

# EFFECTIVE MEETINGS

“The purpose of a public meeting is to conduct the public’s business in an effective, orderly, and efficient manner.” But in many board and council meetings, this purpose can be thwarted by the factionalism and belligerence that may arise out of opposing viewpoints. The following articles focus on preserving (or bringing back) the level of respect, courtesy, and civility needed in council meetings to successfully conduct the public’s business. They address the need to adopt rules of procedure, establish clear standards of behavior and ensure a proper level of decorum. Also included is basic explanation of key provisions from Robert’s Rules of Order, applying the salient points of parliamentary procedure to the conduct of public meetings.

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## Civility in Municipal Government

Adapted from the article “Civility in Municipal Government: Keeping Order When Factions Fracture Your Meetings” by Robert K. Bush, originally published in the September, 2001 issue of Illinois Municipal Review.

“The inference to which we are brought is, that the causes of faction cannot be removed, and that relief is only to be sought in the means of controlling its effects.”

—James Madison, Federalist Paper No. 10.

When former Speaker of the U.S. House of Representatives Thomas “Tip” O’Neill observed that “all politics are local,” he was right on the money. All across America, the day-to-day lives of average citizens are governed by and dependent upon the politicians elected to local office. These mayors, presidents, councilmen, aldermen, trustees, selectmen, commissioners, etc., are charged with adopting and enforcing the laws, ordinances, resolutions, and motions that have a direct effect on our everyday life. It is an awesome responsibility. It is also a credit to the thousands of “everyday” Americans who agree to run for these offices and serve as local elected officials. Hats off to all of them.

Unfortunately, in too many local communities, elected officials see local government as a platform for promoting factional self-interest. It is constantly amazing how the act of

governing a city, town, or village can deteriorate into regular bouts of bickering between local factions. These are not your typical “Democrat vs. Republican” conflicts. Often, opposing groups find it a challenge to even define the differences between one group and another. For example, at a board meeting in one community I represented for a time, I asked one trustee what the “real” difference was between his group and the “opposition.” Without blinking he responded, “They think they are conservative but, really, we are more conservative.” Actually, the real difference was that one group supported the Little League from the west side of town while the other group supported the Little League from the east side.

Another, but more positive, national trend has been the professionalization of local government. More communities have abandoned the tradition of having an elected official, such as a mayor, run the town in favor of a professional manager and staff. But merely because a community has a professional manager does not necessarily result in a less contentious political environment. Quite the contrary: if the politicians don’t need to

worry about the day-to-day municipal operations, they are often left free to create political havoc.

What can be done about the various factions that clamor for recognition in a democratic society? Can their individual needs be satisfied? Can their special interests be addressed? Can their different styles be accommodated? Can their complaints be resolved? Can they live harmoniously under one roof? What can be done, if anything, to reduce the adverse impacts that conflict can have on the effort to run an efficient municipal operation?

Above all else, it is important to recognize the reality of the situation. Throughout our country's history, factions have, for better or worse, thrived at all levels. Political factionalism infiltrates from the most local level to the national scene. Economic factions are a natural consequence of a free market economy where the "have nots" envy the possessions of the "haves," and the "haves" still crave the material wealth of people who have even more. Social factions emerge when people congregate with others who are "like them." In a free society, people tend to gravitate toward others with similar beliefs, values, and prejudices and to distrust and disapprove of elements with dissimilar beliefs and philosophies. Even sports promote disagreement and disdain. Can a Cubs/Mets/Giants fan ever truly befriend a supporter of the White Sox/Yankees/A's? In the end, it takes less energy to seek the comfort of homogeneous neighborhoods, churches, clubs, and the like than to live in a heterogeneous community with all the foibles and conflicts prevalent in a diverse environment.

What is often forgotten, however, is that a cornerstone of our country's emergence was the tolerance for and encouragement of diversity and discourse. The Founding Fathers understood that while conflicting philosophies posed a real threat to the successful operation of society and government, it was totally unacceptable to embrace the alternative of discouraging diverse thought. James

Madison, in the Federalist Paper No. 10, wrote,

*The instability, injustice, and confusion introduced into the public councils, have, in truth, been the mortal diseases under which popular governments have everywhere perished; as they continue to be the favorite and fruitful topics from which the adversaries to liberty derive their most specious declamations. ... Complaints are everywhere heard from our most considerate and virtuous citizens, equally the friends of public and private faith, and of public and personal liberty, that our governments are too unstable, that the public good is disregarded in the conflicts of rival parties, and that measures are too often decided, not according to the rules of justice and the rights of the minor party, but by the superior force of an interested and overbearing majority.*

Yet in weighing what he described as the two remedies for dealing with faction—removing its causes or controlling its effects, Madison went on to say,

*It could never be more truly said than of the first remedy, that it was worse than the disease. Liberty is to faction what air is to fire, an aliment without which it instantly expires. But it could not be less folly to abolish liberty, which is essential to political life, because it nourishes faction, than it would be to wish the annihilation of air, which is essential to animal life, because it imparts to fire its destructive agency.*

In essence, the framers of our American experience believed that people with honest intentions and good will could overcome even fundamental prejudices and differences for the betterment of the whole community.

The purpose of a public meeting is to conduct the public's business in an effective, orderly, and efficient manner. It is not a forum in which to climb upon a personal soapbox to champion the individual beliefs of one's minions. There are appropriate means available to advance a political agenda without disdain

or disruption. Elected officials must recognize that their selection to office is not simply a *carte blanche* to promote partisan views before a larger public audience but a mandate from the electorate to exercise the public trust in a reasonable, rational, and responsible manner. Successful candidates, by virtue of

their election, have the duty and responsibility to advance the greater good and to minimize the potentially deleterious consequences of factionalism and partisanship. They also bear the equally important duty to act with civility and respect when conducting the public's business, even when such business is conducted with people who disagree.

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## Setting the Stage for Civil Meetings

To be civil, in ordinary understanding, means to be polite, respectful, decent, tolerant, and graceful in language and gesture and tone. It means exercising restraint toward others, cooling the hot passions of partisanship, and refraining from adversarial and personalized argument, showing magnanimity toward others.

The decline in civility in public affairs reflects the overall decline in American civility—in professional sports, the media, talk shows, politics, academics, interpersonal communication, even road rage. The loss of civility in our national life betrays more fundamental trends in our society and culture, argues Yale Law School professor Stephen L. Carter, who has traced the historic, cultural, and religious roots of civility that have withered or rotted and that now account for the serious lapse in civil social behavior.<sup>1</sup>

Civility probably cannot be codified into standards of behavior enforceable by penalty. In fact, civility codes for public officials may even set a lower threshold and be an incentive for lowering rather than raising standards, by setting what you can get away with, not how you should be.

There is no constitutional duty of a public official to be civil. But civility might be inspired by conscientious attention to the trappings of a meeting of a public body, by the

Adapted from the article titled "Civility in Local Government: The Civil Society," written by William L. Steude, retired general counsel of the Michigan Municipal League, originally published in the April 2001 issue of *Michigan Municipal Review*.

physical setting, by the rules of procedure, and by the conscious example of members of the public body themselves.

### THE TRAPPINGS OF A MEETING

Opening ceremonies, such as a prayer by a member of the clergy in the community, the pledge of allegiance to the flag led by Girl or Boy Scouts or by veterans, and a formal roll call of the members can set the level of respect with which such formality is usually accorded.

Remember, a municipal council is an elected legislative body whose members take exactly the same constitutional oath of office taken by the governor and by every other elected official in the state. If members and the public have the respect for and from one another that reflects that status, a certain formal level of discourse and decorum might contribute to maintaining a higher level of civility.

The physical setting for the meeting, the furnishings and seating arrangements, and even the council's attire can influence and elevate expectations about public deportment at council meetings. A card table or fold-up table with folding chairs for the council members seems to belittle the office and may invite an informality that can slide into uncivil

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<sup>1</sup> Stephen L. Carter, *Civility: Manners, Morals and the Etiquette of Democracy* (New York: Basic Books, 1998).

discourse or worse. Money spent on decent furnishings and the setting is well worth the cost. It reflects the level of respect accorded by the community toward its self-government and its elected representatives.

### **RULES OF PROCEDURE**

No deliberative body can efficiently conduct its business without rules. A governing body has a relatively free hand in designing its own rules of procedure as long as constitutional (First Amendment), statutory (Open Meetings Act), and local charter requirements are not violated. Although most city and village councils that have rules seem to have automatically adopted Robert's Rules of Procedure, Robert's does not necessarily have to be the primary source for such rules.

The complex detail of parliamentary procedure may confuse and frustrate council members and the public, particularly if the rules are seen as being manipulated for or against one side of an issue, or as being ignored, misunderstood, or wrongly invoked. Such a use of the rules of procedure, or the perception of their misuse, will counter the very purpose of rules of procedure—to protect the minority and promote orderly deliberations and decisions—and will further undermine public confidence in government. Truth in government depends on a set of procedural rules that are followed consistently, provide equal opportunity for every member of the body to participate in decision making, allow for the utmost efficiency, and result in a decision by a majority of the body based on the merits of the issue and not on manipulation of the procedures.

A governing body ordinarily has the discretion to adopt its own simplified set of procedural rules. Such rules do not automatically command civility, but a good set of rules may minimize the perception that the rules are drawn, or bent, to control an outcome. If parliamentary maneuvering is seen as manipulating the proceedings, a frustrated council

member, member of a minority faction, or the attending public can erupt in anger.

Civility and decorum is strained by the gadfly, the activist, and the protester, who tend to distrust government and those in it. If they engage in abusive and baseless charges or monopolize a meeting, the presiding official can rapidly lose the ability to maintain order. Similarly, personal attacks generate counterattacks and lead to verbal duels and free-for-alls that are difficult to control and that leave civility and decorum in the dust. The presiding officer in that event may have no choice except to declare a brief recess so that tempers and rhetoric may cool.

A rule against personal attacks, applicable equally to members of the body and the public, can help keep a discussion “problem centered” and not “person centered.” A procedure to enforce a zero-tolerance policy toward disruptive behavior can be effectuated in the following progressive steps:

1. By reminding the speaker of the rule if a violation occurs
2. If the misconduct persists, by calling the speaker to order and citing the rule—a formal warning that may provide for the speaker to lose the floor (although it may also authorize restoring the floor to the speaker if the abuse ends and the body formally permits the speaker to resume)
3. If the abuse still persists after warnings, by the chair “naming the offender”—a last resort that has the effect of preferring charges. The presiding officer states what the offender has done, and the body then decides how to penalize the offender if he or she is a member of the governing body. The rule could specify a range of penalties—for example, reprimand or formal censure. If the offender is a member of

the public, the presiding officer may order the individual to be escorted from the meeting room.<sup>2</sup>

A rule limiting the length of council meetings and speeches by council members and the public will contribute to keeping the deliberations on point. Good government is not likely to occur in the late night hours of a meeting when the limits of patience strain the limits of civility.

Procedural rules that permit and promote flexible opportunities for public input may diffuse public frustration at being foreclosed from opportune comment and encourage constructive debate. For example, the rules may call for

- Public comment time at the beginning of the meeting (or work session) rather than at the end
- A short time for public comment at the first reading of an ordinance, rather than, or in addition to, at the second reading (preliminary public comment may allow overlooked problems to surface early and minimize any perception at the second reading that the work has already been done and gone too far to be altered and that the issue has already been decided)
- Regular meetings explicitly for public participation separate from or in conjunction with and preceding the regular council meeting.

## TITLES AND DEBATE

How members of a governing body address one another and how the public is conditioned to address the council can promote a level of civility if formalities are observed. A “first name” basis appropriate in a casual street encounter, on the phone with a friend or neighbor who is a colleague on the council, or with a constituent is not appropriate in a formal session of the governing body when members are addressing one another.

Titles may be a source of sensitivity if they seem to be gender-biased. “Commissioner,” when the legislative body is a commission, is an easy gender-neutral title. “Councilman” requires its counterpart, “Councilwoman,” whereas “Council member” fits either. “Councilor” is a shorter alternative. “Trustee” will work for general law villages. “Madam,” “Mister Mayor,” or just plain “Mayor” works for cities; “Madam,” “Mister President,” or just plain “President” works for a village presiding officer. If the title is not in the municipal charter, the rules of procedure can provide it, stipulating how members should address one another and how members of the public should follow suit. For example, “Council members shall be addressed as ‘Councilor.’”

Remember, a municipal council is a local elected legislative body with chartered status. The decorum should reflect the council’s duty to represent the community and all citizens in a positive and dignified manner.

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## Understanding Basic

## Parliamentary

<sup>2</sup> See David M. Grubb, “Maintaining Civility at Council Meetings,” *New Jersey Municipalities* (March 1995): 24, 47–48, for a

good discussion of this. See also Webster’s New World Robert’s Rules of Order, Simplified and Applied (1999), 155–156.

# Procedures

Adapted from articles written by Judge Dave Rosenberg published in the August 2003 and September 2003 issues of Western City.

The rules of procedure at meetings should be simple enough for most people to understand. Unfortunately, that hasn't 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.

This article covers the rules of parliamentary procedure based on twenty years of experience chairing meetings in state and local government. These rules have been simplified and slimmed down, yet they retain the basic tenets of order to which we are accustomed.

The presentation of these basic procedures is in accordance with the following four principles:

1. Rules should establish order. The first purpose of the 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 citizens feel they have been able to participate in the process.
4. Rules should enforce the will of the majority while protecting the rights of the minority. The ultimate purpose of the rules of procedure is to encourage discussion and to facilitate decision making by the body. In a democracy, the 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) and fully participate in the process.

## THE ROLE OF THE CHAIRPERSON

While all members of the governing body should know and understand the rules of parliamentary procedure, it is the chairperson (chair) who is charged with applying the rules of conduct. The chair should be well versed in those rules, because the chair, for all intents and purposes, makes the final ruling on the rules. In fact, all decisions by the chair are final unless overruled by the governing body itself.

Because the chair conducts the meeting, it is common courtesy for the chair to take a less active role than other members of the body in debates and discussions. This does not mean that the chair should not participate in the debate or discussion. On the contrary, as a member of the body, the chair has full rights to participate in debates, discussions, and decision making. The chair should, however, strive to be the last to speak at the discussion and debate stage, and should not make or second a motion unless he or she is convinced that no other member of the body will do so.

## THE BASIC FORMAT FOR AN AGENDA ITEM DISCUSSION

The meeting is governed by the agenda, and the agenda constitutes the body's agreed-upon road map for the meeting. Each agenda item can be handled in the following basic format:

First, the vice-chair should clearly announce the agenda item number and should clearly state what the subject is. The vice-chair will then move for adoption of the agenda item (or defer to a sponsoring governing board member). If moved by other than the vice-chair, the chair should announce the name of the member who makes the motion.

Second, the chair should determine if any member of the body wishes to second the motion. The chair should announce the name of the member who seconds the motion.

Third, the chair will request the appropriate people to report on the item, and give any recommendation they might have. The appropriate person may be the chair, a member of the governing body, a staff person, or a committee chair charged with providing information about the agenda item.

Fourth, the chair should ask members of the body if they have any technical questions for clarification. At this point, members of the governing body may ask clarifying questions to the people who reported on the item, and those people should be given time to respond.

Fifth, the chair should make sure everyone understands the motion. The chair can do this by repeating the motion, or by asking the maker of the motion or the secretary or the clerk of the body to repeat the motion.

Sixth, the chair should invite discussion of the motion by the members of the governing body. If there is no desired discussion or the discussion has ended, the vote should proceed immediately, and there is no need to repeat the motion. If there has been substantial discussion, it is normally best to make sure everyone understands the motion by repeating it.

## MAKING MOTIONS

Motions are the vehicles for decision making. It is usually best to have a motion before the governing body prior to discussing an agenda item, to help everyone focus on the motion before them.

Motions are made in a simple two-step process. First, the chair recognizes the member. Second, the member makes a motion by preceding his or her desired approach with the words: "I move...."

The chair usually initiates a motion by

1. Inviting the members to make a motion: "A motion at this time would be in order."
2. Suggesting a motion: "A motion would be in order that..."
3. Making a motion.

As noted, the chair has every right as a member of the body to make a motion but normally should do so only if he or she wishes a motion to be made but no other member seems willing to do so.

## The Three Basic Motions

These three motions are the most common:

1. The basic motion. The basic motion is the one that puts forward a decision for consideration. A basic motion might be: "I move that we create a five-member committee to plan and put on our annual fundraiser."
2. The motion to amend. If a member wants to change a basic motion that is under discussion, he or she would move to amend it. A motion to amend might be: "I move that we amend the motion to have a ten-member committee." A motion to amend takes the basic motion that is before the body and seeks to change it in some way.
3. The substitute motion. If a member wants to completely do away with the basic motion under discussion and put a new motion before the governing body, he or she would "move a substitute motion." A substitute motion might be: "I move a substitute motion that we cancel the annual fundraiser this year."

Motions to amend and substitute motions are often confused. But they are quite different, and so is their effect, if passed. A motion to amend seeks to retain the basic motion on the floor but to 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, the chair's designation governs.

### Procedures for Dealing with Multiple Motions

Generally, no more than three motions should be allowed on the floor simultaneously. The chair may reject a fourth motion until the three that are on the floor have been resolved.

When two or three motions are on the floor (after motions and seconds) at the same time, the first vote should be on the last motion made. So, for example, assume the first motion is a basic motion to "create 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 ten-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:

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 complete. No vote would be taken on the first or second motions.

On the other hand, if the substitute motion (the third motion) failed, the chair would proceed to consideration of 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 ten members). If the motion to amend passed, the chair would move to consider the main motion (the first motion) as amended. If the motion to amend

failed, the chair would move to consider the main motion (the first motion) in its original form, not amended.

Third, the chair would now deal with the first motion that was placed on the floor. The original motion would be either in its original form (a five-member committee) or, if amended, in its amended form (a ten-member committee). And 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. Thus, 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 specific rules which may govern limits on times and opportunities to speak to the motion.

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

**A 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.

**A 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 range from a few minutes to an hour. It requires a simple majority vote.

**A 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 (or

two-thirds majority if time extends beyond any limit previously established in the governing body rules).

**A motion to table** This motion, if passed, requires discussion of the agenda item to be halted and the agenda item placed on “hold.” The motion may 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 may 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.

**A motion to limit debate** The most common form of this motion is to say: “I move the previous question” or “I call for the question.” When a member of the body makes such a motion, the member is really saying: “I’ve had enough debate. Let’s get on with the vote.” At that point, the chair should ask for a second to the motion, stop debate, and vote on the motion to limit debate. Such a motion could include a time limit—for example: “I move we limit debate on this agenda item to fifteen minutes.” The motion to limit debate requires a two-thirds vote.

## MAJORITY AND SUPER-MAJORITY VOTES

In a democracy, decisions are made with a simple majority vote. A tie vote means that the motion fails. Therefore, in a nine-member body, a vote of 6–3 passes the motion, whereas a vote of 4–4 with one abstention or with one member absent means that the motion fails.

All motions require a simple majority, but there are a few exceptions. The exceptions occur in a instances where statutes require two-thirds vote (bonding authorizations) or when the body is taking an action that effectively cuts off the ability of a minority of the body to take an action or discuss an item. The following 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,” “I move the question,” “I call for 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 vice-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 because the objectionable item can be tabled or defeated straight up. However, when members of a body do not even want a question to be considered, 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 might have a rule prohibiting meetings from extending beyond a certain time. To allow the meeting to continue beyond the time previously set in the rules would require a motion to suspend the rules.

**The motion to reconsider** There is a 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 to reopening only if a proper motion to reconsider is made. A motion to reconsider requires a majority vote to pass, but

there are two special rules that apply only to the motion to reconsider.

First, a motion to reconsider must be made at the meeting in which the item was first voted upon or at the very next meeting. 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—namely, someone 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 may second the motion). If a member who voted in the minority seeks to make the motion to reconsider, the motion must be ruled out of order. The purpose of this rule is finality. If a member of the 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.

### **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. And 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 for every speaker to be recognized by the chair before speaking.

The chair should always ensure that debate and discussion of an agenda item focus on the item and the policy in question, not on 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, too loud, or too crude.

Debate and discussion should be focused but free and open. In the interest of time, however, the chair and/or previously established rules may limit the time allotted to speakers. Can a member of the body interrupt the speaker? The general rule is no. There are, however, exceptions:

**Privilege** 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. The proper interruption would be: "Point of privilege." The chair would then ask the interrupter to "state your point."

**Order** 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. The proper interruption would be: "Point of order." Again, the chair would ask the interrupter to "state your point."

**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, 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, "Let's 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; 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 it 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 basic rules of order outlined here 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:

1. Tell the public what the body will be doing.
2. Keep the public informed while the body is doing it.
3. When the body has acted, tell the public what the body did.

Public input is essential to a healthy democracy, and community participation in public meetings is an important element of that input. The challenge for anyone chairing a public meeting is to accommodate public input in a timely and time-sensitive way while maintaining steady progress through the agenda items. The outline of rules presented here for conducting a meeting are offered as the basic tools for effective leadership and as a means of developing sound public policy.

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### ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Betsy Bean, "Public Problems/Public Values: A New Framework for Helping Boards Solve Controversial, Divisive Problems," *Illinois Municipal Review* 82 (December 2003): 7–9 (also printed in *PA Times*, June 2004).

Phillip Boyle, "Solving Public Problems, Making Democratic Decisions: Public Leadership Is the Key!" *Nation's Cities Weekly*, October 2004.

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Robert Booth Fowler, *The Dance with Community: The Contemporary Debate in American Political Thought* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1991).

Daniel Kemmis, *Community and the Politics of Place* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1990).

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