

## A Brief Guide to Robert's Rules of Order

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Robert's Rules of Order provide rules and procedures that allow a committee to make decisions efficiently and with due regard for the rights of the minority. Having an understanding of the rules of order for new members attending meetings will help the advisory committee achieve its business effectively. While it is the advisory committee chair that directs and runs the meetings, each member's knowledge and use of the rules of order will benefit all participants involved. The following information provides an overview to Robert's Rules of Order of the commonly used rules and procedures.

### **The Agenda/Order of Business**

It is a normal procedure for advisory committees to follow a standard order of business for meetings. Once the chair or secretary determine a quorum (majority of members serving on the advisory committee) is present, the chair will announce that "the meeting will come to order" followed by other opening business on the agenda which includes approval of the agenda and minutes from the previous meeting, introduction of guests, reports from officers and standing committees, conclusion of any old business, and introduction of new business followed by adjournment.

### **Motions – Means by which business is conducted**

A motion is basically a proposition/question brought up for advisory committee consideration. The most common actions for advisory committees are recommendations on regulatory proposals for the Boards of Fisheries and Game. Only one main motion can be considered at a given time. However, "subsidiary" motions such as motions to amend, table, or postpone, can be offered while the "main motion" is before the advisory committee for discussion. Motions are always introduced in the positive as:

*Example: "I move the advisory committee support proposal..."*

Positive motions, such as the example above, ensure that members voting "yes" support the proposal, and those voting "no" oppose it.

Before making a motion, the member must first be recognized by the chair. Before discussing the motion, another member must "second" the motion.

*Example: "I second the motion to support..."*

Both members who make a motion and second a motion are only agreeing to bring up an issue for consideration or discussion; he/she may not actually agree with the issue and may speak against it.

Following the "second" of the motion, the chair restates or makes clear the motion, and then calls upon the members for discussion. Any member recognized by the chair has a right to discuss the motion. Normally, the person who made the original motion is the first entitled to speak. **Discussion must be limited to the motion that is before the advisory committee.**

As the discussion concludes, any member, usually the chair asks for "any further discussion" or if the members "are ready for the question." If no one requests to speak, the chair will ask "all in favor of the motion" by either a raise of hands or an oral vote. Likewise, the chair will ask "all opposed?" After the vote occurs, the chair person will announce the result of the vote.

## **Commonly Used Motions**

Motion to amend: *"I move to amend proposal 45 by..."*

- The purpose of the motion to amend is to modify a motion that has already been presented so that it will be more satisfactory to the advisory committee members. Methods of amendments include addition or insertion, elimination or striking out, or substitution of language within the original proposal.

Motion for Reconsideration: *"I move to reconsider proposal 45."*

- A motion to reconsider enables a committee to bring back a motion already voted on and are usually made for circumstances needing correction or consideration of new information. Under Roberts Rules of Order, a member of the prevailing side (majority of the vote) must make the motion to reconsider. After the motion to reconsider is made and seconded, the membership will vote on the motion for reconsideration—not the issue. If a majority of the membership votes in favor of a motion to reconsider, the issue comes in front of the advisory committee again for discussion and final vote. Motions to reconsider should occur at the same meeting for which the action occurred, before the advisory committee concluded its' business. If an advisory committee needs to address their action on a proposal at a subsequent meeting, a motion to rescind action would be appropriate.

Motion to Rescind or Amend Something Previously Adopted: *"I move to rescind action taken on proposal 45" or "I move to amend the actions taken on proposal 45 that were previously adopted."*

- A motion to "rescind" or to "amend something previously adopted" enables a committee to revisit a motion already voted on at a previous meeting and are usually made for circumstances needing correction or reconsideration of new information. A motion to rescind would place the entire action on the table, and a motion to amend something previously adopted would only place a part of the action on the table. Unlike a motion for reconsideration, any member can make either of these motions, but unless previous notice is given of intent to make one of these motions, adoption of the motion requires either a two-thirds vote of members present or a vote of the majority of the entire membership of the advisory committee. Previous notice would include either announcing the intent to revisit the previous action at an advisory committee meeting prior to the meeting the AC intended to revisit the action, or by including it in the original agenda distribution for a meeting.

Motion to table or postpone: *"I move to table proposal 45" or "I move to postpone proposal 45 to a specific time later in the meeting."*

- A motion to "table" is often misused as a motion to "postpone to a certain time". These motions enable the advisory committee to set aside a motion temporarily and return to it later in the meeting. If the advisory committee intends not to bring the motion up again, the motion to postpone should state that it is to be postponed indefinitely.

Motion to remove from the table: *"I move to take/remove proposal 45 from the table."*

- This motion allows the advisory committee to return to the issue it previously tabled. If approved by a majority of members, the previous motion that was tabled is again before the advisory committee.

## **Other Commonly Used Rules & Procedures**

Nominations do not require a “second”. No member may nominate more than one candidate for each office; a motion to close the nominations requires a two-thirds vote. Nominations may be reopened by a motion which requires only a majority vote.

Voting on nominations occurs once the nominations are closed, usually by ballot. If accepted, the candidate serves immediately unless a beginning term date was agreed upon by the advisory committee prior to the election. Members elected as officers assume duties of office as soon as elected.

Motion to approve the minutes occurs shortly after the meeting has been called to order and the other opening business has been dealt with. If a member would like to offer a correction to the minutes, they must offer new language and an explanation why the change should be made. After the explanation and any further debate by the committee, the correction is then subject to a majority vote. If it becomes necessary to correct minutes after they have initially been approved, such as a later meeting, corrections need to be made by means of the motion to *Rescind or Amend Something Previously Adopted* (see process above). *Note: Recent court rulings determined that emailing among Alaska’s governing bodies (advisory committees are defined as a “governing body”) is a violation of the Open Meetings Act. This is a problem for advisory committees who cannot meet in time to approve minutes for the next board meeting. Committees may appoint one or two members to approve minutes. It is common, and recommended, to appoint members who do not take minutes to be the advisory committee’s approver of minutes.*

Abstentions occur when members choose not to vote or abstain from voting on an issue for various reasons such as a possible conflict of interest. When this occurs, determining the final action of the advisory committee can be confusing. The advisory committee’s Uniform Rules of Operation (5 AAC 96.060(q)) states: “Every action or decision of a majority of the members present at a duly held meeting of a committee, at which a quorum is present, is an act of the committee.” Based on this regulation, abstentions by advisory committee members present at a meeting effectively become a “no” vote {given their presence is counted and they are not voting in the affirmative}. This regulation conflicts with 5 AAC 96.060(r), which advises that advisory committee meetings “...will, to the extent practicable, be conducted according to the latest edition of Robert’s Rules of Order.” Robert’s Rules of Order allow abstentions to not count towards the total vote count. Our main concern is accurately understanding the will of the advisory committee. Therefore, if members choose to abstain from voting, advisory committees are asked to ensure that the intent and final action is very clear in the written record of the meeting. In the case of many abstentions, it may make sense for advisory committees to “take no action.”

## **Record of Advisory Committee Actions**

Preliminary recommendations of each committee meeting shall be recorded in writing using the format adopted by the Joint Board and forwarded to Boards Support Section not later than 30 days after the meeting. Recorded actions are to be submitted to the appropriate board for their consideration at the relevant board meetings. Because the boards rely on the input by the advisory committees, it’s important for the advisory committee actions clearly express

support, opposition or other action, reference the proposal numbers, and provide **both** the minority and majority viewpoints expressed by the members.

### **Standing Rules of Order and Bylaws**

Regulations (5 AAC Chapter 96) set out the Uniform Rules of Operation for advisory committees. In addition, advisory committees may also choose to adopt their own standing rules of order or bylaws for procedures that may be more practical for the advisory committee rather than Robert's Rules of Order. If an advisory committee chooses to do adopt standing rules, those rules need to be recorded and kept on file so advisory committee members and other meeting participants are aware of the rules. Boards Support staff can assist the advisory committees with establishing rules and bylaws and will need to keep a record of any standing rules or bylaws adopted by each advisory committee.

### **Quick Reference for Handling a Motion**

1. A member makes a motion.
2. Another member seconds the motion.
3. The chair states the motion.
4. The member making the motion speaks first to the motion.
5. Other members debate the motion upon advisory committee acknowledgement by the chair.
6. A member "calls for the question" to end debate and call for a vote, or
7. The chair asks if the members are ready for the question or if there is any further debate.
8. The chair restates the motion to clarify what the members will be voting on.
9. The members vote on the motion, usually by a roll call of members or show of hands
10. The chair announces the result and effect of the vote.

### **Under Robert's Rules of Order, the following should be observed during debate:**

- Confine remarks to the pending question/motion,
- Refrain from attacking an individual's motives or person,
- Address all remarks through the chair,
- Refrain from speaking against one's own motion, and
- Refrain from disturbing the discussion.

### **References**

The above information and following chart were derived from Robert's Rules of Order Newly Revised, 11<sup>th</sup> edition, and "Parliamentary Procedure Made Easier" ©2005 by the University of Washington. Used with permission. If you have questions or would like more information about Robert's Rules of Order and other meeting procedures, please contact your Boards Support Section regional coordinator for assistance, or the headquarters office at 907-465-4110.

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## Chart of Motions and Summary of Rules Governing the Motions

	May Interrupt a Speaker	Requires a Second	Debatable	Vote Required
<b>Privileged Motions (Takes precedence.)</b>				
• To fix time at which to adjourn	No	Yes	Limited	Majority
• To adjourn (unqualified)	No	Yes	No	Majority
• To take a recess	No	Yes	Limited	Majority
• To rise to a question of privilege	Yes	No	No	Chair rules
<b>Subsidiary Motions (Applies to main motions.)</b>				
• To lay on the table	No	Yes	No	Majority
• To call for the previous question	No	Yes	No	2/3
• To postpone definitely	No	Yes	Limited	Majority
• To refer to a committee	No	Yes	Limited	Majority
• To amend	No	Yes	Yes	Majority
• To postpone indefinitely	No	Yes	Yes	Majority
<b>Main Motions (To bring up questions or proposals for consideration.)</b>				
General main motions	No	Yes	Yes	Majority
Specific main motions:				
– To reconsider	Yes	Yes	Yes	Majority
– To rescind	No	Yes	Yes	2/3
– To expunge	No	Yes	Yes	2/3
– To adopt a resolution	No	Yes	Yes	Majority
– To adjourn (qualified)	No	Yes	Limited	Majority
– To create orders of the day (Special)	No	Yes	Yes	Gen, Majority; Spec. 2/3
– To amend (constitution, etc.)	No	Yes	Yes	2/3
<b>Incidental Motions (Arise incidentally)</b>				
To withdraw a motion	No	No	No	Majority
To read papers	No	Yes	No	Majority
To object to a consideration	Yes	No	No	2/3
To rise to a point of order	Yes	No	No	Chair rules or Majority
To rise to parliamentary inquiry	Yes	No	No	None
To appeal from the decision of the Chair	Yes	Yes	Limited	Majority
To call for a division of the house	Yes	No	No	Majority
To call for a division of a question	No	Yes	No	Majority