; and
- representing community and constituent interests in alternative transportation planning.

Section 3 – MEMBERSHIP

Rohnert Park City Council Members shall appoint the members of the BPAC in accordance with the most current City Council Protocols. The City Council is encouraged to balance bicycle and pedestrian interests as well as seek out BPAC members with diverse backgrounds and areas of interest.

Section 4 – RECRUITMENT AND TENURE

- A. Vacancies on the BPAC shall be publicly advertised in accordance with the most current City Council Protocols. Applicants shall submit an application form provided by the City of Rohnert Park. Selection shall be based on ensuring a broad cross-section of interests.
- B. The term of office of BPAC members shall begin on the date of appointment and expire on December 31st of the four-year term aligning with their appointing City Council member. Members who fill a mid-term vacancy shall serve a term that lasts the balance of the four-year term in which they are appointed. Members shall serve no more than two (2) consecutive terms, unless so requested by the City of Rohnert Park.

Section 5 – OFFICERS

The officers shall consist of a Chair and a Vice-Chair.

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- A. The Chair shall: preside at all meetings; represent the BPAC before all other bodies and committees as directed; and work with City staff to set the agenda for all meetings.
- B. The Vice-Chair shall perform all duties of the Chair in his/her absence. In the event of the absence of both the Chair and Vice-Chair, the BPAC members in attendance shall select a member to perform the duties of the Chair.
- C. The Chair and Vice-Chair are voting members.

Section 6 – ELECTION OF OFFICERS

- A. The officers of the BPAC shall be elected annually at the last regular meeting held during the calendar year, or as needed to fill vacancies. The term of office shall begin on the next scheduled meeting after the election and shall be for one (1) year, through the next election. Any such officer shall not be prohibited from succeeding himself or herself, however officers shall serve no more than two (2) consecutive terms, unless so requested by City staff. Nominations will be taken from the floor.
- B. The Chair and Vice-Chair shall be elected by a majority of the BPAC.
- C. Should the office of the Chair or Vice Chair become vacant, the BPAC shall elect a successor from among the BPAC members at the next regular or special meeting, and such office shall be held for the unexpired term of said office.

Section 7 – SUBCOMMITTEES

- A. Subcommittees may be formed as necessary to carry out the work of the BPAC.
- B. Subcommittees are advisory to the BPAC.

Section 8 – MEETINGS AND VOTING

- A. Ten (10) meetings of the BPAC shall be scheduled per calendar year.
- B. Minutes of the meetings of the BPAC shall be prepared in writing by the recording secretary and made available to each member of the BPAC at least forty-eight (48) hours in advance of the next meeting. Approved minutes shall be filed in the official book of minutes of the BPAC.
- C. Special meetings shall be held at the call of the BPAC Chair or the City liaison to the BPAC. The person calling the meeting shall fix the time and place. Special meetings must be noticed publicly not less than twenty-four (24) hours in advance, consistent with California Public Meetings Law. Every effort shall be made to reach all BPAC members.
- D. All meetings shall be open to the public, and interested persons or groups are invited to address the BPAC.

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- E. Official action may be taken by the BPAC when a quorum is present. A quorum shall consist of a simple majority of the voting members.
- F. Meetings should be conducted according to most current edition of Rosenberg's Rules.

Section 9 – POSTING AGENDAS/NOTICES

- A. The BPAC staff shall post an agenda for each regular BPAC meeting or a notice for each special meeting containing a brief description of each item of business to be transacted or discussed at the meeting together with the time and location of the meeting. Agendas/notices shall be posted at Rohnert Park City Hall, 130 Avram Avenue, Rohnert Park, California (a location readily accessible to the public) at least seventy-two (72) hours in advance of each regular meeting and at least twenty-four (24) hours in advance of each special meeting.
- B. All notices required by law for proposed actions by the BPAC shall also be posted on the City of Rohnert Park internet web site.

Section 10 – PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

- A. Every regular meeting, members of the public shall have an opportunity to address the BPAC on matters within the BPAC matter jurisdiction. Public input and comment on matters on the agenda, as well as public input and comment on matters not otherwise on the agenda, shall be made during the time set aside for public comment; provided, however, that the BPAC may direct that public input and comment on matters on the agenda be heard when the matter regularly comes up on the agenda.
- B. The Chair may limit the total amount of time allocated for public discussion on particular issues and/or the time allocated for each individual speaker.

Section 11 – NON-AGENDA ITEMS

Matters brought before the BPAC at a regular meeting which were not placed on the agenda of the meeting shall not be acted upon by the BPAC at that meeting unless action on such matters is permissible pursuant to the Ralph M. Brown Act (Gov. Code §54950 et seq.). Those non-agenda items brought before the BPAC which the BPAC determines will require BPAC consideration and action and where BPAC action at that meeting is not so authorized shall be placed on the agenda for the next regular meeting.

Section 12 – TERMINATION

- A. A four-year term shall be continuous except under the following conditions:
 - 1. A member's absence from three (3) consecutive regular meetings shall be considered as a de facto resignation, or in accordance with the most current Rohnert Park City Council Protocols.
 - 2. Change in status of the member so they no longer reside within Rohnert Park.
 - 3. The member submits his/her resignation.

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- B. Each member of the BPAC serves at the pleasure of the City Council. Removal of a BPAC member shall be conducted in accordance with the Rohnert Park City Council Protocols. Before a member is removed for reasons of absence, he/she shall be notified in writing by the City Clerk's Office. A dismissed member may apply to be reappointed by the Rohnert Park City Council.

Section 13 – AMENDMENTS

Recommendations for amendments to these Guidelines shall be passed by a majority vote of the membership of the BPAC. The proposal for amendments to these Guidelines shall appear on the published agenda. The text of the proposed amendments in Guidelines must be sent to all BPAC members not less than fourteen calendar days in advance, unless the amendment is of such an urgent nature as to make shorter notice to BPAC members necessary, in which case it may be included with the meeting notice and agenda.

APPENDIX A: Rosenberg's Rules



Rosenberg's Rules of Order

REVISED 2011

Simple Rules of Parliamentary Procedure for the 21st Century

By Judge Dave Rosenberg



MISSION AND CORE BELIEFS

To expand and protect local control for cities through education and advocacy to enhance the quality of life for all Californians.

VISION

To be recognized and respected as the leading advocate for the common interests of California's cities.

About the League of California Cities

Established in 1898, the League of California Cities is a member organization that represents California's incorporated cities. The League strives to protect the local authority and autonomy of city government and help California's cities effectively serve their residents. In addition to advocating on cities' behalf at the state capitol, the League provides its members with professional development programs and information resources, conducts education conferences and research, and publishes Western City magazine.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Dave Rosenberg is a Superior Court Judge in Yolo County. He has served as presiding judge of his court, and as presiding judge of the Superior Court Appellate Division. He also has served as chair of the Trial Court Presiding Judges Advisory Committee (the committee composed of all 58 California presiding judges) and as an advisory member of the California Judicial Council. Prior to his appointment to the bench, Rosenberg was member of the Yolo County Board of Supervisors, where he served two terms as chair. Rosenberg also served on the Davis City Council, including two terms as mayor. He has served on the senior staff of two governors, and worked for 19 years in private law practice. Rosenberg has served as a member and chair of numerous state, regional and local boards. Rosenberg chaired the California State Lottery Commission, the California Victim Compensation and Government Claims Board, the Yolo-Solano Air Quality Management District, the Yolo County Economic Development Commission, and the Yolo County Criminal Justice Cabinet. For many years, he has taught classes on parliamentary procedure and has served as parliamentarian for large and small bodies.



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INTRODUCTION

The rules of procedure at meetings should be simple enough for most people to understand. Unfortunately, that has not always been the case. Virtually all clubs, associations, boards, councils and bodies follow a set of rules — *Robert's Rules of Order* — which are embodied in a small, but complex, book. Virtually no one I know has actually read this book cover to cover. Worse yet, the book was written for another time and for another purpose. If one is chairing or running a parliament, then *Robert's Rules of Order* is a dandy and quite useful handbook for procedure in that complex setting. On the other hand, if one is running a meeting of say, a five-member body with a few members of the public in attendance, a simplified version of the rules of parliamentary procedure is in order.

Hence, the birth of *Rosenberg's Rules of Order*.

What follows is my version of the rules of parliamentary procedure, based on my decades of experience chairing meetings in state and local government. These rules have been simplified for the smaller bodies we chair or in which we participate, slimmed down for the 21st Century, yet retaining the basic tenets of order to which we have grown accustomed. Interestingly enough, *Rosenberg's Rules* has found a welcoming audience. Hundreds of cities, counties, special districts, committees, boards, commissions, neighborhood associations and private corporations and companies have adopted *Rosenberg's Rules* in lieu of *Robert's Rules* because they have found them practical, logical, simple, easy to learn and user friendly.

This treatise on modern parliamentary procedure is built on a foundation supported by the following four pillars:

1. **Rules should establish order.** The first purpose of rules of parliamentary procedure is to establish a framework for the orderly conduct of meetings.
2. **Rules should be clear.** Simple rules lead to wider understanding and participation. Complex rules create two classes: those who understand and participate; and those who do not fully understand and do not fully participate.
3. **Rules should be user friendly.** That is, the rules must be simple enough that the public is invited into the body and feels that it has participated in the process.
4. **Rules should enforce the will of the majority while protecting the rights of the minority.** The ultimate purpose of rules of procedure is to encourage discussion and to facilitate decision making by the body. In a democracy, majority rules. The rules must enable the majority to express itself and fashion a result, while permitting the minority to also express itself, but not dominate, while fully participating in the process.

Establishing a Quorum

The starting point for a meeting is the establishment of a quorum. A quorum is defined as the minimum number of members of the body who must be present at a meeting for business to be legally transacted. The default rule is that a quorum is one more than half the body. For example, in a five-member body a quorum is three. When the body has three members present, it can legally transact business. If the body has less than a quorum of members present, it cannot legally transact business. And even if the body has a quorum to begin the meeting, the body can lose the quorum during the meeting when a member departs (or even when a member leaves the dais). When that occurs the body loses its ability to transact business until and unless a quorum is reestablished.

The default rule, identified above, however, gives way to a specific rule of the body that establishes a quorum. For example, the rules of a particular five-member body may indicate that a quorum is four members for that particular body. The body must follow the rules it has established for its quorum. In the absence of such a specific rule, the quorum is one more than half the members of the body.


The Role of the Chair

While all members of the body should know and understand the rules of parliamentary procedure, it is the chair of the body who is charged with applying the rules of conduct of the meeting. The chair should be well versed in those rules. For all intents and purposes, the chair makes the final ruling on the rules every time the chair states an action. In fact, all decisions by the chair are final unless overruled by the body itself.

Since the chair runs the conduct of the meeting, it is usual courtesy for the chair to play a less active role in the debate and discussion than other members of the body. This does not mean that the chair should not participate in the debate or discussion. To the contrary, as a member of the body, the chair has the full right to participate in the debate, discussion and decision-making of the body. What the chair should do, however, is strive to be the last to speak at the discussion and debate stage. The chair should not make or second a motion unless the chair is convinced that no other member of the body will do so at that point in time.

The Basic Format for an Agenda Item Discussion

Formal meetings normally have a written, often published agenda. Informal meetings may have only an oral or understood agenda. In either case, the meeting is governed by the agenda and the agenda constitutes the body's agreed-upon roadmap for the meeting. Each agenda item can be handled by the chair in the following basic format:



First, the chair should clearly announce the agenda item number and should clearly state what the agenda item subject is. The chair should then announce the format (which follows) that will be followed in considering the agenda item.

Second, following that agenda format, the chair should invite the appropriate person or persons to report on the item, including any recommendation that they might have. The appropriate person or persons may be the chair, a member of the body, a staff person, or a committee chair charged with providing input on the agenda item.

Third, the chair should ask members of the body if they have any technical questions of clarification. At this point, members of the body may ask clarifying questions to the person or persons who reported on the item, and that person or persons should be given time to respond.

Fourth, the chair should invite public comments, or if appropriate at a formal meeting, should open the public meeting for public input. If numerous members of the public indicate a desire to speak to the subject, the chair may limit the time of public speakers. At the conclusion of the public comments, the chair should announce that public input has concluded (or the public hearing, as the case may be, is closed).

Fifth, the chair should invite a motion. The chair should announce the name of the member of the body who makes the motion.

Sixth, the chair should determine if any member of the body wishes to second the motion. The chair should announce the name of the member of the body who seconds the motion. It is normally good practice for a motion to require a second before proceeding to ensure that it is not just one member of the body who is interested in a particular approach. However, a second is not an absolute requirement, and the chair can proceed with consideration and vote on a motion even when there is no second. This is a matter left to the discretion of the chair.

Seventh, if the motion is made and seconded, the chair should make sure everyone understands the motion.

This is done in one of three ways:

1. The chair can ask the maker of the motion to repeat it;
2. The chair can repeat the motion; or
3. The chair can ask the secretary or the clerk of the body to repeat the motion.

Eighth, the chair should now invite discussion of the motion by the body. If there is no desired discussion, or after the discussion has ended, the chair should announce that the body will vote on the motion. If there has been no discussion or very brief discussion, then the vote on the motion should proceed immediately and there is no need to repeat the motion. If there has been substantial discussion, then it is normally best to make sure everyone understands the motion by repeating it.

Ninth, the chair takes a vote. Simply asking for the “ayes” and then asking for the “nays” normally does this. If members of the body do not vote, then they “abstain.” Unless the rules of the body provide otherwise (or unless a super majority is required as delineated later in these rules), then a simple majority (as defined in law or the rules of the body as delineated later in these rules) determines whether the motion passes or is defeated.

Tenth, the chair should announce the result of the vote and what action (if any) the body has taken. In announcing the result, the chair should indicate the names of the members of the body, if any, who voted in the minority on the motion. This announcement might take the following form: “The motion passes by a vote of 3-2, with Smith and Jones dissenting. We have passed the motion requiring a 10-day notice for all future meetings of this body.”

Motions in General

Motions are the vehicles for decision making by a body. It is usually best to have a motion before the body prior to commencing discussion of an agenda item. This helps the body focus.

Motions are made in a simple two-step process. First, the chair should recognize the member of the body. Second, the member of the body makes a motion by preceding the member’s desired approach with the words “I move . . .”

A typical motion might be: “I move that we give a 10-day notice in the future for all our meetings.”

The chair usually initiates the motion in one of three ways:

1. **Inviting the members of the body to make a motion**, for example, “A motion at this time would be in order.”
2. **Suggesting a motion to the members of the body**, “A motion would be in order that we give a 10-day notice in the future for all our meetings.”
3. **Making the motion**. As noted, the chair has every right as a member of the body to make a motion, but should normally do so only if the chair wishes to make a motion on an item but is convinced that no other member of the body is willing to step forward to do so at a particular time.

The Three Basic Motions

There are three motions that are the most common and recur often at meetings:

The basic motion. The basic motion is the one that puts forward a decision for the body’s consideration. A basic motion might be: “I move that we create a five-member committee to plan and put on our annual fundraiser.”

The motion to amend. If a member wants to change a basic motion that is before the body, they would move to amend it. A motion to amend might be: “I move that we amend the motion to have a 10-member committee.” A motion to amend takes the basic motion that is before the body and seeks to change it in some way.

The substitute motion. If a member wants to completely do away with the basic motion that is before the body, and put a new motion before the body, they would move a substitute motion. A substitute motion might be: “I move a substitute motion that we cancel the annual fundraiser this year.”

“Motions to amend” and “substitute motions” are often confused, but they are quite different, and their effect (if passed) is quite different. A motion to amend seeks to retain the basic motion on the floor, but modify it in some way. A substitute motion seeks to throw out the basic motion on the floor, and substitute a new and different motion for it. The decision as to whether a motion is really a “motion to amend” or a “substitute motion” is left to the chair. So if a member makes what that member calls a “motion to amend,” but the chair determines that it is really a “substitute motion,” then the chair’s designation governs.

A “friendly amendment” is a practical parliamentary tool that is simple, informal, saves time and avoids bogging a meeting down with numerous formal motions. It works in the following way: In the discussion on a pending motion, it may appear that a change to the motion is desirable or may win support for the motion from some members. When that happens, a member who has the floor may simply say, “I want to suggest a friendly amendment to the motion.” The member suggests the friendly amendment, and if the maker and the person who seconded the motion pending on the floor accepts the friendly amendment, that now becomes the pending motion on the floor. If either the maker or the person who seconded rejects the proposed friendly amendment, then the proposer can formally move to amend.

Multiple Motions Before the Body

There can be up to three motions on the floor at the same time. The chair can reject a fourth motion until the chair has dealt with the three that are on the floor and has resolved them. This rule has practical value. More than three motions on the floor at any given time is confusing and unwieldy for almost everyone, including the chair.

When there are two or three motions on the floor (after motions and seconds) at the same time, the vote should proceed *first* on the *last* motion that is made. For example, assume the first motion is a basic “motion to have a five-member committee to plan and put on our annual fundraiser.” During the discussion of this motion, a member might make a second motion to “amend the main motion to have a 10-member committee, not a five-member committee to plan and put on our annual fundraiser.” And perhaps, during that discussion, a member makes yet a third motion as a “substitute motion that we not have an annual fundraiser this year.” The proper procedure would be as follows:

First, the chair would deal with the *third* (the last) motion on the floor, the substitute motion. After discussion and debate, a vote would be taken first on the third motion. If the substitute motion *passed*, it would be a substitute for the basic motion and would eliminate it. The first motion would be moot, as would the second motion (which sought to amend the first motion), and the action on the agenda item would be completed on the passage by the body of the third motion (the substitute motion). No vote would be taken on the first or second motions.

Second, if the substitute motion *failed*, the chair would then deal with the second (now the last) motion on the floor, the motion to amend. The discussion and debate would focus strictly on the amendment (should the committee be five or 10 members). If the motion to amend *passed*, the chair would then move to consider the main motion (the first motion) as *amended*. If the motion to amend *failed*, the chair would then move to consider the main motion (the first motion) in its original format, not amended.

Third, the chair would now deal with the first motion that was placed on the floor. The original motion would either be in its original format (five-member committee), or if *amended*, would be in its amended format (10-member committee). The question on the floor for discussion and decision would be whether a committee should plan and put on the annual fundraiser.

To Debate or Not to Debate

The basic rule of motions is that they are subject to discussion and debate. Accordingly, basic motions, motions to amend, and substitute motions are all eligible, each in their turn, for full discussion before and by the body. The debate can continue as long as members of the body wish to discuss an item, subject to the decision of the chair that it is time to move on and take action.

There are exceptions to the general rule of free and open debate on motions. The exceptions all apply when there is a desire of the body to move on. The following motions are not debatable (that is, when the following motions are made and seconded, the chair must immediately call for a vote of the body without debate on the motion):

Motion to adjourn. This motion, if passed, requires the body to immediately adjourn to its next regularly scheduled meeting. It requires a simple majority vote.

Motion to recess. This motion, if passed, requires the body to immediately take a recess. Normally, the chair determines the length of the recess which may be a few minutes or an hour. It requires a simple majority vote.

Motion to fix the time to adjourn. This motion, if passed, requires the body to adjourn the meeting at the specific time set in the motion. For example, the motion might be: “I move we adjourn this meeting at midnight.” It requires a simple majority vote.

Motion to table. This motion, if passed, requires discussion of the agenda item to be halted and the agenda item to be placed on “hold.” The motion can contain a specific time in which the item can come back to the body. “I move we table this item until our regular meeting in October.” Or the motion can contain no specific time for the return of the item, in which case a motion to take the item off the table and bring it back to the body will have to be taken at a future meeting. A motion to table an item (or to bring it back to the body) requires a simple majority vote.

Motion to limit debate. The most common form of this motion is to say, “I move the previous question” or “I move the question” or “I call the question” or sometimes someone simply shouts out “question.” As a practical matter, when a member calls out one of these phrases, the chair can expedite matters by treating it as a “request” rather than as a formal motion. The chair can simply inquire of the body, “any further discussion?” If no one wishes to have further discussion, then the chair can go right to the pending motion that is on the floor. However, if even one person wishes to discuss the pending motion further, then at that point, the chair should treat the call for the “question” as a formal motion, and proceed to it.

When a member of the body makes such a motion (“I move the previous question”), the member is really saying: “I’ve had enough debate. Let’s get on with the vote.” When such a motion is made, the chair should ask for a second, stop debate, and vote on the motion to limit debate. The motion to limit debate requires a two-thirds vote of the body.

NOTE: A motion to limit debate could include a time limit. For example: “I move we limit debate on this agenda item to 15 minutes.” Even in this format, the motion to limit debate requires a two-thirds vote of the body. A similar motion is a *motion to object to consideration of an item*. This motion is not debatable, and if passed, precludes the body from even considering an item on the agenda. It also requires a two-thirds vote.

Majority and Super Majority Votes

In a democracy, a simple majority vote determines a question. A tie vote means the motion fails. So in a seven-member body, a vote of 4-3 passes the motion. A vote of 3-3 with one abstention means the motion fails. If one member is absent and the vote is 3-3, the motion still fails.

All motions require a simple majority, but there are a few exceptions. The exceptions come up when the body is taking an action which effectively cuts off the ability of a minority of the body to take an action or discuss an item. These extraordinary motions require a two-thirds majority (a super majority) to pass:

Motion to limit debate. Whether a member says, “I move the previous question,” or “I move the question,” or “I call the question,” or “I move to limit debate,” it all amounts to an attempt to cut off the ability of the minority to discuss an item, and it requires a two-thirds vote to pass.

Motion to close nominations. When choosing officers of the body (such as the chair), nominations are in order either from a nominating committee or from the floor of the body. A motion to close nominations effectively cuts off the right of the minority to nominate officers and it requires a two-thirds vote to pass.

Motion to object to the consideration of a question. Normally, such a motion is unnecessary since the objectionable item can be tabled or defeated straight up. However, when members of a body do not even want an item on the agenda to be considered, then such a motion is in order. It is not debatable, and it requires a two-thirds vote to pass.

Motion to suspend the rules. This motion is debatable, but requires a two-thirds vote to pass. If the body has its own rules of order, conduct or procedure, this motion allows the body to suspend the rules for a particular purpose. For example, the body (a private club) might have a rule prohibiting the attendance at meetings by non-club members. A motion to suspend the rules would be in order to allow a non-club member to attend a meeting of the club on a particular date or on a particular agenda item.

Counting Votes

The matter of counting votes starts simple, but can become complicated.


Usually, it’s pretty easy to determine whether a particular motion passed or whether it was defeated. If a simple majority vote is needed to pass a motion, then one vote more than 50 percent of the body is required. For example, in a five-member body, if the vote is three in favor and two opposed, the motion passes. If it is two in favor and three opposed, the motion is defeated.

If a two-thirds majority vote is needed to pass a motion, then how many affirmative votes are required? The simple rule of thumb is to count the “no” votes and double that count to determine how many “yes” votes are needed to pass a particular motion. For example, in a seven-member body, if two members vote “no” then the “yes” vote of at least four members is required to achieve a two-thirds majority vote to pass the motion.

What about tie votes? In the event of a tie, the motion always fails since an affirmative vote is required to pass any motion. For example, in a five-member body, if the vote is two in favor and two opposed, with one member absent, the motion is defeated.

Vote counting starts to become complicated when members vote “abstain” or in the case of a written ballot, cast a blank (or unreadable) ballot. Do these votes count, and if so, how does one count them? The starting point is always to check the statutes.

In California, for example, for an action of a board of supervisors to be valid and binding, the action must be approved by a majority of the board. (California Government Code Section 25005.) Typically, this means three of the five members of the board must vote affirmatively in favor of the action. A vote of 2-1 would not be sufficient. A vote of 3-0 with two abstentions would be sufficient. In general law cities in



California, as another example, resolutions or orders for the payment of money and all ordinances require a recorded vote of the total members of the city council. (California Government Code Section 36936.) Cities with charters may prescribe their own vote requirements. Local elected officials are always well-advised to consult with their local agency counsel on how state law may affect the vote count.

After consulting state statutes, step number two is to check the rules of the body. If the rules of the body say that you count votes of “those present” then you treat abstentions one way. However, if the rules of the body say that you count the votes of those “present and voting,” then you treat abstentions a different way. And if the rules of the body are silent on the subject, then the general rule of thumb (and default rule) is that you count all votes that are “present and voting.”

Accordingly, under the “present and voting” system, you would **NOT** count abstention votes on the motion. Members who abstain are counted for purposes of determining quorum (they are “present”), but you treat the abstention votes on the motion as if they did not exist (they are not “voting”). On the other hand, if the rules of the body specifically say that you count votes of those “present” then you **DO** count abstention votes both in establishing the quorum and on the motion. In this event, the abstention votes act just like “no” votes.

How does this work in practice?

Here are a few examples.

Assume that a five-member city council is voting on a motion that requires a simple majority vote to pass, and assume further that the body has no specific rule on counting votes. Accordingly, the default rule kicks in and we count all votes of members that are “present and voting.” If the vote on the motion is 3-2, the motion passes. If the motion is 2-2 with one abstention, the motion fails.

Assume a five-member city council voting on a motion that requires a two-thirds majority vote to pass, and further assume that the body has no specific rule on counting votes. Again, the default rule applies. If the vote is 3-2, the motion fails for lack of a two-thirds majority. If the vote is 4-1, the motion passes with a clear two-thirds majority. A vote of three “yes,” one “no” and one “abstain” also results in passage of the motion. Once again, the abstention is counted only for the purpose of determining quorum, but on the actual vote on the motion, it is as if the abstention vote never existed — so an effective 3-1 vote is clearly a two-thirds majority vote.

Now, change the scenario slightly. Assume the same five-member city council voting on a motion that requires a two-thirds majority vote to pass, but now assume that the body **DOES** have a specific rule requiring a two-thirds vote of members “present.” Under this specific rule, we must count the members present not only for quorum but also for the motion. In this scenario, any abstention has the same force and effect as if it were a “no” vote. Accordingly, if the votes were three “yes,” one “no” and one “abstain,” then the motion fails. The abstention in this case is treated like a “no” vote and effective vote of 3-2 is not enough to pass two-thirds majority muster.

Now, exactly how does a member cast an “abstention” vote?

Any time a member votes “abstain” or says, “I abstain,” that is an abstention. However, if a member votes “present” that is also treated as an abstention (the member is essentially saying, “Count me for purposes of a quorum, but my vote on the issue is abstain.”) In fact, any manifestation of intention not to vote either “yes” or “no” on the pending motion may be treated by the chair as an abstention. If written ballots are cast, a blank or unreadable ballot is counted as an abstention as well.

Can a member vote “absent” or “count me as absent?” Interesting question. The ruling on this is up to the chair. The better approach is for the chair to count this as if the member had left his/her chair and is actually “absent.” That, of course, affects the quorum. However, the chair may also treat this as a vote to abstain, particularly if the person does not actually leave the dais.

The Motion to Reconsider

There is a special and unique motion that requires a bit of explanation all by itself; the motion to reconsider. A tenet of parliamentary procedure is finality. After vigorous discussion, debate and a vote, there must be some closure to the issue. And so, after a vote is taken, the matter is deemed closed, subject only to reopening if a proper motion to consider is made and passed.

A motion to reconsider requires a majority vote to pass like other garden-variety motions, but there are two special rules that apply only to the motion to reconsider.

First, is the matter of timing. A motion to reconsider must be made at the meeting where the item was first voted upon. A motion to reconsider made at a later time is untimely. (The body, however, can always vote to suspend the rules and, by a two-thirds majority, allow a motion to reconsider to be made at another time.)

Second, a motion to reconsider may be made only by certain members of the body. Accordingly, a motion to reconsider may be made only by a member who voted in the majority on the original motion. If such a member has a change of heart, he or she may make the motion to reconsider (any other member of the body — including a member who voted in the minority on the original motion — may second the motion). If a member who voted in the minority seeks to make the motion to reconsider, it must be ruled out of order. The purpose of this rule is finality. If a member of minority could make a motion to reconsider, then the item could be brought back to the body again and again, which would defeat the purpose of finality.

If the motion to reconsider passes, then the original matter is back before the body, and a new original motion is in order. The matter may be discussed and debated as if it were on the floor for the first time.



Courtesy and Decorum

The rules of order are meant to create an atmosphere where the members of the body and the members of the public can attend to business efficiently, fairly and with full participation. At the same time, it is up to the chair and the members of the body to maintain common courtesy and decorum. Unless the setting is very informal, it is always best for only one person at a time to have the floor, and it is always best for every speaker to be first recognized by the chair before proceeding to speak.

The chair should always ensure that debate and discussion of an agenda item focuses on the item and the policy in question, not the personalities of the members of the body. Debate on policy is healthy, debate on personalities is not. The chair has the right to cut off discussion that is too personal, is too loud, or is too crude.

Debate and discussion should be focused, but free and open. In the interest of time, the chair may, however, limit the time allotted to speakers, including members of the body.

Can a member of the body interrupt the speaker? The general rule is “no.” There are, however, exceptions. A speaker may be interrupted for the following reasons:

Privilege. The proper interruption would be, “point of privilege.” The chair would then ask the interrupter to “state your point.” Appropriate points of privilege relate to anything that would interfere with the normal comfort of the meeting. For example, the room may be too hot or too cold, or a blowing fan might interfere with a person’s ability to hear.

Order. The proper interruption would be, “point of order.” Again, the chair would ask the interrupter to “state your point.” Appropriate points of order relate to anything that would not be considered appropriate conduct of the meeting. For example, if the chair moved on to a vote on a motion that permits debate without allowing that discussion or debate.

Appeal. If the chair makes a ruling that a member of the body disagrees with, that member may appeal the ruling of the chair. If the motion is seconded, and after debate, if it passes by a simple majority vote, then the ruling of the chair is deemed reversed.

Call for orders of the day. This is simply another way of saying, “return to the agenda.” If a member believes that the body has drifted from the agreed-upon agenda, such a call may be made. It does not require a vote, and when the chair discovers that the agenda has not been followed, the chair simply reminds the body to return to the agenda item properly before them. If the chair fails to do so, the chair’s determination may be appealed.

Withdraw a motion. During debate and discussion of a motion, the maker of the motion on the floor, at any time, may interrupt a speaker to withdraw his or her motion from the floor. The motion is immediately deemed withdrawn, although the chair may ask the person who seconded the motion if he or she wishes to make the motion, and any other member may make the motion if properly recognized.

Special Notes About Public Input

The rules outlined above will help make meetings very public-friendly. But in addition, and particularly for the chair, it is wise to remember three special rules that apply to each agenda item:

Rule One: Tell the public what the body will be doing.

Rule Two: Keep the public informed while the body is doing it.

Rule Three: When the body has acted, tell the public what the body did.



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