

8TH EDITION

Parliamentary Procedure for Counties

A GUIDE AND MODEL ORDINANCE



ACCG
Advancing Georgia's Counties.

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Introduction

In order to properly manage county business, the board of commissioners must make decisions as a group in an open meeting. Parliamentary procedure establishes the ground rules for how the board discusses an issue and then makes a decision. These rules are commonly known as rules of order or rules of procedure. Parliamentary procedure allows the board to reach decisions in an organized way that is fair to everyone involved. In a perfect world, all votes would be unanimous. However, in reality, boards are often divided. Parliamentary procedure provides the answer to whether a motion passes when all members are not present or some member abstains and the vote is split. Parliamentary procedure prevents a commissioner from using meeting time to discuss issues that the board has previously voted down. A board that follows parliamentary procedure will be more productive, more efficient, and above all, more businesslike than a board that does not.

While some counties utilize *Robert's Rules of Order*, many others have not adopted any procedure officially. For counties that rely on *Robert's Rules*, it can be a daunting task to understand even the basic rules. Consequently, this guide offers a more simplified approach. Any county considering adopting procedures should first check their local legislation to make sure that the General Assembly has not required that *Robert's Rules* be used.

This guide includes an overview of parliamentary procedure, charts, and figures on various motions, and a model ordinance for implementing parliamentary procedure. The model ordinance is devoted to debate, voting, and to the 17 most important motions of parliamentary procedure.

Keep in mind the ordinance is a model based on *Robert's Rules of Order*. As such, it suggests one approach to meetings procedure. Provisions in this model can and should be changed to conform to local legislation, existing meeting structure, or local preferences. Consequently, this model should be amended to conform to any such local legislation and to any other provisions that are addressed in local legislation. It is critical that the county attorney be directly involved in the adoption of any meetings procedure or rules of order, since defective procedures and defective meetings may negate decisions made by a board during any such meeting.

Definitions

ABSTAIN

When a commissioner is present during a vote, but does not cast a vote, he or she has abstained from the vote. Abstention should not be allowed unless a conflict of interest exists. In general, an abstention is not counted as either a yes or no vote. It is presumed under the Georgia Open Meetings law that all members in attendance voted in favor of the motion, unless the minutes reflect the names of those voting against the proposal or abstaining.

ADJOURN

To officially end a meeting.

AMEND

To change the main motion.

DEBATE

Discussion of a motion or question. It is the attempt of a commissioner to persuade the rest of the board of the correctness of his or her opinion on the question or motion before the board.

FLOOR

“Getting the floor” or “having the floor” is the privilege of speaking at the commission meeting.

MAJORITY

The minimum number of votes needed to pass or defeat a motion or question. In general, the majority is one more than half of the number of commissioners voting (or one more than half of the quorum). Some boards have special rules or require a “super majority” (e.g., 2/3 of the members voting or members) for special types of questions.

MINUTES

The official record of the board of commissioners’ meeting. At a minimum, minutes must include the names of all members present, a description of all motions, and the vote.

MOTION

A formal question presented to the board, which must be made by one of the commissioners and seconded by another commissioner.

PARLIAMENTARY INQUIRY

The formal method used to ask the chair a question about a rule of procedure.

POINT OF ORDER

The formal method used to pose a question to the chair whether a violation of the rules of procedure has occurred.

QUORUM

The minimum number of commissioners necessary to hold a meeting and conduct county business. For many counties, a quorum is a simple majority of the board (i.e., one-half of the members of the board plus one). For example, three commissioners would be a quorum in a five-member board. The county’s local legislation may establish a different number as a quorum. Unless otherwise addressed in local legislation, the commissioners may want to decide whether a vacant seat on the board counts in determining the quorum.

SECOND

To express agreement on the presentation of a motion; seconding a motion does not mean or imply that the member is in support of the motion. A commissioner must second the motion of another commissioner before debate can begin or the motion is considered. Requiring a second ensures that there is adequate interest in the board to consider the question.

Roles of the Board and Meeting Participants

CHAIR

The chair is the presiding officer responsible for running the meeting impartially and in compliance with parliamentary procedure. The vice-chair serves in this position if the chair is absent or has recused himself or herself.

All remarks from other meeting participants should be addressed to the chair, who should be referred to as “Mr. Chair” or “Madam Chair.”

Whether the chair may make motions or vote on issues depends upon the county’s local legislation, ordinance, or policy. In some counties, the chair only votes in case of a tie; in other counties, the chair always votes.

DISTRICT COMMISSIONERS

District commissioners must “get the floor” through the chair, may make and second motions, engage in discussion on motions, and ultimately vote on motions. Any questions for department heads, citizens, guests, or speakers from a commissioner should be addressed through the chair.

COUNTY CLERK

The county clerk serves as secretary to the board. He or she is responsible for preparing the agenda, properly advertising the meeting, recording the meeting, and preparing and maintaining the minutes. During the meeting, the clerk keeps track of all motions and seconds. He or she must be able to repeat a motion back for the chair when requested.

COUNTY ATTORNEY

The county attorney serves as the parliamentarian. Any procedural questions should be directed through the chair to the county attorney.

COUNTY MANAGER, ADMINISTRATOR, AND DEPARTMENT HEADS

The county manager or administrator generally attends all commission meetings. He or she serves as a resource for the board and may make regular reports or presentations to the board. Department heads and other employees may be called to give reports, make presentations, or attend meetings of the board. No county manager, administrator, department head, or other employee should interrupt or engage in the discussion of the meeting unless first recognized by the chair.

INVITED SPEAKERS

Invited speakers (e.g., other governmental officials, consultants, vendors, etc.) may attend meetings and be called upon by the chair to present information.

MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC

Generally, the role of the public is to attend and observe meetings. Participation by the public is reserved for public hearings. In some counties, a portion of the agenda is set aside for citizen comments. Other counties open the floor to citizen comments on agenda items. Regardless of the practice of a particular county, citizens should be recognized by the chair. All remarks should be made to the chair and not to individual commissioners, department heads, employees, etc.

Taking Action on Behalf of the County

In order for a board of commissioners to officially act, they must first make a decision as a group on the action. In order to make a decision as a group, the decision must first be presented in the form of a motion. There are several types of motions that may be used in a board meeting, each of which has different purposes and requirements. This guide provides detailed descriptions of subsidiary, privileged, incidental, and supplementary main motions.

GETTING THE FLOOR

Before a motion can be made and before an issue can be discussed, a commissioner needs to be recognized by the chair as having the right to speak. This is referred to as “getting the floor.” The chair must recognize any commissioner who asks to get the floor and who is entitled to it (i.e., the commissioner must not be out of order). A commissioner desiring the floor should simply say, “Mr. Chair” or “Madam Chair.” The chair will normally recognize the commissioner by stating, “The Chair recognizes the Commissioner from District ____.” Once a commissioner has the floor, no one is allowed to interrupt him or her.

MAIN MOTION

In order for a board to take any official action on any subject, a commissioner must make a proposal known as a main motion. The chair will not recognize a proposed motion until another commissioner agrees to second the motion, confirming that at least two commissioners want the motion to be considered by the board. The commissioner seconding the motion does not have to support the motion.

DEBATE

After the chair recognizes the main motion, the board may debate the motion. Commissioners may only speak one at a time and the chair must recognize each commissioner before they begin to speak. Their comments must be directed to the chair. All discussion must be limited to the pending question. The discussion should be courteous. There should be no personal attacks on other board members. The motion, not the person, is the subject of the discussion.

SUBSIDIARY MOTIONS

During the course of debate, commissioners can introduce motions proposing that the board take a particular action on a motion. These motions, called subsidiary motions, allow a board to reach a conclusion on the main motion. Subsidiary motions require a second and most of these motions may be debated, such as motions to refer to a committee and to amend. However, debate is not allowed on motions to limit debate, vote immediately, and lay on the table. These motions also can apply to other subsidiary motions.

Figure 1.

HOW TO MAKE A MOTION

1. A commissioner must request recognition by the chair by saying, “Mr. Chair...” or “Madam Chair...”
2. The chair recognizes the commissioner.
3. The commissioner states the motion: “I move that...”
4. Another commissioner may second the motion by saying, “Second.” If no one does, then the chair may ask: “Is there a second?”
5. If there is no second, the chair announces, “The motion fails for lack of a second.”
6. If there is a second, the chair notes, “It is moved and seconded that... Is there any discussion?”
7. The commissioner offering the motion initiates the discussion after being recognized by the chair.

PRIVILEGED MOTIONS

Privileged motions facilitate the running of the meeting. They do not directly relate to the main motion, but can be introduced while a main motion is being considered. Privileged motions include motions to raise a question of privilege, recess or adjourn. Privileged motions take precedence over all subsidiary motions. Debate is not allowed on these motions.

INCIDENTAL MOTIONS

Incidental motions allow commissioners to exert their rights as members of the board and can be introduced at any time during a meeting. For example, motions to appeal or raise a point of order allow a commissioner to raise an objection. They also include motions that allow a commissioner to ask a question about the rules of order or about the business of the board.

SUPPLEMENTARY MAIN MOTIONS

Supplementary main motions allow the board to act on a main motion that has either been previously passed or tabled by the board. Supplementary main motions can be introduced at any time during a meeting. For example, a motion to reconsider allows the board to consider new information that may affect the decision that has already been made.

PROPER ORDER OF MOTIONS (RANKING)

The system of proposing, considering, and disposing of motions in their proper order is called the “order of precedence” or “ranking” and provides some structure and order to a meeting. Each subsidiary and privileged motion is assigned a specific rank, and is considered and decided upon from highest to lowest. A motion to adjourn has the highest rank and will take precedence over all other subsidiary and privileged motions. A main motion has the lowest rank. Voting on the main motion is in order only when all subsidiary motions have been decided.

A motion of higher precedence can interrupt a motion of lower precedence. The higher motion must be decided before the board returns to consider the motion of lower precedence. For example, while the board is discussing a motion to refer a main motion to a committee, a commissioner can introduce a motion to limit debate on the main motion. The motion to limit debate has a higher precedence than a motion to refer, and must be considered and decided on first before returning to the motion to refer.

Figure 2 provides a list of the ranked motions. Incidental motions (appeal, point of order, parliamentary inquiry, point of information) and supplementary main motions (reconsider, rescind, and resume consideration) are not part of the ranking order, since they can be introduced at any time.

Figure 3 provides a flowchart explanation of the ranking and parliamentary process of motions.

Figure 2.

RANKING OF MOTIONS, HIGH TO LOW

PRIVILEGED MOTIONS (UNDEBATABLE)

- Adjourn
- Recess
- Question of Privilege

SUBSIDIARY MOTIONS (UNDEBATABLE)

- Lay on the Table (Postpone Temporarily)
- Vote Immediately (Previous Question)
- Limit Debate or Extend

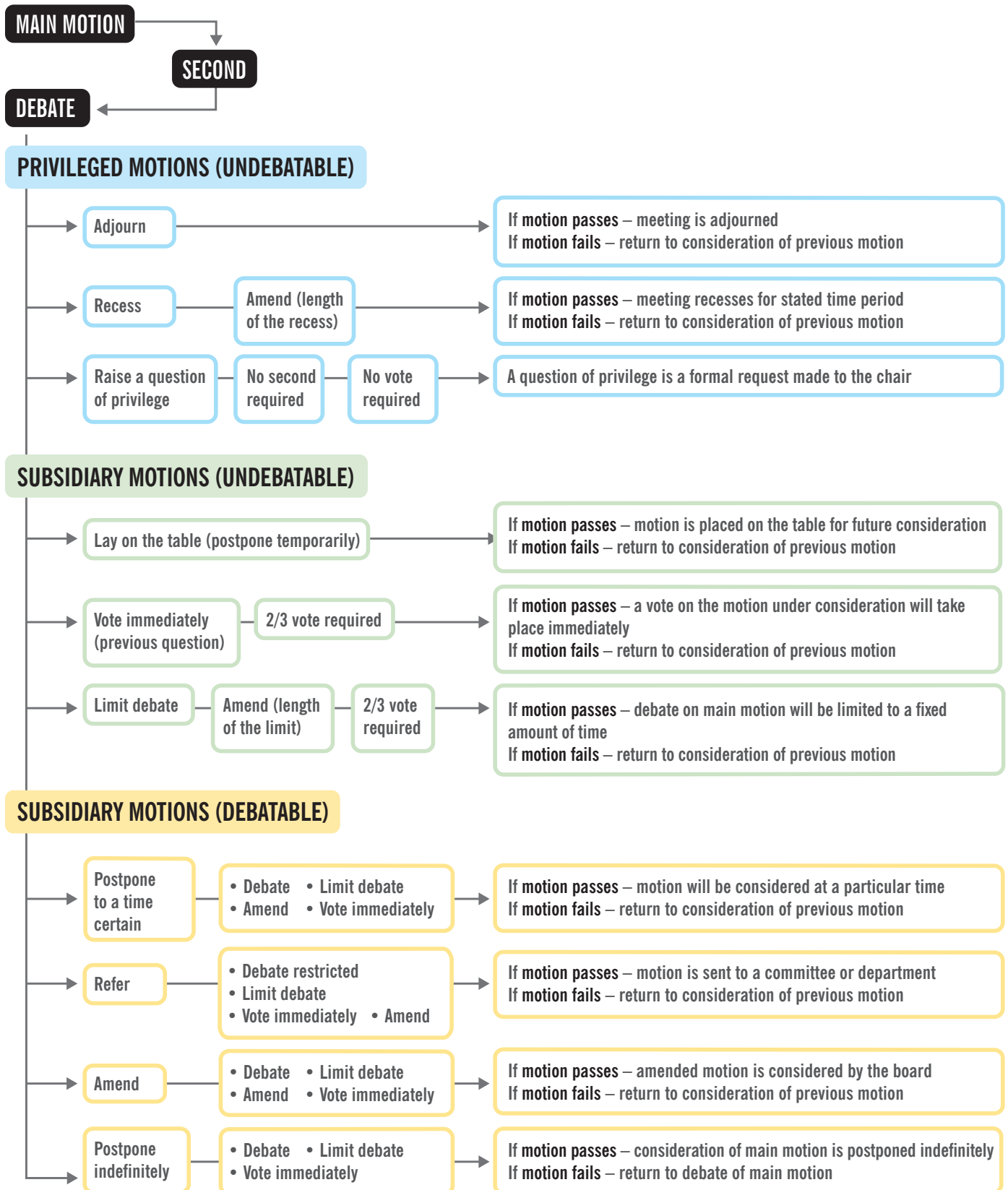
SUBSIDIARY MOTIONS (DEBATABLE)

- Postpone to a Time Certain (Postpone Definitely)
- Refer to Committee (Commit)
- Amend
- Postpone Indefinitely

MAIN MOTIONS

Figure 3.

OVERVIEW OF RANKED MOTIONS IN PARLIAMENTARY PROCEDURE



Note: Incidental Motions (appeal, parliamentary inquiry, point of order, point of information) and Supplementary Main Motions (reconsider, rescind, resume consideration) are not included in the flowchart since they are not part of the ranking system and can be introduced at any time. Source: *Robert's Rules of Order*, 2000

VOTING

All commissioners in attendance must vote for or against a motion unless he or she has a conflict of interest. The chair votes in accordance with the county's local legislation (i.e., could be only in the case of a tie, or on all motions unless her or she has a conflict of interest). Voting procedure varies according to whether the motion is debatable or undebatable (see Summary of Motions, p. 11).

VOTING ON DEBATABLE MOTIONS

In the case of debatable motions, the vote can be proposed in one of two ways:

- (1) If debate has been completed and no other commissioner wishes to speak, then the chair can call for the vote. If there are no objections, then the chair proceeds with the vote.
- (2) If the chair calls for the vote and there is an objection, debate will continue. To end debate, a member of the board may move to vote immediately (sometimes stated as "move the previous question"). If this motion is seconded and approved by a 2/3 vote, debate will stop. The chair will then read the proposed motion to the board and ask for the votes of the commissioners. (If a board of commissioners consists of only three members, the 2/3 vote becomes meaningless since it would take two votes for a simple majority.)

VOTING ON UNDEBATABLE MOTIONS

In the case of undebatable motions, the vote occurs immediately after the chair recognizes the motion. The chair reads the proposed motion on the board and then calls for a vote.

Figure 4.

HOW TO TAKE A VOTE

A vote can be taken either by voice or by show of hands based on the county's procedure, or in the absence of procedure, the chair's discretion.

By Voice

The chair restates the motion and then says:

"Those in favor, say 'Aye'."

"Those opposed say 'No'."

By Show of Hands

The chair restates the motion and then says:

*"Those in favor raise your right hand.
Please lower your hand."*

*"Those opposed raise your right hand.
Please lower your hand."*

The chair announces the vote and states either, *"The ayes have it"* and restates the motion as passed or *"The noes have it and the motion is lost."*

Summary of Motions

The main motion and 17 specific motions make up the foundation of parliamentary procedure. Knowledge of these motions enables a commissioner to be an active and productive member of the board during commission meetings.

MAIN MOTION

In order for a board to take any official action on any subject, a commissioner must propose a main motion. The chair does not recognize a proposed main motion until another commissioner agrees to second the presentation of the motion. A second does not require the commissioner seconding the motion to support the motion. A commissioner may withdraw a main motion that he or she has made at any time before the board has voted on that motion. The final disposition for a motion often requires one or more subsidiary motion decisions.

SUBSIDIARY MOTIONS

During the course of debate, commissioners can introduce subsidiary motions to propose that the board takes a particular action on a motion, such as amend or refer to a committee. These motions help the board to reach a decision on the main motion. Subsidiary motions require a second; some of these motions are debatable and some are not. Three subsidiary motions—amend, limit debate, and vote immediately—also can apply to other subsidiary motions. Subsidiary motions are discussed below in order of precedence.

MOTION TO POSTPONE INDEFINITELY

- Second required
- Debatable
- Not amendable
- Majority vote

If a commissioner believes that the main motion should not be considered by the board, he or she may move to postpone the consideration of the main motion indefinitely. The purpose is to “kill” the main motion. If the motion to postpone indefinitely is successful, consideration of the main motion stops and the motion is tabled for the duration of the meeting. A motion to postpone indefinitely can be debated, but it cannot be amended since any amendment to the motion would alter the very nature of the motion.

MOTION TO AMEND TO MAIN MOTION

- Second required
- Debatable if the motion to be amended is debatable
- Amendable
- Majority vote

If a commissioner believes that a main motion under discussion should be changed in order to make it more acceptable to the board, then he or she can move to amend the motion. Amendments must be closely related to the original motion and must not change the nature of the motion that they amend. The chair enforces these rules. Motions to refer, amend, postpone to a time certain, and recess can also be amended.

Debate is allowed on a motion to amend only if the original motion is debatable. Debate is limited to the proposed amendment. A majority vote is required for the board to adopt an amendment. If the amendment is adopted, then the board will consider the amended version of the motion. A motion cannot be amended more than two times.

MOTION TO REFER TO A COMMITTEE (COMMIT)

- Second required
- Debatable
- Amendable (as to the committee and date the committee will report back)
- Majority vote

If a commissioner believes that further information is needed before the board can act on a motion, he or she can propose that the motion be referred to a specific committee or department for further study. If an appropriate committee does not already exist, then a committee can be formed as a part of the motion. A motion to refer should specify the date that the committee or department will report back to the board. This motion is debatable and can be amended as to the committee and the date that the committee will report back.

MOTION TO POSTPONE TO A TIME CERTAIN (POSTPONE DEFINITELY)

- Second required
- Debatable
- Amendable (as to the length of the postponement)
- Majority vote

A motion to postpone to a certain time can be proposed if a commissioner believes that the main motion should not be considered until a future time. This motion sets a particular time for the main motion to be considered again, which may be later in the same meeting, at a future meeting, or upon the occurrence of a specified event (e.g., the issuance of a report that may clarify the issue under discussion). The motion is debatable and can be amended as to the length of postponement. A majority vote is required for the motion to pass. If the motion is passed, the chair will bring the original motion back to the board for consideration at the specified time.

MOTION TO LIMIT OR EXTEND LIMITS OF DEBATE

- Second required
- Not debatable
- Amendable (as to the length of the limit)
- 2/3 vote

A motion to limit debate places a time constraint on the length of debate. The details of such a motion are to be decided by the commissioner who makes the motion. This motion can also be used to extend the limits of debate if a limit on debate already exists. Debate is not allowed on this motion and a 2/3 vote is required. The motion can be amended as to the length of the limit.

MOTION TO VOTE IMMEDIATELY (PREVIOUS QUESTION)

- Second required
- Not debatable
- Not amendable
- 2/3 vote

If a commissioner believes that the motion that is being considered should be voted on, the commissioner can move to vote immediately. This motion stops debate. The motion is undebatable and a vote of 2/3 of the board is required for the motion to pass.

MOTION TO LAY ON THE TABLE (POSTPONE TEMPORARILY)

- Second required
- Not debatable
- Not amendable
- Majority vote

A motion to lay on the table proposes that the consideration of a main motion be postponed until a later time in the same meeting. The main motion can be brought back for consideration if a motion to resume consideration is passed by the board during that same meeting. The motion to lay on the table will die if it is not taken up during the meeting. Debate is not allowed on this motion and the motion is not amendable.

PRIVILEGED MOTIONS

Privileged motions help to facilitate the running of the meeting. They do not address or relate to the main motion and can be introduced when there is no main motion under consideration or while a main motion is being debated. Privileged motions take precedence over all subsidiary motions and are discussed below by order of precedence.

QUESTION OF PRIVILEGE

- No second required
- Not debatable
- Not amendable
- No vote required

A question of privilege is a formal question addressed to the chair concerning the rights of a commissioner and of the board as a whole. It does not require a second and cannot be debated or amended. Instead of the board taking a vote on the question, the chair makes a ruling on the question.

MOTION TO RECESS

- Second required
- Not debatable
- Amendable (as to the length of the recess)
- Majority vote

A commissioner can propose that the meeting be suspended for a particular amount of time by moving to recess. This motion, offered while business is still pending, is a temporary intermission in the proceedings for meals or other breaks. The commissioner must specify the length of the recess. The motion must be seconded. Debate is not allowed on this motion, but the motion can be amended as to the length of the recess. Business resumes after the recess where it left off before the recess.

MOTION TO ADJOURN

- Second required
- Not debatable
- Not amendable
- Majority vote

In order for a meeting to come to a close, a commissioner must move to adjourn. The motion to adjourn has the highest precedence of any motion and therefore can be introduced at any time. The motion is not debatable or amendable.

INCIDENTAL MOTIONS

Incidental motions enable commissioners to exert their rights as a member of the board (e.g. to raise an objection to a ruling of the chair, to point out a possible violation of the rules of order, or to ask a question). Incidental motions are not a part of the ranking system; they can be introduced at any time during a meeting.

MOTION TO APPEAL

- Second required
- Debatable
- Not amendable
- Can be interrupted only by a privileged motion or a motion to lay on the table
- Majority vote

If a commissioner disagrees with a ruling made by the chair, he or she may appeal the decision. The motion to appeal should be made immediately following the chair's ruling. If the appeal is seconded, it will be considered by the board. The chair has the opportunity to explain the ruling that has been challenged, then the board may debate the appeal. The board as a whole will decide by majority vote if the chair's decision should be upheld or overturned. An appeal is high in precedence and can only be interrupted by a privileged motion or by a motion to lay on the table.

PARLIAMENTARY INQUIRY

- No second required
- Not debatable
- Not amendable
- Can be interrupted only by a privileged motion
- No vote involved

If a commissioner has a question about the rules of order that relate to the current business of the board, he or she may make a parliamentary inquiry, asking the chair to give an opinion on that question. This motion takes precedence over all motions except privileged motions, does not require a second, and is not debatable or amendable.

POINT OF ORDER (QUESTION OF ORDER)

- No second required
- Debatable
- The chair may make a ruling or may allow the board to vote
- Can be interrupted only by a privileged motion or a motion to lay on the table

If a commissioner believes that a violation of parliamentary procedure rules has occurred, he or she can raise a point of order. A second is not required. The chair can make a ruling on the question or can allow the board to debate the question and vote on it. A point of order motion can only be interrupted by a privileged motion or a motion to lay on the table.

POINT OF INFORMATION

- No second required
- Not debatable
- Not amendable
- No vote involved

If a commissioner has a question about the facts of a particular issue that is being considered, he or she may ask a point of information. This motion is addressed first to the chair and then to the appropriate person. A second is not required and the motion is not debatable or amendable.

SUPPLEMENTARY MAIN MOTIONS

Three motions allow the board to act on a main motion that has either been previously passed or tabled by the board. These motions are considered to be main motions, but differ from usual main motions in specified ways. Supplementary main motions can be introduced at any time during a meeting.

MOTION TO RECONSIDER

- Second required
- Debatable
- Not amendable
- Majority vote

The motion to reconsider allows the board to debate whether or not to reopen debate on a decision made at the meeting in progress. This motion allows the board to consider new information that may affect the decision that has already been made. Any commissioner can make a motion to reconsider and any commissioner can second the motion. The motion is debatable, but it cannot be amended. A majority vote of the board is required for the motion to pass. If a motion to reconsider is passed, the original decision will be voided and the board will return to debate on the original motion.

MOTION TO RESCIND

- Second required
- Debatable
- Not amendable
- Majority vote

A motion to rescind proposes that the board overturn a motion that was made at a previous meeting. It can be made by any commissioner. This motion is in order as long as the original motion has not been implemented.

An announcement of the intention to rescind a motion may be made at the meeting where the decision was made, or the commissioner seeking to rescind may place the matter on the agenda for the next meeting. At the next meeting, the motion to rescind will be formally made. If it is seconded, then it will be considered by the board. A majority vote is required for the motion to pass. If the motion to rescind passes, the original decision is voided.

MOTION TO RESUME CONSIDERATION

- Second required
- Not debatable
- Not amendable
- Majority vote

The motion to resume consideration allows the board to consider a motion that has been temporarily postponed (laid on the table). This motion requires a second, is not debatable or amendable, and ranks higher than any debatable motion. A majority vote is required for the motion to pass.

Parliamentary Courtesies

PRINCIPLES OF PARLIAMENTARY LAW

Being a member of a board comes with the responsibility to keep in mind the principles and purposes underlying parliamentary law:

- *Order*: Orderly procedure prevents confusion, chaos, and disorganization.
- *Equality*: Each commissioner has an equal right to attempt to persuade the other commissioners that his or her opinion on the question or motion is correct or best for the county.
- *The right of the minority opinion to be heard on questions*: It is important to protect the right of the lone commissioner to have his or her opinion considered by the board.
- *The right of the majority opinion to rule the organization*: Being a commissioner on the losing end of a proposal before the board is difficult. However, no matter how right a commissioner believes that he or she is, the commissioner must consent to the will of the majority and never attempt to undermine the decision of the board after the fact.

COURTESIES FROM BOARD MEMBERS

Courtesies that should be expected from all members of the board include the following:

- Arrive at all meetings on time and prepared.
- Address the chair as “Madam Chair” or “Mr. Chair.”
- Do not speak during the meeting without being recognized by the chair.
- Only one member speaks at a time. There should be no talking or whispering among members during the meeting.
- All comments should be addressed to the chair.
- Only one question or motion is discussed and decided at a time.
- Willingly accept the decision of the board.

COURTESIES FROM THE CHAIR

The chair should always provide the following courtesies to his or her board:

- Arrive at all meetings on time and prepared.
- Become knowledgeable in the rules of parliamentary procedure.
- Be impartial.
- Always restate the exact wording of a motion or amendment before the vote. Ask the county clerk to read it if necessary.
- Do not allow discussion on an issue until the motion has been made by a commissioner, seconded by another commissioner, and then restated by the chair.

- The chair is typically not supposed to enter into the discussion while presiding over the meeting. Local legislation or policy may supersede this, particularly when the chair represents one district (as opposed to a commissioner who represents the entire county at large).
- Always be clear in stating how the vote will be taken (e.g. “All in favor of the motion to... say ‘Aye’.”).
- Always remember to call for the negative vote (e.g., “All those opposed...say ‘No’.”).
- Remember that adoption of an amendment does not mean adoption of the main motion. Once the vote of the amendment is concluded, restate the motion as amended.
- Call a motion out of order, rather than call a commissioner out of order.

Sources

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Resources



Model Ordinance: Parliamentary Procedures for Counties

WHEREAS, well-organized meetings allow a board of commissioners to reach decisions in a fair and organized manner;

WHEREAS, parliamentary procedure is the framework for organizing and conducting meetings; and

WHEREAS, parliamentary procedure provides the rules by which a board debates an issue and then comes to a decision.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that all meetings of the Board of Commissioners of _____ County shall be conducted in accordance with the provisions of this meetings procedure ordinance.

SECTION 1. MAIN MOTION. In order for a board to take any official action on any subject, a commissioner must propose a main motion. A proposed main motion will not be recognized by the chair until another commissioner agrees to second the motion. A second does not require the commissioner seconding the motion to support the motion. A commissioner may withdraw a main motion that he or she has made at any time before the board has voted on that motion.

SECTION 2. DEBATE. After the main motion is recognized by the chair, the board shall debate the motion. The debate shall be managed by the chair in a manner that is fair to all members of the board. Commissioners can participate in the debate only when they are recognized by the chair.

During the course of a debate, commissioners may introduce subsidiary motions that propose that the board take a particular action on a motion (Section 5). There are two classes of subsidiary motions: debatable subsidiary motions and undebatable subsidiary motions. Debatable subsidiary motions consist of motions to postpone indefinitely, amend, refer to committee, and postpone to a time certain. Debatable subsidiary motions require a second before they can be voted on or debated. There are three undebatable subsidiary motions: limit debate, vote immediately, and lay on the table. They require a second and cannot be debated.

Commissioners may also introduce Privileged Motions (Section 6). Privileged Motions facilitate the running of the meeting and can be introduced during the course of debate. Privileged Motions consist of a motion to raise a question of privilege and motions to recess and adjourn. The motions to recess and adjourn require a second. Debate is not allowed on Privileged Motions.

SECTION 3. VOTING PROCEDURE. Voting on debatable motions and voting on undebatable motions shall take place in accordance with the following provisions:

(a) **DEBATABLE MOTIONS.** In the case of debatable motions, the vote can be proposed in one of two ways:

- (1) If debate has been completed and no other commissioner wishes to speak, the chair can call for the vote. Absent an objection, the chair can proceed with the vote;
- (2) If the chair calls for the vote and there is an objection, a member of the board may move to vote immediately (“move the previous question”). If this motion is seconded and approved by a 2/3 vote, debate will stop. The chair will then read the proposed motion to the board and ask for the votes of the commissioners.

(b) **UNDEBATABLE MOTIONS.** In the case of undebatable motions, the vote shall occur immediately after the motion is recognized by the chair. The chair shall read the proposed motion to the board and then call for the vote.

All commissioners in attendance must vote for or against a motion unless he or she has a conflict of interest. The chair only votes in case of a tie. The chair must vote on all motions unless he or she has a conflict of interest. (*Choose one of these two options*).

Note: The county's local legislation should be reviewed by the county attorney to determine the chair's eligibility to vote.

SECTION 4. RANKING OF MOTIONS. Each subsidiary and privileged motion is assigned a specific rank. A motion of higher precedence can interrupt a motion of lower precedence. The higher motion must be decided before the board returns to consider the motion of lower precedence.

A main motion has the lowest rank and does not take precedence over any other motion. A motion to adjourn has the highest rank and will take precedence over all other subsidiary and privileged motions. The order of precedence of motions shall be in accordance with the table in this section. Motions at the top of the following list take precedence over motions at the bottom of the list.

RANKING OF MOTIONS (HIGHEST TO LOWEST)

PRIVILEGED MOTIONS (UNDEBATABLE)

1. Adjourn
2. Recess
3. Question of Privilege

SUBSIDIARY MOTIONS (UNDEBATABLE)

4. Lay on the Table (Postpone Temporarily)
5. Vote Immediately (Previous Question)
6. Limit Debate or Extend

SUBSIDIARY MOTIONS (DEBATABLE)

7. Postpone to a Time Certain (Postpone Definitely)
8. Refer to Committee (Commit)
9. Amend
10. Postpone Indefinitely

OTHER MOTIONS

11. Main Motion

SECTION 5. SUBSIDIARY MOTIONS. During the course of debate, commissioners may introduce motions that propose that the board take a particular action on a main motion. These motions, called subsidiary motions, allow a board to reach a conclusion on the main motion. Subsidiary motions require a second before they can be voted on or debated. Three subsidiary motions—amend, limit debate, and vote immediately—also can apply to other subsidiary motions.

- (a) **POSTPONE INDEFINITELY.** If a commissioner believes that the main motion should not be considered by the board, he or she may move to postpone the consideration of the main motion indefinitely. If the motion is successful, consideration of the main motion stops and the main motion is tabled for the duration of the meeting. A motion to postpone indefinitely can be debated but it cannot be amended. A majority vote is required for the motion to pass.
- (b) **AMEND.** If a commissioner believes that a main motion should be changed in order to make it more acceptable, he or she can move to amend the motion. Amendments must be closely related to the original motion and must not change the nature of the motion that they amend. Motions to refer, amend, postpone to a time certain, and recess can also be amended. A motion cannot be amended more than two times. Debate is allowed on a motion to amend only if the original motion is debatable. Debate is limited to the proposed amendment. A majority vote is required for the board to adopt an amendment. If the amendment is adopted, then the board shall consider the amended version of the motion.
- (c) **REFER TO A COMMITTEE (COMMIT).** If a commissioner believes that further information is needed before the board can act on a main motion, he or she may propose that the motion be referred to a specific committee or department for further study. If an appropriate committee does not already exist, then a committee may be formed as a part of the motion. A motion to commit should specify the date that the committee or department will report back to the board. This motion is debatable and amendable. A majority vote is required for the motion to pass.
- (d) **POSTPONE TO A TIME CERTAIN (POSTPONE DEFINITELY).** A motion to postpone to a time certain may be proposed if a commissioner believes that the main motion should not be considered until a future time. This motion shall set a particular time for the main motion to be considered again. It is debatable and can be amended. If this motion is passed, the chair will bring the original motion back to the board for consideration at the specified time, which may be at the same meeting, at a subsequent meeting, or upon the occurrence of a specified event. A majority vote is required for the motion to pass.
- (e) **LIMIT OR EXTEND LIMITS OF DEBATE.** A motion to limit debate places a time constraint on the length of debate. The details of such a motion are to be decided by the commissioner who makes the motion. This motion can also be used to extend the limits of debate if a limit on debate already exists. Debate is not allowed on this motion and a 2/3 vote is required for the motion to pass.
- (f) **VOTE IMMEDIATELY (PREVIOUS QUESTION).** If a commissioner believes debate on a motion should end and that the motion that is being considered should be voted on, he or she can move to vote immediately. The motion is undebatable and a vote of 2/3 of the board is required for the motion to pass.
- (g) **LAY ON THE TABLE (POSTPONE TEMPORARILY).** A motion to lay on the table proposes that the consideration of a main motion be postponed until a later time in the same meeting. The main motion can be brought back for consideration only if a motion to resume consideration is accepted by the board during the same meeting. The motion will die if it is not taken up during the meeting. Debate is not allowed on this motion and the motion is not amendable. A majority vote is required for the motion to pass.

SECTION 6. PRIVILEGED MOTIONS. Privileged motions facilitate the running of the meeting. They do not address or relate to a main motion and can be introduced whether or not there is a main motion under consideration. Privileged motions take precedence over all subsidiary motions. Debate is not allowed on these motions.

- (a) **QUESTION OF PRIVILEGE.** A formal question addressed to the chair concerning the rights of a commissioner or of the board as a whole is referred to as a question of privilege. It does not require a second and cannot be debated or amended. The chair is required to make a ruling on the question.
- (b) **RECESS.** A motion to recess proposes that the meeting be suspended for a particular amount of time when business is still pending. It is a temporary intermission of the proceedings. The motion must specify the length of the recess. The motion must also be seconded. Debate is not allowed on this motion but the motion can be amended. A majority vote is required for the motion to pass.
- (c) **ADJOURN.** In order for a meeting to come to a close, a commissioner must make a motion to adjourn. The motion to adjourn has the highest rank of any motion and can be introduced at any time. The motion requires a second, but is not debatable or amendable. A majority vote is required for the motion to pass.

SECTION 7. INCIDENTAL MOTIONS. Incidental motions allow commissioners to exert their rights as a member of the board. Incidental motions can be introduced at any time during a meeting.

- (a) **APPEAL.** If a commissioner disagrees with a ruling that is made by the chair, he or she may appeal the decision. If the appeal is seconded, the appeal will be considered by the board. The chair has the opportunity to explain the ruling that has been challenged. The board may then debate the appeal. The board shall decide by majority vote if the chair's decision is to be upheld or overturned. An appeal is high in precedence and can only be interrupted by a privileged motion or by a motion to lay on the table.
- (b) **PARLIAMENTARY INQUIRY.** If a commissioner has a question about the rules of order, he or she may ask the chair to give an opinion on that question. This question should take the form of a parliamentary inquiry and should relate to the current business of the board. This motion takes precedence over all motions except privileged motions. This motion does not require a second and is not debatable or amendable.
- (c) **POINT OF ORDER (QUESTION OF ORDER).** If a commissioner believes that a violation of the rules of parliamentary procedure has occurred, he or she can raise a point of order. A second is not required. The chair can make a ruling on the question or can allow the board to debate and then rule on the question by majority vote. A point of order can only be interrupted by a privileged motion or a motion to lay on the table.
- (d) **POINT OF INFORMATION (REQUEST FOR INFORMATION).** If a commissioner has a question about the facts of a particular issue that is being considered, he or she may ask a point of information. This motion is addressed first to the chair and then to the appropriate person. A second is not required and the motion is not debatable or amendable.

SECTION 8. SUPPLEMENTARY MAIN MOTIONS. Three motions allow the board to act on a main motion that has either been passed or tabled by the board. These motions are considered to be main motions but differ from usual main motions in the ways specified.

- (a) **RECONSIDER.** The motion to reconsider allows the board to debate whether or not to overturn a decision made at the meeting that is in progress. It allows the board to consider new information that may affect the decision that

has already been made. Any commissioner can make a motion to reconsider and any commissioner may second the motion. The motion is debatable, but it cannot be amended. A majority vote of the board is required for the motion to pass. If a motion to reconsider is passed, the original decision will be voided and the board will return to debate and revote the original motion.

- (b) **RESCIND.** A motion to rescind proposes that the board overturn a motion passed at a previous meeting. It can be made by any commissioner. A motion to rescind is in order as long as the original motion has not been implemented. An announcement of the intention to rescind a motion may be made at the meeting where the decision was made, or the commissioner seeking to rescind may place the matter on the agenda for the next meeting. The motion to rescind will then be placed on the agenda for the next meeting. At the next meeting, the motion to rescind will formally be made. If it is seconded, then the board shall debate and vote on rescission. A majority vote is required for the motion to pass. If a motion to rescind is passed, the original decision will be voided.
- (c) **RESUME CONSIDERATION.** The motion to resume consideration allows the board to consider a motion that has been temporarily postponed. This motion requires a second and is not debatable or amendable. It is a main motion but ranks higher than any debatable motion. A majority vote is required for the motion to pass.

Motion Characteristics at a Glance

SUBSIDIARY MOTIONS

Motions that modify, defer, remove, or dispose of the main motion. They must be handled first.

MOTION TO POSTPONE INDEFINITELY

Second required
Debatable
Not amendable
Majority vote

MOTION TO AMEND

Second required
Debatable (if motion to be amended is debatable)
Amendable
Majority vote

MOTION TO REFER TO A COMMITTEE (COMMIT)

Second required
Debatable
Amendable (as to committee and date committee will report back)
Majority vote

MOTION TO POSTPONE TO A TIME CERTAIN (POSTPONE DEFINITELY)

Second required
Debatable
Amendable (as to length of postponement)
Majority vote

MOTION TO LIMIT OR EXTEND LIMITS OF DEBATE

Second required
Not debatable
Amendable
2/3 vote

MOTION TO VOTE IMMEDIATELY (PREVIOUS QUESTION)

Second required
Not debatable
Not amendable
2/3 vote

MOTION TO LAY ON THE TABLE (POSTPONE TEMPORARILY)

Second required
Not debatable
Not amendable
Majority vote

PRIVILEGED MOTIONS

Motions that relate to the order and the rights and welfare of the commissioners.

QUESTION OF PRIVILEGE

No second required
Not debatable
Not amendable
No vote required

MOTION TO RECESS

Second required
Not debatable
Amendable (as to length of recess)
Majority vote

MOTION TO ADJOURN

Second required
Not debatable
Not amendable
Majority vote

INCIDENTAL MOTIONS

Motions that relate to procedures.

MOTION TO APPEAL

Second required
Debatable
Not amendable
Can be interrupted only by a privileged motion or motion to lay on the table
Majority vote

POINT OF ORDER

No second required
Debatable
The chair may make a ruling or may allow board to vote
Can be interrupted only by a privileged motion or motion to lay on the table

PARLIAMENTARY INQUIRY

No second required
Not debatable
Not amendable
Can be interrupted only by a privileged motion
No vote involved

POINT OF INFORMATION (REQUEST FOR INFORMATION)

No second required
Not debatable
Not amendable
No vote involved

SUPPLEMENTARY MAIN MOTIONS

Motions on a main motion that has either been previously passed or tabled by the board.

They can be introduced at any time during the meeting.

MOTION TO RECONSIDER

Second required
Debatable
Not amendable
Majority vote

MOTION TO RESCIND

Second required
Debatable
Not amendable
Majority vote

MOTION TO RESUME CONSIDERATION

Second required
Not debatable
Not amendable
Majority vote



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