

# Running Effective Meetings – Rules of Decorum

WCA Educational Seminar  
January 22, 2018

# 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
  - To provide a firm basis for resolving questions of procedure
-

# 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



# 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

# 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

---

# 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
-

# 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

---

# 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
-

# 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
-

# 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

- 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

# Making a Motion

- 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

# 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

# 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

# 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

# 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

# Content of Minutes

- They should contain mainly a record of what was done at a meeting and not what was said by members
- Kind of meeting; name of society or assembly; date, time and place; minutes of previous meeting – read or approved; all main motions

# 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

---

# 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
-



# 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

# 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

# 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 members 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”

---

# 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?

## **Philip J. Freeburg**

Local Government Law Educator

UW – Extension Local Government Center

608-262-5103

[philip.freeburg@ces.uwex.edu](mailto:philip.freeburg@ces.uwex.edu)

## **Jon Hochkammer**

Outreach Manager

Wisconsin Counties Association

866-404-2700

[hochkammer@wicounties.org](mailto:hochkammer@wicounties.org)