RESOLUTION ADOPTING ROSENBERG’S RULES OF ORDER FOR THE GOVERNANCE OF MEETINGS OF
THE BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS

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Purpose: Adoption of Rosenberg’s Rules of Order (“Rosenberg’s Rules”) as the parliamentary rules
governing Housing Authority of the City of Los Angeles (“HACLA”) Board of
Commissioners (“Board”) meetings will promote transparency, fairness, and consistency
by establishing clear, comprehensible guidelines for the conduct of Board business.

Regarding: HACLA’s Bylaws (the “Bylaws”), last updated and approved on May 23, 2019, under
Resolution 9505, outline several procedural rules, such as the number of Commissioners
needed to establish a quorum, that all actions require a positive vote from a majority of
all Board members to pass, and that an abstention is counted as an “aye” vote. However,
the Bylaws do not formally adopt a set of parliamentary rules to govern Board
procedures, such as how to raise and consider motions.

Issues: The Board currently conducts meetings according to American procedural norms, such
as the solicitation of a motion, second to the motion, and discussion before a vote is
taken on an item. While this method of business and the brief procedural rules outlined
in the Bylaws provide a basic foundation for conducting efficient meetings, the formal
adoption of procedural rules would provide more clear guidance for handling specific
procedural situations which may arise.

Formal rules of procedure help public bodies run consistent and efficient meetings by
providing guidelines for important procedural matters such as the handling of different
types of motions. Adoption of formal parliamentary rules also ensures that every matter
is given the same process, which makes meetings more consistent, accessible, and
comprehensible to the public.

While many organizations choose to use Robert’s Rules of Order (“Robert’s Rules”) because it contains the traditional rules of parliamentary procedure in the United States, Robert’s Rules is extremely long and complex, with the current twelfth edition containing 714 numbered pages. Adoption of Robert’s Rules could arguably detract from the goals of openness and transparency by limiting accessibility for ordinary members of the public, and even for board members themselves. Robert’s Rules is best suited for large public bodies that may require extensive rules of procedure (e.g., the British Parliament),
and its overall benefits are diminished when applied to smaller bodies with relatively straightforward agendas.

To combat the problem of overly complex parliamentary rules, California Superior Court Judge David Rosenberg created Rosenberg’s Rules, a simplified version of Robert’s Rules that condenses the most relevant parts of Robert’s Rules down to six easily understandable pages of rules and advice as to how to run a meeting. Rosenberg’s Rules includes guidance regarding such topics as the role of the chairperson and a suggested basic format for agenda item discussion. In addition, Rosenberg’s Rules contains a description of permissible types of motions and their rules, and rules for when to debate, voting, and decorum. These rules, which are contained on pages three to seven of the attached Rosenberg’s Rules document beginning with the section “The Three Basic Motions,” are those this report recommends the Board adopt via resolution.

**Following Local and Peer Practices**

The League of California Cities (the “League”) publishes Rosenberg’s Rules as part of the League’s commitment to “conducting the business of government with transparency, openness, respect, and civility.”¹ The practicability, logic, and simplicity that Rosenberg’s Rules offers smaller deliberative bodies has led numerous other public entities, in California and throughout the United States, to adopt it in lieu of Robert’s Rules.

For example, the cities of Alameda, Los Alamitos, Dublin, Santa Rosa, Belmont, Calistoga, Fresno, Redwood City, Richmond, San Mateo, and Sonoma have all adopted Rosenberg’s Rules. Within the City of Los Angeles (the “City”), the City’s Neighborhood Councils are authorized to adopt either Rosenberg’s Rules or Robert’s Rules at their discretion, subject to review and approval by the Department of Neighborhood Empowerment and the City Attorney’s Office.²

**Vision Plan: Pathways Strategy #7 – Organizational Efficiency**

Adopting Rosenberg’s Rules, with its emphasis on transparency, efficiency, and ease of use, is consistent with the Vision Plan’s commitment to reducing operating and administrative costs so that scarce resources are maximized. Having a clear and comprehensible set of parliamentary procedures will also aid in the onboarding of new Board members, since the procedures laid out in Rosenberg’s Rules are intuitive, easy to learn, and supported by accessible and readily available training materials.


Funding: The Chief Administrative Officer confirms the following:

No dedicated funding is required.

Environmental Review: Neither CEQA nor NEPA are triggered by this request.

Section 3: Not applicable.

Attachments:

1. Resolution
RESOLUTION NO.______________

RESOLUTION ADOPTING ROSENBERG’S RULES OF ORDER FOR THE GOVERNANCE OF MEETINGS OF THE BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS

WHEREAS, the Housing Authority of the City of Los Angeles’ (“HACLA”) Bylaws (“Bylaws”) contain rules of procedure for HACLA Board of Commissioners (“Board”) meetings addressing foundational issues like quorum, how to vote, and the number of votes necessary to act, but do not address finer procedural questions regarding the conduct of Board meetings;

WHEREAS, HACLA wishes to establish formal rules of procedure which will help to ensure that Board meetings are conducted in a fair, transparent, and consistent manner;

WHEREAS, rules of procedure which are easy to understand increase access for the general public and foster openness and transparency;

WHEREAS, Rosenberg’s Rules of Order (“Rosenberg’s Rules”) provides a practical, logical, simple, easy-to-learn and user-friendly format for meeting procedures;

WHEREAS, the adoption of Rosenberg’s Rules will provide clear procedures that will allow for efficient and effective discussion, public participation, and overall use of time at Board meetings;

WHEREAS, four Board members shall continue to constitute a quorum, abstentions are counted as “aye” votes, and a vote of the majority of all Board members will remain conclusive authority, consistent with the Bylaws;

WHEREAS, “Rosenberg’s Rules” contains both advice for Board members as well as prescriptive rules of procedure, and the Board wishes to formally adopt that section of Rosenberg’s Rules that provides rules of procedure; and

WHEREAS, if any provision of the Bylaws conflicts with Rosenberg’s Rules, the Bylaws will control.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the Board hereby approves the adoption of Rosenberg’s Rules, 2011 Revised Edition, starting with the section “The Three Basic Motions” on page 3 and running through the end of page 7, as attached to this Board letter, for the governance of proceedings during Board meetings.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that this Resolution shall take effect immediately.

APPROVED AS TO FORM   HOUSING AUTHORITY OF THE
By: __________________________   CITY OF LOS ANGELES
James Johnson, General Counsel   By: __________________________
Cielo Castro, Chairperson

DATE ADOPTED: ____________________
Rosenberg’s Rules of Order
REVISED 2011
Simple Rules of Parliamentary Procedure for the 21st Century

By Judge Dave Rosenberg
MISSION and CORE BELIEFS
To expand and protect local control for cities through education and advocacy to enhance the quality of life for all Californians.

VISION
To be recognized and respected as the leading advocate for the common interests of California’s cities.

About the League of California Cities
Established in 1898, the League of California Cities is a member organization that represents California’s incorporated cities. The League strives to protect the local authority and autonomy of city government and help California’s cities effectively serve their residents. In addition to advocating on cities’ behalf at the state capitol, the League provides its members with professional development programs and information resources, conducts education conferences and research, and publishes Western City magazine.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR
Dave Rosenberg is a Superior Court Judge in Yolo County. He has served as presiding judge of his court, and as presiding judge of the Superior Court Appellate Division. He also has served as chair of the Trial Court Presiding Judges Advisory Committee (the committee composed of all 58 California presiding judges) and as an advisory member of the California Judicial Council. Prior to his appointment to the bench, Rosenberg was member of the Yolo County Board of Supervisors, where he served two terms as chair. Rosenberg also served on the Davis City Council, including two terms as mayor. He has served on the senior staff of two governors, and worked for 19 years in private law practice. Rosenberg has served as a member and chair of numerous state, regional and local boards. Rosenberg chaired the California State Lottery Commission, the California Victim Compensation and Government Claims Board, the Yolo-Solano Air Quality Management District, the Yolo County Economic Development Commission, and the Yolo County Criminal Justice Cabinet. For many years, he has taught classes on parliamentary procedure and has served as parliamentarian for large and small bodies.
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Introduction

The rules of procedure at meetings should be simple enough for most people to understand. Unfortunately, that has not always been the case. Virtually all clubs, associations, boards, councils and bodies follow a set of rules — Robert’s Rules of Order — which are embodied in a small, but complex, book. Virtually no one I know has actually read this book cover to cover. Worse yet, the book was written for another time and for another purpose. If one is chairing or running a parliament, then Robert’s Rules of Order is a dandy and quite useful handbook for procedure in that complex setting. On the other hand, if one is running a meeting of say, a five-member body with a few members of the public in attendance, a simplified version of the rules of parliamentary procedure is in order.

Hence, the birth of Rosenberg’s Rules of Order.

What follows is my version of the rules of parliamentary procedure, based on my decades of experience chairing meetings in state and local government. These rules have been simplified for the smaller bodies we chair or in which we participate, slimmed down for the 21st Century, yet retaining the basic tenets of order to which we have grown accustomed. Interestingly enough, Rosenberg’s Rules has found a welcoming audience. Hundreds of cities, counties, special districts, committees, boards, commissions, neighborhood associations and private corporations and companies have adopted Rosenberg’s Rules in lieu of Robert’s Rules because they have found them practical, logical, simple, easy to learn and user friendly.

This treatise on modern parliamentary procedure is built on a foundation supported by the following four pillars:

1. **Rules should establish order.** The first purpose of rules of parliamentary procedure is to establish a framework for the orderly conduct of meetings.
2. **Rules should be clear.** Simple rules lead to wider understanding and participation. Complex rules create two classes: those who understand and participate; and those who do not fully understand and do not fully participate.
3. **Rules should be user friendly.** That is, the rules must be simple enough that the public is invited into the body and feels that it has participated in the process.
4. **Rules should enforce the will of the majority while protecting the rights of the minority.** The ultimate purpose of rules of procedure is to encourage discussion and to facilitate decision making by the body. In a democracy, majority rules. The rules must enable the majority to express itself and fashion a result, while permitting the minority to also express itself, but not dominate, while fully participating in the process.

Establishing a Quorum

The starting point for a meeting is the establishment of a quorum. A quorum is defined as the minimum number of members of the body who must be present at a meeting for business to be legally transacted. The default rule is that a quorum is one more than half the body. For example, in a five-member body a quorum is three. When the body has three members present, it can legally transact business. If the body has less than a quorum of members present, it cannot legally transact business. And even if the body has a quorum to begin the meeting, the body can lose the quorum during the meeting when a member departs (or even when a member leaves the dais). When that occurs the body loses its ability to transact business until and unless a quorum is reestablished.

The default rule, identified above, however, gives way to a specific rule of the body that establishes a quorum. For example, the rules of a particular five-member body may indicate that a quorum is four members for that particular body. The body must follow the rules it has established for its quorum. In the absence of such a specific rule, the quorum is one more than half the members of the body.

The Role of the Chair

While all members of the body should know and understand the rules of parliamentary procedure, it is the chair of the body who is charged with applying the rules of conduct of the meeting. The chair should be well versed in those rules. For all intents and purposes, the chair makes the final ruling on the rules every time the chair states an action. In fact, all decisions by the chair are final unless overruled by the body itself.

Since the chair runs the conduct of the meeting, it is usual courtesy for the chair to play a less active role in the debate and discussion than other members of the body. This does not mean that the chair should not participate in the debate or discussion. To the contrary, as a member of the body, the chair has the full right to participate in the debate, discussion and decision-making of the body. What the chair should do, however, is strive to be the last to speak at the discussion and debate stage. The chair should not make or second a motion unless the chair is convinced that no other member of the body will do so at that point in time.

The Basic Format for an Agenda Item Discussion

Formal meetings normally have a written, often published agenda. Informal meetings may have only an oral or understood agenda. In either case, the meeting is governed by the agenda and the agenda constitutes the body’s agreed-upon roadmap for the meeting. Each agenda item can be handled by the chair in the following basic format:
The chair should clearly announce the agenda item number and should clearly state what the agenda item subject is. The chair should then announce the format (which follows) that will be followed in considering the agenda item.

Motions are made in a simple two-step process. First, the chair recognizes the member of the body who makes a motion. Second, the member of the body makes a motion by preceding the member’s desired approach with the words “I move …”

A typical motion might be: “I move that we give a 10-day notice in the future for all our meetings.”

The chair usually initiates the motion in one of three ways:

1. **Inviting the members of the body to make a motion**, for example, “A motion at this time would be in order.”
2. **Suggesting a motion to the members of the body**, “A motion would be in order that we give a 10-day notice in the future for all our meetings.”
3. **Making the motion**. As noted, the chair has every right as a member of the body to make a motion, but should normally do so only if the chair wishes to make a motion on an item but is convinced that no other member of the body is willing to step forward to do so at a particular time.

The Three Basic Motions

There are three motions that are the most common and recur often at meetings:

1. **The basic motion**. The basic motion is the one that puts forward a decision for the body’s consideration. A basic motion might be: “I move that we create a five-member committee to plan and put on our annual fundraiser.”
The motion to amend. If a member wants to change a basic motion that is before the body, they would move to amend it. A motion to amend might be: “I move that we amend the motion to have a 10-member committee.” A motion to amend takes the basic motion that is before the body and seeks to change it in some way.

The substitute motion. If a member wants to completely do away with the basic motion that is before the body, and put a new motion before the body, they would move a substitute motion. A substitute motion might be: “I move a substitute motion that we not put on our annual fundraiser.” During the discussion of this motion, a member makes yet a third motion as a “substitute motion that we not put on our annual fundraiser.” And perhaps, during that discussion, a member might make a fourth motion as a “substitute motion that we not put on our annual fundraiser.” The proper procedure would be as follows:

First, the chair would deal with the third (the last) motion on the floor, the substitute motion. After discussion and debate, a vote would be taken first on the third motion. If the substitute motion passed, it would be a substitute for the basic motion and would eliminate it. The first motion would be moot, as would the second motion (which sought to amend the first motion), and the action on the agenda item would be completed on the passage by the body of the third motion (the substitute motion). No vote would be taken on the first or second motions.

Second, if the substitute motion failed, the chair would then deal with the second (now the last) motion on the floor, the motion to amend. The discussion and debate would focus strictly on the amendment (should the committee be five or 10 members). If the motion to amend passed, the chair would then move to consider the main motion (the first motion) as amended. If the motion to amend failed, the chair would then move to consider the main motion (the first motion) in its original format, not amended.

Third, the chair would now deal with the first motion that was placed on the floor. The original motion would either be in its original format (five-member committee), or if amended, would be in its amended format (10-member committee). The question on the floor for discussion and decision would be whether a committee should plan and put on the annual fundraiser.

To Debate or Not to Debate
The basic rule of motions is that they are subject to discussion and debate. Accordingly, basic motions, motions to amend, and substitute motions are all eligible, each in their turn, for full discussion before and by the body. The debate can continue as long as members of the body wish to discuss an item, subject to the decision of the chair that it is time to move on and take action.

There are exceptions to the general rule of free and open debate on motions. The exceptions all apply when there is a desire of the body to move on. The following motions are not debatable (that is, when the following motions are made and seconded, the chair must immediately call for a vote of the body without debate on the motion):

Motion to adjourn. This motion, if passed, requires the body to immediately adjourn to its next regularly scheduled meeting. It requires a simple majority vote.

Motion to recess. This motion, if passed, requires the body to immediately take a recess. Normally, the chair determines the length of the recess which may be a few minutes or an hour. It requires a simple majority vote.

Motion to fix the time to adjourn. This motion, if passed, requires the body to adjourn the meeting at the specific time set in the motion. For example, the motion might be: “I move we adjourn this meeting at midnight.” It requires a simple majority vote.

Multiple Motions Before the Body
There can be up to three motions on the floor at the same time. The chair can reject a fourth motion until the chair has dealt with the three that are on the floor and has resolved them. This rule has practical value. More than three motions on the floor at any given time is confusing and unwieldy for almost everyone, including the chair.

When there are two or three motions on the floor (after motions and seconds) at the same time, the vote should proceed first on the last motion that is made. For example, assume the first motion is a basic “motion to have a five-member committee to plan and put on our annual fundraiser.” During the discussion of this motion, a member might make a second motion to “amend the main motion to have a 10-member committee, not a five-member committee to plan and put on our annual fundraiser.” And perhaps, during that discussion, a member makes yet a third motion as a “substitute motion that we not have an annual fundraiser this year.”” The proper procedure would be as follows:

“Motions to amend” and “substitute motions” are often confused, but they are quite different, and their effect (if passed) is quite different. A motion to amend seeks to retain the basic motion on the floor, but modify it in some way. A substitute motion seeks to throw out the basic motion on the floor, and substitute a new and different motion for it. The decision as to whether a motion is really a “motion to amend” or a “substitute motion” is left to the chair. So if a member makes what that member calls a “motion to amend,” but the chair determines that it is really a “substitute motion,” then the chair’s designation governs.

A “friendly amendment” is a practical parliamentary tool that is simple, informal, saves time and avoids bogging a meeting down with numerous formal motions. It works in the following way: In the discussion on a pending motion, it may appear that a change to the motion is desirable or may win support for the motion from some members. When that happens, a member who has the floor may simply say, “I want to suggest a friendly amendment to the motion.” The member suggests the friendly amendment, and if the maker and the person who seconded the motion pending on the floor accepts the friendly amendment, that now becomes the pending motion on the floor. If either the maker or the person who seconded rejects the proposed friendly amendment, then the proposer can formally move to amend.
**Motion to table.** This motion, if passed, requires discussion of the agenda item to be halted and the agenda item to be placed on “hold.” The motion can contain a specific time in which the item can come back to the body. “I move we table this item until our regular meeting in October.” Or the motion can contain no specific time for the return of the item, in which case a motion to take the item off the table and bring it back to the body will have to be taken at a future meeting. A motion to table an item (or to bring it back to the body) requires a simple majority vote.

**Motion to limit debate.** The most common form of this motion is to say, “I move the previous question” or “I move the question” or “I call the question” or sometimes someone simply shouts out “question.” As a practical matter, when a member calls out one of these phrases, the chair can expedite matters by treating it as a “request” rather than as a formal motion. The chair can simply inquire of the body, “any further discussion?” If no one wishes to have further discussion, then the chair can go right to the pending motion that is on the floor. However, if even one person wishes to discuss the pending motion further, then at that point, the chair should treat the call for the “question” as a formal motion, and proceed to it.

When a member of the body makes such a motion (“I move the previous question”), the member is really saying: “I’ve had enough debate. Let’s get on with the vote.” When such a motion is made, the chair should ask for a second, stop debate, and vote on the motion to limit debate. The motion to limit debate requires a two-thirds vote of the body.

**NOTE:** A motion to limit debate could include a time limit. For example: “I move we limit debate on this agenda item to 15 minutes.” Even in this format, the motion to limit debate requires a two-thirds vote of the body. A similar motion is a motion to object to consideration of an item. This motion is not debatable, and if passed, precludes the body from even considering an item on the agenda. It also requires a two-thirds vote.

**Majority and Super Majority Votes**

In a democracy, a simple majority vote determines a question. A tie vote means the motion fails. So in a seven-member body, a vote of 4-3 passes the motion. A vote of 3-3 with one abstention means the motion fails. If one member is absent and the vote is 3-3, the motion still fails.

All motions require a simple majority, but there are a few exceptions. The exceptions come up when the body is taking an action which effectively cuts off the ability of a minority of the body to take an action or discuss an item. These extraordinary motions require a two-thirds majority (a super majority) to pass:

**Motion to limit debate.** Whether a member says, “I move the previous question,” or “I move the question,” or “I call the question,” or “I move to limit debate,” it all amounts to an attempt to cut off the ability of the minority to discuss an item, and it requires a two-thirds vote to pass.

**Motion to close nominations.** When choosing officers of the body (such as the chair), nominations are in order either from a nominating committee or from the floor of the body. A motion to close nominations effectively cuts off the right of the minority to nominate officers and it requires a two-thirds vote to pass.

**Motion to object to the consideration of a question.** Normally, such a motion is unnecessary since the objectionable item can be tabled or defeated straight up. However, when members of a body do not even want an item on the agenda to be considered, then such a motion is in order. It is not debatable, and it requires a two-thirds vote to pass.

**Motion to suspend the rules.** This motion is debatable, but requires a two-thirds vote to pass. If the body has its own rules of order, conduct or procedure, this motion allows the body to suspend the rules for a particular purpose. For example, the body (a private club) might have a rule prohibiting the attendance at meetings by non-club members. A motion to suspend the rules would be in order to allow a non-club member to attend a meeting of the club on a particular date or on a particular agenda item.

**Counting Votes**

The matter of counting votes starts simple, but can become complicated.

Usually, it’s pretty easy to determine whether a particular motion passed or whether it was defeated. If a simple majority vote is needed to pass a motion, then one vote more than 50 percent of the body is required. For example, in a five-member body, if the vote is three in favor and two opposed, the motion passes. If it is two in favor and three opposed, the motion is defeated.

If a two-thirds majority vote is needed to pass a motion, then how many affirmative votes are required? The simple rule of thumb is to count the “no” votes and double that count to determine how many “yes” votes are needed to pass a particular motion. For example, in a seven-member body, if two members vote “no” then the “yes” vote of at least four members is required to achieve a two-thirds majority vote to pass the motion.

What about tie votes? In the event of a tie, the motion always fails since an affirmative vote is required to pass any motion. For example, in a five-member body, if the vote is two in favor and two opposed, with one member absent, the motion is defeated.

Vote counting starts to become complicated when members vote “abstain” or in the case of a written ballot, cast a blank (or unreadable) ballot. Do these votes count, and if so, how does one count them? The starting point is always to check the statutes.

In California, for example, for an action of a board of supervisors to be valid and binding, the action must be approved by a majority of the board. (California Government Code Section 25005.) Typically, this means three of the five members of the board must vote affirmatively in favor of the action. A vote of 2-1 would not be sufficient. A vote of 3-0 with two abstentions would be sufficient. In general law cities in
California, as another example, resolutions or orders for the payment of 
money and all ordinances require a recorded vote of the total members 
of the city council. (California Government Code Section 36936.) Cities 
with charters may prescribe their own vote requirements. Local elected 
officials are always well-advised to consult with their local agency 
counsel on how state law may affect the vote count.

After consulting state statutes, step number two is to check the rules 
of the body. If the rules of the body say that you count votes of “those 
present” then you treat abstentions one way. However, if the rules of 
the body say that you count the votes of those “present and voting,” 
then you treat abstentions a different way. And if the rules of the 
body are silent on the subject, then the general rule of thumb (and 
default rule) is that you count all votes that are “present and voting.”

Accordingly, under the “present and voting” system, you would NOT 
count abstention votes on the motion. Members who abstain are 
counted for purposes of determining quorum (they are “present”), 
but you treat the abstention votes on the motion as if they did not 
exist (they are not “voting”). On the other hand, if the rules of the 
body specifically say that you count votes of those “present” then you 
DO count abstention votes both in establishing the quorum and on 
the motion. In this event, the abstention votes act just like “no” votes.

How does this work in practice? 
Here are a few examples.

Assume a five-member city council voting on a motion that 
requires a simple majority vote to pass, and assume further that the 
body has no specific rule on counting votes. Accordingly, the default 
rule kicks in and we count all votes of members that are “present and 
voting.” If the vote on the motion is 3-2, the motion passes. If the 
motion is 2-2 with one abstention, the motion fails.

Assume a five-member city council voting on a motion that requires 
a two-thirds majority vote to pass, and further assume that the body 
has no specific rule on counting votes. Again, the default rule applies. 
If the vote is 3-2, the motion fails for lack of a two-thirds majority. If 
the vote is 4-1, the motion passes with a clear two-thirds majority. A 
vote of three “yes,” one “no” and one “abstain” also results in passage 
of the motion. Once again, the abstention is counted only for the 
purpose of determining quorum, but on the actual vote on the 
motion, it is as if the abstention vote never existed — so an effective 
3-1 vote is clearly a two-thirds majority vote.

Now, change the scenario slightly. Assume the same five-member 
city council voting on a motion that requires a two-thirds majority 
vote to pass, but now assume that the body DOES have a specific rule 
requiring a two-thirds vote of members “present.” Under this specific 
rule, we must count the members present not only for quorum but 
also for the motion. In this scenario, any abstention has the same 
force and effect as if it were a “no” vote. Accordingly, if the votes were 
three “yes,” one “no” and one “abstain,” then the motion fails. The 
abstention in this case is treated like a “no” vote and effective vote of 
3-2 is not enough to pass two-thirds majority muster.

Now, exactly how does a member cast an “abstention” vote? 
Any time a member votes “abstain” or says, “I abstain,” that is an 
abstention. However, if a member votes “present” that is also treated 
as an abstention (the member is essentially saying, “Count me for 
purposes of a quorum, but my vote on the issue is abstain.”) In fact, 
any manifestation of intention not to vote either “yes” or “no” on 
the pending motion may be treated by the chair as an abstention. If 
written ballots are cast, a blank or unreadable ballot is counted as an 
abstention as well.

Can a member vote “absent” or “count me as absent?” Interesting 
question. The ruling on this is up to the chair. The better approach is 
for the chair to count this as if the member had left his/her chair and 
is actually “absent.” That, of course, affects the quorum. However, the 
chair may also treat this as a vote to abstain, particularly if the person 
does not actually leave the dais.

The Motion to Reconsider

There is a special and unique motion that requires a bit of 
explanation all by itself; the motion to reconsider. A tenet of 
parliamentary procedure is finality. After vigorous discussion, debate 
and a vote, there must be some closure to the issue. And so, after a 
vote is taken, the matter is deemed closed, subject only to reopening 
if a proper motion to consider is made and passed.

A motion to reconsider requires a majority vote to pass like other 
garden-variety motions, but there are two special rules that apply 
only to the motion to reconsider.

First, is the matter of timing. A motion to reconsider must be made 
at the meeting where the item was first voted upon. A motion to 
reconsider made at a later time is untimely. (The body, however, can 
always vote to suspend the rules and, by a two-thirds majority, allow 
a motion to reconsider to be made at another time.)

Second, a motion to reconsider may be made only by certain 
members of the body. Accordingly, a motion to reconsider may be 
made only by a member who voted in the majority on the original 
motion. If such a member has a change of heart, he or she may 
make the motion to reconsider (any other member of the body 
— including a member who voted in the minority on the original 
motion — may second the motion). If a member who voted in the 
minority seeks to make the motion to reconsider, it must be ruled 
out of order. The purpose of this rule is finality. If a member of 
minority could make a motion to reconsider, then the item could be 
brought back to the body again and again, which would defeat the 
purpose of finality.

If the motion to reconsider passes, then the original matter is back 
before the body, and a new original motion is in order. The matter may 
be discussed and debated as if it were on the floor for the first time.
**Appeal.** If the chair makes a ruling that a member of the body disagrees with, that member may appeal the ruling of the chair. If the motion is seconded, and after debate, if it passes by a simple majority vote, then the ruling of the chair is deemed reversed.

**Call for orders of the day.** This is simply another way of saying, “return to the agenda.” If a member believes that the body has drifted from the agreed-upon agenda, such a call may be made. It does not require a vote, and when the chair discovers that the agenda has not been followed, the chair simply reminds the body to return to the agenda item properly before them. If the chair fails to do so, the chair’s determination may be appealed.

**Withdraw a motion.** During debate and discussion of a motion, the maker of the motion on the floor, at any time, may interrupt a speaker to withdraw his or her motion from the floor. The motion is immediately deemed withdrawn, although the chair may ask the person who seconded the motion if he or she wishes to make the motion, and any other member may make the motion if properly recognized.

**Special Notes About Public Input**

The rules outlined above will help make meetings very public-friendly. But in addition, and particularly for the chair, it is wise to remember three special rules that apply to each agenda item:

**Rule One:** Tell the public what the body will be doing.

**Rule Two:** Keep the public informed while the body is doing it.

**Rule Three:** When the body has acted, tell the public what the body did.

**Courtesy and Decorum**

The rules of order are meant to create an atmosphere where the members of the body and the members of the public can attend to business efficiently, fairly and with full participation. At the same time, it is up to the chair and the members of the body to maintain common courtesy and decorum. Unless the setting is very informal, it is always best for only one person at a time to have the floor, and it is always best for every speaker to be first recognized by the chair before proceeding to speak.

The chair should always ensure that debate and discussion of an agenda item focuses on the item and the policy in question, not the personalities of the members of the body. Debate on policy is healthy, debate on personalities is not. The chair has the right to cut off discussion that is too personal, is too loud, or is too crude.

Debate and discussion should be focused, but free and open. In the interest of time, the chair may, however, limit the time allotted to speakers, including members of the body.

Can a member of the body interrupt the speaker? The general rule is “no.” There are, however, exceptions. A speaker may be interrupted for the following reasons:

**Privilege.** The proper interruption would be, “point of privilege.” The chair would then ask the interrupter to “state your point.” Appropriate points of privilege relate to anything that would interfere with the normal comfort of the meeting. For example, the room may be too hot or too cold, or a blowing fan might interfere with a person’s ability to hear.

**Order.** The proper interruption would be, “point of order.” Again, the chair would ask the interrupter to “state your point.” Appropriate points of order relate to anything that would not be considered appropriate conduct of the meeting. For example, if the chair moved on to a vote on a motion that permits debate without allowing that discussion or debate.

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