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# Robert's Rules of Order

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Michael Haas

City Attorney

Madison, Wisconsin

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# Who is Robert?

- ◆ General Henry M. Robert (1837-1923), distinguished engineer.
- ◆ First codified in 1876. Now in its 12<sup>th</sup> edition.
- ◆ First edition not completely edited by a member of the Robert family.



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# Purposes of Robert's Rules

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- ◆ Run meetings efficiently.
- ◆ Protect the rights of the majority, the minority, individual members and absent members.
- ◆ A careful balance to allow action, and in some cases to halt action.



# Sources



- ◆ Robert's Rules of Order (12<sup>th</sup> Ed.): 650 pages
- ◆ Robert's Rules In Short (“May’s Manual”): 7 pages.
- ◆ Chapter 2, and sec. 33.01, MGO



# Chapter 2, MGO



- ◆ Chapter 2 constitutes the standing rules for the Common Council.
- ◆ Except as modified by Chapter 2, Robert's Rules govern Council meetings. Sec. 2.32.
- ◆ Standing Order of Business, sec. 2.04.

# MGO Section 2.05

- ◆ Sponsorship by Mayor or alder, with some exceptions.
- ◆ City Attorney's Office must draft ordinances.
- ◆ Alders or agency staff may draft resolutions.
- ◆ Wednesday at noon deadline for Legistar submissions.

# MGO Section 2.05

- ◆ Introduction from the floor & by title only.
- ◆ Amendments to ordinances offered on the Council floor must be emailed to the Council, Mayor, Clerk and City Attorney.
- ◆ City Attorney must approve the form of ordinance amendments made on the floor.
- ◆ 60-day rule and placing on file without prejudice.



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# MGO Section 2.05 – Consent Agenda

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- ◆ Consent agenda requests by noon on Tuesday.
- ◆ President approves consent agenda recommendations subject to sponsor's approval.
- ◆ Additional exclusions on Council floor.



# MGO Section 2.055

- ◆ Introduction of Business at a prior meeting, unless suspension of the rules.
- ◆ Referrals require BBC and Council return dates.
- ◆ Referrals from the floor require reason.
- ◆ Lead referral determines recommended motion if sponsored, unless changed by President.

# Other Ch. 2 Rules

- ◆ Debate limit – no more than twice speaking or more than 10 minutes at one time without 2/3 vote, sec. 2.13
- ◆ Majority vote of all members required, sec. 2.18.
- ◆  $\frac{3}{4}$  majority to change adopted budget, sec. 2.19.
- ◆ Reconsideration, sec. 2.21. Must make motion at same or next meeting.

# Public Comments – MGO 2.29

- ◆ No comments when only referral or when comments previously taken and item referred for action.
- ◆ 3-minute limit, unless extended by 2/3 vote or unanimous consent.
- ◆ Recommend extension for specific time such as 30 seconds or one minute.

# Role of the Chair

- ◆ Obligation to run an orderly meeting.
- ◆ Recognizes members.
- ◆ Rules on votes, subject to request for roll call vote.
- ◆ Rules on procedure, subject to appeal to body.
- ◆ Mayor may only vote in the case of a 10 – 10 tie.

# Proceed by Motion!

- ◆ The most basic rule of Robert's Rules: proceed by motion.
- ◆ No magic words: “I move that \_\_\_\_\_”, “I move adoption of \_\_\_\_\_”, “Move referral.”
- ◆ Matters before Council usually have a recommendation which becomes the motion.
- ◆ Substitutes and Alternates may be introduced.

# Classes of Motions

- ◆ Main motion. Underlying matter before the body.
- ◆ Subsidiary motions. To do something with or to the main motions (e.g., amend, refer).
- ◆ Incidental motions. Procedural matters related to the main motion that take precedence (e.g., point of order, suspend the rules).
- ◆ Privileged motions. Limited number that take precedence (recess, privilege, adjourn).

# Common Motions

- ◆ Adjourn. Not debatable.
- ◆ Adopt.
- ◆ Amend. Normally no more than two levels of amendment allowed. Robert's, Sec. 12. Friendly amendments are accepted without objection from the Council. MGO 2.08(3)
- ◆ Division of Assembly/Roll Call. Granted when asked, not debatable.

# Common Motions (cont.)

- ◆ Division of Question/Separation. Separates votes on different issues or paragraphs. Requires a second, but is not debatable.
- ◆ Lay on Table/Take off Table. Temporarily delay taking action. Not debatable.
- ◆ Place on file. Equivalent of a motion to delay or postpone indefinitely. Non-adoption without voting it down. 60-day rule and placing on file without prejudice. MGO 2.05(5)



# Common Motions (cont.)

- ◆ Point of Order/Procedure. Another incidental motion, no second required. It raises a question about the procedure being used. The Chair rules on the point, subject to an appeal (which does require a second) to the full body.
- ◆ Point of Privilege. A privileged motion, no second. Relates to a personal matter.
- ◆ Previous Question or Call the Question. Ends debate and proceeds to an immediate vote. Requires a second, not debatable and requires a 2/3 vote.

# Common Motions (cont.)

- ◆ Recess. A privileged motion. The length of the recess should be stated. Not debatable.
- ◆ Reconsideration. Asks that a matter be reconsidered. Must be made at the same or next meeting by a member who voted for the winning side or had an excused absence.
- ◆ Referral. The matter is referred to another body or a later meeting of the same body.
- ◆ Suspend the Rules. Requires a 2/3 majority.

# Consent

- ◆ Use of unanimous consent is a way to quickly move through non-controversial items.
- ◆ “Is there any objection to \_\_\_\_\_?”
- ◆ In virtual meetings, Chair asks to raise virtual hand if object, otherwise it is ruled to be a unanimous vote.

# Precedence of Motions

- ◆ See Robert's Rules Sec. 5 and Chart.
- ◆ A motion is not in order when a motion with higher precedence is under consideration. The motion with precedence must be disposed of before the other motion is allowed.
- ◆ Following charts show precedence; a motion is not in order if it has a higher number than the pending matter.

# Undebatable Motions

- ◆ 1. Adjourn.
- ◆ 2. Recess.
- ◆ 3. Question of Privilege.
- ◆ 4. Lay on the Table.
- ◆ 5. Previous Question
- ◆ 6. Limit or Extend Debate.

# Debatable Motions

- ◆ 7. Postpone to a definite time.
- ◆ 8. Refer or commit.
- ◆ 9. Amend.
- ◆ 10. Postpone indefinitely/place on file.
- ◆ 11. Main motion.

# Incidental Motions

- ◆ Incidental motions are not included in the list of precedence because they are subject to individual rules. Generally, whenever an incidental motion is in order, it takes precedence over all other matters. Key incidental motions are Point of order or information, Suspend the Rules, Division of the Assembly or the Question).

# Meeting Decorum

- ◆ Chair is responsible for maintaining order.
- ◆ Members can also raise point of order.
- ◆ Productive and civil debate requires focusing on the issue and proposal, not personalities and motivations.
- ◆ Direct remarks to the Chair, not at members of the body.



# Meeting Decorum

- ◆ “Debate must be confined to the merits of the pending question. Speakers must address their remarks to the chair, maintain a courteous tone, and . . . avoid interjecting a personal note into debate. To this end, they must never attack or make any allusion to the motives of members.”

Robert’s Rules, (12<sup>th</sup> edition) 4:30

# Meeting Decorum

- ◆ When a question is pending, a member can condemn the nature or likely consequences of the proposed measure in strong terms, but they must avoid personalities, and under no circumstances can they attack or question the motives of another member. The measure, not the member, is the subject of debate.

Robert's Rules (12<sup>th</sup> edition) 43:21

# “May’s Manual”

- ◆ Available on handout and the City Attorney’s web page.
- ◆ <http://www.cityofmadison.com/attorney/>
- ◆ Contains a “Cheat Sheet” on common motions.



# Questions?



- ◆ Call us at 266-4511
- ◆ Michael Haas or Patricia Lauten with questions related to Robert's Rules and legislative procedures.