

call to order

Approve the Agenda

—J. Michael Blaska, Parliamentarian & Chief of Staff,
Wisconsin Counties Association



Many organizations and county boards establish an order of business as part of their bylaws or rules. The order of business specifies the sequence business items are taken up. The order of business might include such items as roll call, special matters and announcements, approval of payments, reports, ordinance amendments, award of contracts, resolutions, etc. But how does an item get on the agenda? There is no simple answer as *Robert's Rules of Order* conflicts with the Wisconsin State Statutes.

Robert's Rules of Order states that for a proposed agenda to become the official agenda for the meeting, it must be adopted by the assembly at the outset of the meeting. A draft agenda is sent to the members who then can add or delete items or make any other change.

Wisconsin's Open Meeting Law renders this motion impractical because governmental bodies must give public notice at least 24 hours prior to the commencement of the meeting. In fact, it would be illegal to add items to the agenda.

Many boards, at the beginning of the meeting, entertain a motion to adopt or approve the agenda. This is a practice that is not necessary and should be eliminated.

This process is also used by some county boards to remove items that are not ready for approval, remove items placed on the agenda inadvertently, to honor a member's request to delay action, or to change the order. There are several motions that can address those situations during the meeting. If a resolution is not ready for approval it can be *Postponed*

to a specific time, *Indefinitely Postponed* if the intent is to kill, or *Referred* back to a committee. The chair can honor requests to take items out of order if there is no objection and if there is objection, a motion to *Suspend the Rules* is in order. There is no need for a motion to adopt the agenda.

The board is not required to dispose of every item on the agenda. If unable to finish, the remaining items can be placed on the next regularly scheduled meeting or the board can *Adjourn* to a special date and time to finish their business.

So how do items get on the agenda? The county board rules should specify how and who is responsible for placing items on the agenda. In some counties, the board chair has the responsibility, in others it is done in collaboration with the county administrator, administrative coordinator, or county clerk. Still others require all resolutions and ordinance amendments to go through a standing committee; when the committee or committees act, the item is placed on the agenda and the chair has no say.

Robert's Rules of Order suggests that the president or chair may assist in preparing the agenda, but it is wrong to assume that they set the agenda.

However, Wisconsin's Open Meetings Law states that the chief presiding officer or designee is responsible for insuring public notice is given for meetings. It is then assumed, without any other county board rule, that it is the chair's responsibility for setting the agenda.

I hope reading *Call to Order* is on everyone's agenda.

Source: *Robert's Rules of Order Newly Revised, 11th Edition*