

Guide to Robert's Rules of Order

This guide is intended to familiarize Dover City Councilors with the basic principles and concepts of parliamentary procedure. If you are familiar with parliamentary rules, you may want to review and skim this guide. If you have had little experience with parliamentary procedure, please read this guide carefully. The use of parliamentary procedure makes City Council meetings run smoothly, efficiently, and professionally. If you ever have any questions about parliamentary procedure during the course of a meeting, please don't hesitate to ask the Mayor or other Councilor presiding over the meeting.

Most of the business of the Council is conducted through the use of motions, which are proposals for some type of action. Many different types of motions exist, and they can be far-reaching or very narrow in their scope. With a few exceptions, most motions will be made in relation to items included on the meeting agenda.

A standard framework exists for handling motions. They are first made by the Deputy Mayor or the sponsoring Councilor and seconded by another Councilor. Next, a period of debate occurs (some motions are undebatable, however). Debate ends when everyone who wishes to speak has done so or when a limit imposed by the City Council Rules is reached. During the debate, the motion can be discussed, changed, referred, postponed, or treated in many other ways. If the motion has not been referred or postponed after debate ends, the motion is voted on. The adoption of motions within this framework is how the City Council establishes the various regulations and policy of the City of Dover.

Part I of this guide defines some basic parliamentary terms. Part II provides an overview of common parliamentary situations and concepts. Part III provides a comprehensive list of parliamentary motions, their functions, and their special characteristics. Part IV is a reference chart which shows the order of precedence among motions (that is, their rank).

Guide to Robert's Rules of Order

PART I: DEFINITIONS

Quorum: A *quorum* is the minimum number of Councilors required at a meeting to conduct business.

Chair: The *chair* is the person presiding over the City Council meeting. This will usually be the Mayor and in his/her absence will be delegated to the Deputy Mayor.

Floor: A person who has been granted the right to speak by the Chair has obtained the *floor*.

Precedence: The rank of motions is their order of *precedence*. Generally speaking, a motion of high precedence may be made while a motion of lower precedence is pending. The rank of the parliamentary motions is given in Part IV.

Yield: A motion of low precedence *yields* to one of higher precedence.

Pending: A *pending* motion is one that has been brought before the Council and which has not yet been disposed of. A motion can be disposed of in many ways, including the following: referring the question to a committee, postponing the question, or voting to pass or defeat the motion. An *immediately pending* motion is the one being considered at the time in question. For example, a piece of legislation may be pending while an amendment to that legislation is immediately pending. The amendment would have to be dealt with by the Council before the legislation could be voted on directly.

Question: The immediately pending motion is often referred to as the *question*.

Entertain: The Chair *entertains* a motion when s/he accepts or allows it to be brought before the Council. Sometimes when the Chair sees the need for a particular motion to be made, s/he may state that s/he will entertain the particular motion. For example, if everyone looks like they are about to fall asleep, the Speaker can suggest that s/he will entertain a recess for ten minutes. A Councilor can then make the suggested motion by merely saying, "I so move."

Out of order: Motions, debate, or actions that are not allowed under the rules of a given situation are *out of order*.

Dilatory: A *dilatory* motion is one intended to disrupt or impede business and may be ruled out of order by the Chair.

Recess: A *recess* is a break in a meeting.

Adjournment: An *adjournment* is a termination of a meeting.

PART II PARLIAMENTARY SITUATIONS AND CONCEPTS

Obtaining the floor – A Councilor who wishes to speak or offer a motion in a City Council meeting must usually obtain the floor--that is, be recognized and granted the right to speak by the Chair. To obtain the floor, one should raise his/her hand at the conclusion of any remarks by someone already speaking. In recognizing people to speak, the Chair follows rules which grant preferences to some people over others in obtaining the floor. For example, a Councilor who makes a motion has the right to speak on that motion before anyone else. As much as possible, the Chair alternates in recognizing the proponents and opponents of an issue. Furthermore, while everyone

has the right to speak twice on each debatable question, no one has the right to speak a second time before all who desire to speak have had their first opportunity to do so.

Motions - Motions are proposals for action by the City Council. Motions have a variety of objectives, and each motion has characteristics that make it unique. Councilors making motions should begin by saying, "I move..." , and then stating the motion. Motions should always be explicit and specific--the Chair will not entertain vague or poorly worded motions.

Bringing a motion before the City Council - Generally, there are three steps in the process of bringing a motion before the Council: 1) A Councilor offers the motion by obtaining the floor and stating the motion; 2) Another Councilor seconds the motion (if the particular motion requires a second); and 3) the Chair states the question on the motion. The motion is not officially before the Council until the Speaker has stated the question.

Seconding - Most motions require a second. A second does not necessarily imply that the seconder agrees with the motion, but that s/he merely believes the motion to be worth consideration. A Councilor can make a second simply by saying "Second" after a motion is made, without having to obtain the floor.

Considering a motion - There are three further steps in considering a motion after it has been brought before the Council: 1) The motion is debated (if debate is allowed for the particular motion); 2) the Chair puts the question to a vote; and 3) the Chair announces the outcome of the vote.

Voting - Most motions require a vote in order for the Council to dispose of them. There are two different types of voting that will typically be used by the City Council: 1) A vote taken by a show of hands is the most common type of voting. The Chair will ask those in favor of a question to raise their hand to be counted. The Chair will then ask those against a question to raise their hand to be counted. After counting both responses, the Chair will announce the results of the vote. 2) A "roll call" vote is also used. The Chair will ask Councilors to respond to the call of the roll. As each Councilor's name is announced that Councilor will simply state their vote by either stating "yes" or "no". After tallying the responses, the Chair will announce the results of the vote.

Unanimous consent - Unanimous consent is a specialized type of voting. It is used only in situations where it is anticipated that there will be no opposition to a request. In such situations the Chair may simply order the action unless someone objects. If there is any objection to the request or proposal, the objector must speak up immediately, and the request or proposal must be put up to a regular vote.

PART III: MOTIONS - CLASSES, DESCRIPTIONS, AND PURPOSES

Motions fall into five categories depending on their purpose: 1) Main Motion; 2) Subsidiary Motion; 3) Privileged Motion; 4) Incidental Motion; 5) Motions that bring a question again before the City Council. The descriptions of the motions in this section tell the effect and any special characteristics of each motion. Unless stated otherwise, it should be assumed that each motion requires a second, can be reconsidered, requires a majority vote, and is debatable and amendable.

A. Main motions - Main motions bring a substantive and new item of business before the Council. They can only be made at the proper time in the meeting agenda and when no other business is pending. Before the City Council, most main motions relate to resolutions or ordinances that are written and presented on the meeting agenda.

B. Subsidiary motions - Subsidiary motions help the Council treat or dispose of other motions to which they are attached. Subsidiary motions may alter, postpone, or refer motions. They may also change the time frame of speeches and debate.

1. *Postpone Indefinitely*: Kills the motion without bringing it to a direct vote. Can be used to avoid an unpopular or controversial proposal. Not amendable. An affirmative vote can be reconsidered, but not a negative vote. Form: "I move to postpone the question indefinitely."

2. *Amend*: Alters the motion to which it is attached by striking, adding, or inserting words, sentences, or paragraphs. Can be used to substitute an entirely new but related proposal. Takes precedence over the motion it amends and yields to any motions that take precedence over the motion it amends. For example, a motion to amend the length of a recess takes precedence over the motion to recess but would yield to a motion to adjourn, since the motion to adjourn is of higher rank than the motion to recess (see precedence chart in Section IV). Secondary but not tertiary amendments are allowed (an amendment to an amendment to an amendment is not allowed). Must be germane (relevant). Is debatable if the motion it proposes to amend is debatable. Form: "I move to amend by striking the word 'must' and insert 'should' in its place."

3. *Commit or Refer*: Has the effect of removing the pending question from the Council's consideration and referring it to a committee or other forum for consideration. The committee or forum to which the question is referred must be specified in the motion. The motion can include instructions to a committee or for the forum. A motion to commit or refer can be reconsidered if the committee or forum has not begun consideration of the question. Form: "I move the refer the question to a public hearing at the next regularly scheduled City Council meeting."

4. *Postpone to a Certain Time*: Removes the question from the Council's consideration so it may be considered at a later, specified time. Form: "I move we postpone the question until October 9 at 8:00 PM."

5. *Limit or Extend Limits of Debate*: Limits or extends the time allowed for debate, the allowable length of speeches, or the number of speeches each person can make on the pending business. Can be applied to the immediately pending question or any series of pending questions. Is amendable but not debatable (amendments must be made after the Chair announces the question and before s/he puts the questions to a vote). All limitations or extensions require a 2/3 vote and can be reconsidered, but only the unexecuted part of the order is subject to reconsideration. Form: "I move we limit discussion by each Councilor to one minute."

6. *Previous Question*: Ends debate and amendment on pending business and brings the question to an immediate vote. Can be applied to the immediately pending question or any series of pending questions. Is not debatable or amendable. Requires a two-thirds vote. Can only be reconsidered before being executed. Form: "I move the previous question."

7. *Lay on the Table*: Removes the question from the Council's consideration temporarily. Should not be used to kill a question. A motion laid on the table can be considered again by the use of the motion Take from the Table (see below). A Lay on the Table motion is not debatable or amendable and cannot be reconsidered. Form: "I move to lay the question on the table."

C. Privileged motions-Privileged motions are unrelated to the pending business, but are of such importance or urgency that they need to be considered at the time they are introduced.

1. *Raise a Question of Privilege:* May be used to ensure that the rights and comfort of the City Council and its Councilors are not denied. For example, a Councilor who cannot hear the proceedings could raise a question of privilege. A question of privilege motion is in order when another person has the floor if necessary, does not require a second and is not debatable or amendable. The motion is ruled upon by the Chair, and no vote is taken unless the ruling is appealed. In the above instance, the Chair might ask people to quiet down. The Chair's ruling can be appealed but not reconsidered. Form: "I wish to raise a question of privilege."

2. *Recess:* Brings about a break in the meeting. Is debatable and cannot be reconsidered. Form: "I move we recess for ten minutes."

3. *Adjourn:* Ends the meeting. Is not debatable or amendable. Since City Council meetings follow a prescribed order of business (including an adjournment), this motion is made prior to the completion of business only in unusual circumstances. Form: "I move we adjourn."

D. Incidental motions- Incidental motions relate to the pending business but do not assist the Senate in dealing with the business in the same way as subsidiary motions.

1. *Point of Order:* Requires the Chair to make a ruling if there has been a potential breach of parliamentary rules, City Council rules or other controlling legislative authority. For example, if the Chair allowed a motion to postpone the question indefinitely while a motion to refer the question was pending, a Councilor could raise a point of order and remind the Chair that the motion to postpone indefinitely is not in order at that time (see the precedence chart). A point of order motion is in order when another person has the floor. It does not require a second and is not amendable. The motion is ruled upon by the Chair, whose ruling can be appealed. The motion is not debatable unless the Chair submits the point to a vote of the City Council. Once voted, the motion cannot be reconsidered. Form: "Point of order-- the motion to postpone indefinitely is not in order now."

2. *Appeal:* Contests a decision of the Chair by bringing the matter before the City Council for a vote. An appeal motion is in order when another person has the floor, but must be made at the time of the ruling. The motion is debatable unless the immediately pending question is undebatable. The Chair may speak twice in debate on an appeal while everyone else may only speak once. The motion is not amendable and a majority of the Council must vote to oppose the ruling in order to overturn the Chair's decision. Form: "I appeal the chair's ruling."

3. *Suspend the Rules:* Can be used to ignore certain applicable rules which would otherwise prevent the accomplishment of the desired purpose. Only the City Council's rules may be suspended. The motion to suspend the rules is not debatable or amendable and cannot be reconsidered. It Requires a two-thirds vote and can be combined with another motion to accomplish the desired purpose (this is the only motion that can be combined with another). Form: "I move we suspend the rules to move agenda item B10 to be voted on at this time."

4. *Consideration by Paragraph:* Allows a long proposal to be considered, debated, and amended paragraph by paragraph. Is not debatable and cannot be reconsidered. Form: "I move to consider the question by paragraph."

5. *Motions Relating to Methods of Voting:* Call for a vote to be taken by a method specified by the motion (perhaps a counted rising or ballot vote). Are in order until the Chair has stated the question on a new motion. Are not debatable. Form: "I move to conduct the vote by secret ballot."

6. *Requests and Inquires:* There are several types of requests and inquires. A parliamentary inquiry is a request for the Chair's opinion on a point of parliamentary procedure. A point of information inquiry is one in which someone asks about factual information pertaining to the business at hand. It is always addressed to the Chair, who may then answer it him/herself or call on someone to answer it. Requests and inquiries are not debatable or amendable. Form: "Parliamentary inquiry--is the motion to reconsider in order at this time?" "Point of information--How much was spent on office supplies last year?"

E. Motions that bring a question again before the City Council

1. *Take from the Table:* Brings a question before the City Council again that was previously laid on the table. Is not debatable or amendable and cannot be reconsidered. Form: "I move to take the resolution related to the State's share of education funding from the table."

2. *Rescind; Amend Something Previously Adopted:* Repeals or changes a motion already adopted by the City Council. Cannot be applied where it is too late to undo action already taken or where it is possible to accomplish the same objective with a motion to reconsider. Requires a two-thirds vote. A negative vote (not to rescind or amend) can be reconsidered, but not an affirmative vote. Form: "I move to rescind the previous action taken on Agenda Item B-10."

3. *Reconsider:* Brings under renewed consideration a question on which the City Council has already voted. Can only be made by a Councilor who voted with the winning side of the question (e.g. if the motion passed, can only be made by a Councilor who voted "yes"). Can only be made at the same meeting the vote was taken, but can be considered at that meeting or the next meeting. Because of the time limit involved, the making of motion to reconsider takes precedence over all other motions. The consideration of the motion to reconsider, however, has only the same rank as the motion to be reconsidered. For example, a motion to reconsider a motion to lay an item on the table could be made while a motion to recess was pending, but it could not be dealt with until the motion to recess had been disposed, because the motion to recess has a higher rank than the motion to lay on the table. Generally speaking, can be applied to most motions except: 1) when action has been taken that cannot be undone; or 2) when another parliamentary motion can accomplish the same purpose. Can be made without obtaining the floor, but cannot interrupt a speaker. Is debatable whenever the motion to be reconsidered is debatable. If a motion to reconsider cannot be considered at the time it is made, a Councilor must "call it up" at a later time. Is not amendable and cannot be reconsidered. If it passes, the motion to reconsider brings the original motion before the City Council as if it had never been voted on. Form: "I move to reconsider Agenda Item B-10."

PART IV: THE ORDER OF PRECEDENCE

The reference charts below show motions in their order of precedence. It may prove helpful to remove and keep these charts at the Council desks during City Council meetings:

Based on Robert's Rules of Order Newly Revised (10th Edition)

Part 1, Main Motions. These motions are listed in order of precedence. A motion can be introduced if it is higher on the chart than the pending motion. § indicates the section from Robert's Rules.

§	PURPOSE:	YOU SAY:	INTERRUPT?	2ND?	DEBATE?	AMEND?	VOTE?
§21	Close meeting	I move to adjourn	No	Yes	No	No	Majority
§20	Take break	I move to recess for ...	No	Yes	No	Yes	Majority
§19	Register complaint	I rise to a question of privilege	Yes	No	No	No	None
§18	Make follow agenda	I call for the orders of the day	Yes	No	No	No	None
§17	Lay aside temporarily	I move to lay the question on the table	No	Yes	No	No	Majority
§16	Close debate	I move the previous question	No	Yes	No	No	2/3
§15	Limit or extend debate	I move that debate be limited to ...	No	Yes	No	Yes	2/3
§14	Postpone to a certain time	I move to postpone the motion to ...	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Majority
§13	Refer to committee	I move to refer the motion to ...	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Majority
§12	Modify wording of motion	I move to amend the motion by ...	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Majority
§11	Kill main motion	I move that the motion be postponed indefinitely	No	Yes	Yes	No	Majority
§10	Bring business before assembly (a main motion)	I move that [or "to"] ...	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Majority

Part 2, Incidental Motions. No order of precedence. These motions arise incidentally and are decided immediately.

§	PURPOSE:	YOU SAY:	INTERRUPT?	2ND?	DEBATE?	AMEND?	VOTE?
§23	Enforce rules	Point of Order	Yes	No	No	No	None
§24	Submit matter to assembly	I appeal from the decision of the chair	Yes	Yes	Varies	No	Majority
§25	Suspend rules	I move to suspend the rules	No	Yes	No	No	2/3
§26	Avoid main motion altogether	I object to the consideration of the question	Yes	No	No	No	2/3
§27	Divide motion	I move to divide the question	No	Yes	No	Yes	Majority
§29	Demand a rising vote	I move for a rising vote	Yes	No	No	No	None
§33	Parliamentary law question	Parliamentary inquiry	Yes	No	No	No	None
§33	Request for information	Point of information	Yes	No	No	No	None

Part 3, Motions That Bring a Question Again Before the Assembly.

No order of precedence. Introduce only when nothing else is pending.

§	PURPOSE:	YOU SAY:	INTERRUPT?	2ND?	DEBATE?	AMEND?	VOTE?
§34	Take matter from table	I move to take from the table ...	No	Yes	No	No	Majority
§35	Cancel previous action	I move to rescind ...	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	2/3 or Majority with notice
§37	Reconsider motion	I move to reconsider ...	No	Yes	Varies	No	Majority