

## Overview

Parliamentary procedure provides the process for proposing, amending, approving and defeating legislative motions. It helps us keep our Region Assemblies running smoothly.

## Basic Rules

- **Only one subject may be before a group at one time.** Each item to be considered is proposed as a motion and requires a "second" before being put to a vote. Once a motion is made and seconded, the Chair places the question (motion) before the Assembly by restating the motion for clarity.
- **Only one person may speak at any given time.** When a motion is on the floor, Robert's Rules outline a speaker order, allowing the maker of a motion to speak first, so that the group understands the basic premise of the motion.
- **All members have equal rights.** Each speaker must be recognized by the moderator prior to speaking. Each speaker should make clear his or her intent by stating, "I wish to speak for/against the motion" prior to stating an argument. Motions generally have 3 pros and 3 cons while amendments to motions have 2 pros and 2 cons.
- **Each item presented for consideration is entitled to a full and free debate.** Each person speaks once, until everyone else has had an opportunity to speak.
- **The rights of the minority must be protected, but the will of the majority must prevail.** Persons who don't share the point of view of the majority have a right to have their ideas presented for consideration, but ultimately the majority will determine what the Assembly will or will not do. Use parliamentary procedure as a tool, not a bludgeon.

## Ways to Alter the Motion

- **Tabling.** Used to postpone discussion until the group decides by majority vote to resume discussion. By adopting the motion to "lay on the table," a majority has the power to halt consideration of a question immediately without debate. This motion requires a second and is not debatable or amendable.
- **Previous question or close debate.** Used to bring the body to an immediate vote. It closes debate and stops further amendment. Contrary to some misconceptions, the majority decides when enough discussion has occurred, not the moderator. The formal motion is to "call for the question" or "call for the previous question," or simply, "I move to close debate." The motion requires a second, is not debatable, and requires a two-thirds majority.
- **Limit/extend debate.** May be desired if the group has adopted a rule limiting the amount of time that will be spent on a topic, or if the group desires to impose a time limitation. If

discussion is going on too long or is becoming repetitive, either a Rep or Chair can ask that the Question be called.

- **Postpone to a definite time.** Similar to tabling, except that the motion directs that the matter will be taken up again at some specific date and time.
- **Amendment.** Used to "fine tune" a motion to make it more acceptable to the group. The amendment must be related to the main motion's intent and cannot be phrased in a way that would defeat the main motion. Two amendments may be on the floor at one time: the first amendment modifies the main motion, and the second amendment must relate to the first amendment. When an amendment is on the floor, only the amendment may be debated. The amendments are voted on in the reverse order in which they were made, as each amendment changes to some degree the intent of the main motion. As each amendment is voted on, an additional primary or secondary amendment may be introduced. An amendment is debatable, and requires a second and a majority vote.
- **Refer to committee.** Directs that some other body will study the matter and report back. This must happen if a 3<sup>rd</sup> amendment is proposed to a motion.
- **Postpone indefinitely.** This motion effectively kills a motion, because, if adopted, a two-thirds vote is subsequently required to take the matter up again.

## Incidental Motions

Incidental motions are housekeeping motions which are in order at any time, taking precedence over main motions and subsidiary motions. These motions include:

- **Point of order.** To bring to the group's attention that the rules are being violated. You don't need to be recognized prior to making a point of order. This is not really a motion, but requires the moderator to make a ruling as to whether or not immediate consideration is proper.
- **Appeal from the decision of the chair.** The group can overrule the chair on any decision. While the motion must be seconded, it cannot be amended. When this motion is moved and seconded, the moderator immediately states the question, "Shall the decision of the chair stand as the judgment of the Assembly?" If there is a tie vote, the chair's decision is upheld. The motion is not debatable when it applies to a matter of improper use of authority or when it is made while there is a pending motion to close debate. However, the motion can be debated at other times. Each person may speak once, and the moderator may also state the basis for the decision.
- **Parliamentary inquiry.** Not a motion, but a question as to whether an action would be in order.
- **Point of information.** A person may rise to offer information that is considered necessary for the group. This provision is not used to offer debate.
- **Division of assembly.** To require a more precise method of counting votes than by a voice vote, such as having persons raise hands or stand. Divisions of assembly don't require seconds or votes, and are not debatable.

- **Request to withdraw a motion.** Contrary to popular misconception, a motion cannot be withdrawn by its mover. This request requires majority approval.
- **Suspension of the rules.** When matters are to be taken out of order, or a particular task can be better handled without formal rules in place, this motion can be approved by a two-thirds vote of the group. However, until the rules are restored, only discussion can occur; no decisions can be made. This motion requires a second but is not debatable or amendable.
- **Object to consideration of a question.** When a motion is so outrageous, intended to distract the group from resolving legitimate business. The motion can be objected to and ruled out of order without debate. However, if the chair does not rule the motion out of order, a two-thirds vote of the group can block further consideration.

## Questions of Privilege

Finally, there are a few questions of privilege that are in order at any time and must be disposed of prior to resuming discussion on the matter at hand:

- **Fix the time for next meeting.** This is in order at any time, including when a motion to adjourn is pending. Second required, not debatable, and amendable.
- **Adjourn.** To bring the meeting to a halt. Second required, not debatable, and not amendable. Alternatively, instead of a motion, the chair can ask if there is any further business. If there is no response, the chair can say, "Since there is no further business, the meeting is adjourned."
- **Recess.** A temporary break in the meeting; should state a time at which the meeting will resume. Second required, not debatable, and not amendable.
- **Point of privilege.** A matter that concerns the welfare of the group. Can be raised even when another person is speaking. No second, not debatable, and no vote required. This is often used to calm things down and call for the Serenity Prayer.
- **Call for the orders of the day.** A demand that the group return to the agenda. Can be taken when another person is speaking, no second required, not debatable, and no vote required.