

# Running Effective Meetings – Rules of Decorum

WCA Educational Seminar  
January 13, 2020



## Sources of Procedural Rules

- State Statutes
- Local Rules
- Robert's Rules of Order

## Object of Rules of Order

- To facilitate the smooth functioning of the assembly
  - Provides order
  - Provides a firm basis for resolving questions of procedure
  - Provides organizational stability

## Object of Rules of Order

- It is unwise for an assembly or society to function w/o formally adopted rules of order
- For many organizations that manual is Robert's Rules of Order, Newly Revised 11<sup>th</sup> Edition

## History

- Parliamentary law originally was the name given to the rules & customs for carrying on business in the English Parliament
- The kind of gathering in which parliamentary law is applicable is known as a deliberative assembly

## Henry Martyn Robert (1837–1923)

- Engineering officer in regular army
- Became Brigadier General
- Active in educational work; church & civic org
- w/o warning asked to preside over meeting
- Embarrassment was supreme
- Never again w/o knowing parliamentary law
- Severe winter tied up Milwaukee engineering project (Lake Michigan), wrote manuscript

## Principles Underlying Parliamentary Law

Rules based on regard for the rights:

- of the majority
- of the minority, especially a strong minority
- of individual members
- of absentees, and
- of all these together

## The Process

- Call to Order – Presiding officer
- Quorum
  - statute, bylaws or local rules should specify
  - In the absence of such a provision – a majority
  - where membership is loosely determined than those who attend
  - WCA Board – majority of members
  - WCA Steering Committee – 25% of members
  - WCA Standing Committee – majority of members

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## The Process

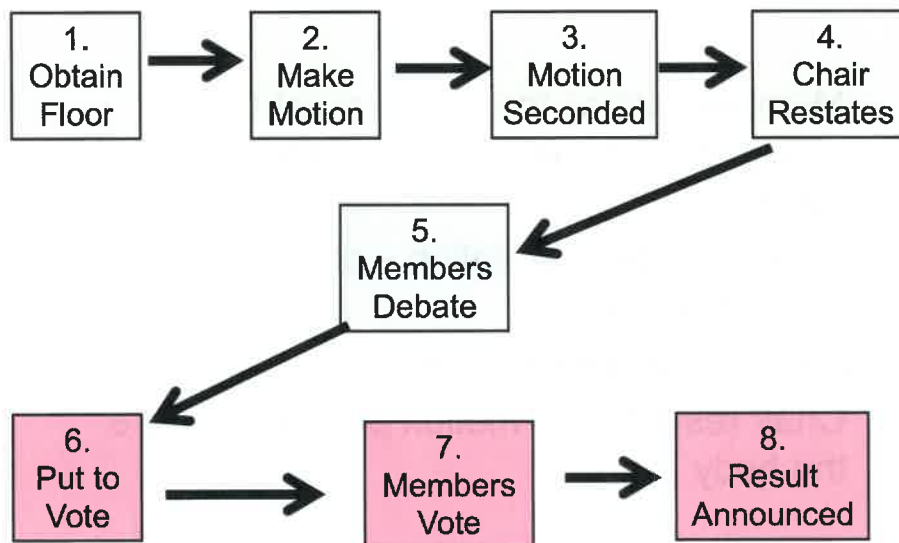
- Member obtains the floor – must be recognized - raise your hand, stand, push a button
  - Member makes a motion – proposal to take a specific action
  - Another member seconds the motion
  - Chair restates the motion placing it before the body
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## The Process

- Members debate
  - Amendments are in order – only 2 at a time
  - Put the motion to a vote – if debate is finished the chair asks “are you ready for the question?”
  - Members vote
  - Chair announces the vote
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## Motion, Debate and Action



## Bringing Business Before Assembly

- Business is brought by a motion by a member
- A motion is a formal proposal to take action
- Basic form of a motion, the only one that brings business before the assembly, is the main motion
- Many other parliamentary motions but none of those bring business before the assembly

## Making a Motion

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- Member must obtain the floor when no other question is pending and when business of the kind represented by the motion is in order
  - Member must obtain the floor before making a motion or speaking in debate
  - Motion is not before the body until stated by the chair
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## Making a Motion

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- Motion can be prefaced by a few words of explanation
  - Chair may assist member in framing the motion
  - Maker of the motion may not withdraw motion once stated by the chair, it is the property of the body
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## Speaking to the Motion

- Discussion of any question is permitted only with a reference to a pending question
  - Until a matter is brought before the assembly in the form of a motion it cannot be debated
  - General rule against discussion w/o a motion is one of parliamentary procedure's most powerful tools for keeping business on track
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## Speaking to the Motion

- Presiding officer must never interrupt because he/she knows more about the matter than the speaker
  - Maker of the motion may vote against it but he/she is not allowed to speak against his/her own motion
  - Must avoid personalities and under no circumstances question the motives of another member
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## Precedence in Speaking

- Member who makes motion is entitled to be recognized
- No one is entitled to the floor a second time if member who has not spoken desires the floor
- No member can speak more than twice
- No more than 10 minutes in total
- Member can not yield unused time

## Refrain from Disturbing the Assembly

During debate no member should be permitted to disturb the assembly by whispering, walking across the floor, or in any other way – key words are “disturbing the assembly”

## Reading from Reports

- Member has no right to read from or have the clerk/secretary read from any paper or book as part of his/her speech w/o permission of the assembly
- Members are permitted to read short, pertinent, printed extracts in debate as long as they do not abuse the privilege

## Assigning the Floor

- Member who rose and addressed the chair first, after the floor was yielded, is entitled to be recognized
- Exceptions to make, those who have not spoken and opposing opinions (should alternate if possible)
- A member can not establish prior claim to the floor by rising before it has been yielded

## Rules of Decorum

### Avoid Use of Member's Names

- Presiding officer should not be referred to by name
- Presiding officer speaks of himself/herself in the third person
- Avoid mentioning another's name when the person can be described in another way

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## When to Speak

- Member never speaks while seated
  - Member does not speak w/o first having risen, addressed the chair & obtained the floor
  - Member has not obtained the floor until recognized by the chair
  - Stand, raise hand, get chair's attention, press a button
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## Address the Chair

- Address all remarks through the chair – not the body, gallery or TV cameras
  - Members can not address one another directly
  - Direct questions to other supervisors through the chair
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## Duties of the Chair

- All persons at a meeting have an obligation to obey the presiding officer
- Members using parliamentary forms for obstructive purposes should not be recognized or ruled out of order
- Enforce the rules relating to debate, order and decorum
- Remind members to confine remarks to the merits of the question

## Duties of the Chair

- Announces issues and keeps members on track
- Restates motion to place before the body & for clarity
- Recognizes members
- Asks for votes on each side and announces outcome
- Responds to requests and rules on points of order

## Debate on the Question

- Members remarks must be germane to the question before the assembly
- Speakers must address their remarks to the chair, maintain a courteous tone, avoid injecting a personal tone into the debate
- Member has a right to speak twice on the same question
- Can speak no longer than 10 minutes in total

## Chair Speaking in Debate

- Presiding officer should relinquish the chair if entering the discussion
- Officer should not return until the pending question is disposed of
- Exception with small boards and committees

## Committee–Public Comment

- The public should be encouraged to speak at the committee level as opposed to the board
- Set time limits – 2,3,5 minutes
- Public should not be allowed to discuss or debate
- Members should not respond to questions
- Determine if public comment is limited to items on the agenda

## Committee–Seating

- Board members should be allowed to address the committee but not participate in debate
- Only members of the committee and staff should be seated at the table
- Other seating should be provided for members of the board, public or guests

## Committee-Closed Session

- Members of the board are allowed to attend a closed meeting of the committee
- County may adopt a rule limiting members of the parent body from attending a closed session of a committee (s.19.89 Wis. Stats.)

## Committee-Debate

- General rule is to have motion first then discussion
- In committee it is acceptable to have discussion first then a motion



## Budget Resolution

### Preferred

- Motion – approve the budget
- Motion to amend – reduce park fees 2%
- Motion to amend – increase salary line 2%

### Alternative

- Motion – reduce park fees 2%
- Motion – increase salary line 2%
- Motion – approve budget as amended

## Committee-Debate

- Members may raise a hand instead of standing when seeking the floor
- Members may remain seated during debate and discussion
- Informal discussion is permitted before a motion is pending
- Members may speak as often and as long as they like

## Committee-Chair

- The chair may, without stepping down, discuss, debate and vote on all questions
- The chair need not rise when putting a motion to a vote

## Committee of the Whole

- Enables full assembly to give detailed consideration to a matter under conditions of freedom similar to a committee
- Speak as often as you can get the floor
- Votes are not final, only recommendations
- Can not adjourn as a committee
- Use for general discussion
- More common in smaller bodies-city councils

## Motions & Misconceptions

### Nominations

- Nominations are not necessary
  - Each member is free to vote for anyone eligible
- Need not be recognized by the chair
- May nominate your self
- No second required
  - Sometimes done to show support

## Nominations

- Motion to close
  - No motion necessary
  - Not in order until reasonable time has been given
  - Is out of order if someone is seeking the floor
  - Requires 2/3 vote
  - No requirement to ask 3 times
  - Chair can declare nominations are closed

## Elections

- Impropriety of limiting voting to the 2 leading candidates
  - Leading candidates may represent 2 different factions – division may be deepened
  - May unite members w/compromise candidate
- Improper to remove nominee w/lowest votes
  - Repeat balloting until you have a winner
  - Nominee w/lowest number of votes could be a “dark horse” who all can agree on

## Motion to Lay on the Table

- Temporarily sets aside the matter w/intent to take up later in the meeting
- Commonly misused in place of Postpone Indefinitely or Postpone to a Time Certain
- Adopting halts consideration w/o debate
- Such action violates the rights of the minority and individual members
- Is out of order if no other urgent matter

## Motion to Postpone

- Motion by which pending action can be delayed
- Must be to a time specific
  - Definite day, meeting, hour or until after a certain event
- Motion is debatable
- Motion to just postpone is out of order

## Motion to Postpone Indefinitely

- Motion used when the body declines to take a position
- Motion is debatable
- Adoption kills the motion
- Avoids a direct vote on the question
- Useful in disposing of a badly chosen main motion that cannot be either adopted or rejected w/o undesirable consequences

## Move the Previous Question

- Motion used to bring the assembly to an immediate vote - non-debatable
- Requires 2/3 vote
- Often mistaken for a “Call for the Question”
  - No one person can close debate
  - Not proper to shut off debate against the will of even one member who wishes to speak and has not exhausted his/her right to debate

## Motion to Adopt Entire Report

- Seldom wise except when it is to be issued or published in the name of the organization
- An affirmative vote has the effect of the assembly endorsing every word of the report
- Expressions *adopt*, *accept* & *agree to* are all equivalent
- A common error is to move that a report “be received” or “accepted” - implies that the assembly has endorsed the complete report

## Friendly Amendment

- Often used to describe an amendment offered by someone who is in sympathy with the purpose of the main motion
- Regardless of whether or not the maker of the main motion “accepts” the amendment it must be opened to debate and voted on (unless adopted by unanimous consent)
- Is handled under the same rules as amendments generally

## Voting – Division of the Assembly

- A vote retaken by rising at the demand of a member is called a “Division of the Assembly”
- A member can demand a division from the moment the negative votes have been cast until the result of the vote has been announced

## Voting – Right of Abstention

- It is the duty of every member who has an opinion on a question to express it by his/her vote
- A member can abstain
- A member cannot be compelled to vote



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## Explain Your Vote

- A member has no right to explain his/her vote during voting
  - It would be the same as debate at such a time
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## Change One's Vote

- A member has a right to change his/her vote up to the time the result is announced
  - A member can change his/her vote after the result is announced only by unanimous consent without debate
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## Point of Order

- Member states when he/she feels rules of the assembly are being violated
- Takes precedence over pending question
- In order when another has the floor
- Does not require a second
- Is not debatable
- Ruled upon by the chair

## Appeal the Ruling of the Chair

- Any two member have the right to appeal from the ruling of the presiding officer – one makes the Appeal the other seconds
- The question is taken from the chair and vested in the assembly
- No member is allowed to speak more than once except the presiding officer who is not limited and need not leave the chair

We have to stop meeting this way



Ukrainian Parliament-April 26, 2010  
Source: nytimes.com "Ukraine Passes Deal Under Hail of Eggs"

53

## Resources

- The UW-Extension Local Government Center
- 608-262-9961
  
- von Briesen & Roper, S.C.
- 414-287-1570
  
- Wisconsin Counties Association
- 866-404-2700

## Questions? Comments?

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