



# **ROBERT'S RULES OF ORDER - PARLIAMENTARY PROCEDURE**


Presented to the Executive Assistants' Group

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# FUN STUFF WE'LL TALK ABOUT

- What Are Robert's Rules of Order?
- General Overview of Parliamentary Procedure and How Robert's Rules Fit In
- Meeting Basics
- Motions, Debate, Amendments, Voting
- Reports and Public Comment
- Suspending the Rules
- Frequently Asked Questions
- Informal Procedures in Small Boards



In a land where perhaps most persons . . . are members of one or more societies, some knowledge of parliamentary [procedure] may be justly regarded as a necessary part of the education of every man and woman . . .

- Henry M. Robert

# ROBERT'S RULES OF ORDER

- **Robert's Rules of Order – Newly Revised, 11th Edition (RONR)**
  - Bigger black book – more detailed (the actual rules)
  - Excellent resource for more in-depth questions
  - Have a copy in your office at least
- **Robert's Rules of Order – Newly Revised, In Brief**
  - Littler yellow book – simpler, easy-to-read format
  - Excellent reference for quick answers to most questions (but not the actual rules)
  - Good to have a copy at all of your meetings
  - Give a copy to your chair! (and maybe all of your members)
  - Has references to RONR

# GENERAL OVERVIEW

## Authorities Governing an Assembly's Meetings

- **Law:** RCWs and WACs governing meetings (e.g., OPMA) and those specific to your agency, board, or commission
- **Bylaws/Charter:** Governing the structure and operation of the organization
  - May cover some topics in Robert's Rules and take precedence
- **Rules of Order:**
  - Special Rules of Order: Specific to your organization
  - Parliamentary Authority: General book of rules (e.g., **Robert's Rules**)
- **Common Practice or Custom**
  - Not in written rule

# MEETING BASICS

- **Presiding Officer**
  - Chair, or if not present, Vice-Chair or other designated person
- **Quorum (or not)**
  - Minimum number of members who must be present to conduct business
  - Usually majority or number established in law or bylaws
- **Agenda/Order of Business**
  - Can adopt a standard Order of Business or circulate agenda prior to meeting
- **Minutes**
  - Approve prior meeting minutes at beginning of each meeting
  - Record of what was DONE at the meeting, not of what was SAID
- **Adjournment or Recess**



# MOTIONS, DEBATE, AMENDMENTS, AND VOTING

## How Decisions of the Group Are Made

- **Motion is made** – Motion = formal proposal made by a member at a meeting that the group take certain action
- **Seconded** – Another member must second a motion to bring it before the entire group
- **Chair “states” the Question** – Repeats the exact words of the motion
- **Debate** – Discussion of the merits of the Question
- **Secondary Motions** – Most common is an amendment
- **Vote** – Chair “puts” the Question if there is no more discussion; group votes; Chair announces the result

# REPORTS AND PUBLIC COMMENT

- **Reports**

- May be regular Officer or Committee reports
- Members decide what reports they want
- Should be listed on the agenda/order of business

- **Public Comment**

- Not required in RONR or OPMA
- If allowed, is still under the control of the Presiding Officer
- Limitations on time and subject relevance may be imposed



# SUSPENDING THE RULES

## **Allows the Assembly to Do Something Contrary to What the Adopted Rules Say**

- Need Motion to Suspend the Rules
- Motion made by stating what you want to be able to do that would violate the rules (do not need to name the rule you want to suspend)
- Need a second
- Requires two-thirds vote

# FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

## \*\*\*POP QUIZ!\*\*\*

- **Can President/Chair only vote to break a tie?**
- **Once a quorum is established, does it continue even if some members leave?**
- **What constitutes a majority?**
- **Can you round down for a two-thirds vote?**
- **Is it necessary to summarize matters discussed at a meeting in the minutes?**

# FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

## \*\*\*ANSWERS\*\*\*

- **Can President/Chair only vote to break a tie?**
  - No; if member of the voting body, then has the same rights as other members
- **Once a quorum is established, does it continue even if some members leave?**
  - No; if the Chair notices that a quorum is no longer present, he or she should declare this point—especially before taking a vote
- **What constitutes a majority?**
  - More than half (not 50% + one)
- **Can you round down for a two-thirds vote?**
  - No; two-thirds means *at least* two-thirds
- **Is it necessary to summarize matters discussed at a meeting in the minutes?**
  - Not only is it not necessary, it is improper to do so; minutes are a record of what was done—not what was said

# INFORMAL PROCEDURES IN SMALL BOARDS

## **If No More Than About a Dozen Board Members Are Present, More Informal Procedures May Be Followed:**

- Member may raise hand to obtain floor instead of standing
- Member may remain seated when making motion or speaking
- Member may speak more than twice during debate
- Can discuss a subject informally even if no motion pending
- Chair need not stand when putting questions to a vote
- Chair may participate in debate, make motions, and vote without giving up the chair

# ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- **Attorney General's Office's Open Government Manual and Trainings:**  
<http://www.atg.wa.gov/open-government-resource-manual>  
(OPMA/PRA)
- **Municipal Research Services Center (MRSC) - Parliamentary Procedure: A Brief Guide to Robert's Rules of Order:**  
<http://mrsc.org/Home/Explore-Topics/Governance/Legislative-Organization,-Meetings-and-Process/Parliamentary-Procedure.aspx>
- **The Official Robert's Rules of Order Website:**  
<http://www.robertsrules.com/> - includes short history of Robert's Rules, the basics of parliamentary procedure, question and answer forum, and "Ask the Authors" feature

THE END

- Any Questions?

