

Parliamentary Procedure for Village Board Meetings

Properly Making Motions, Amending Motions, and Dividing Questions Under Robert's Rules of Order

Purpose

For the Village of Harrison Village Board, clear motion practice is essential to ensure actions are lawful, understandable, and efficiently decided. Robert's Rules of Order Newly Revised provides the standard framework for introducing business, debating proposals, modifying them, dividing questions when appropriate, and taking final action.

1. How a Main Motion Is Made

A main motion is the formal method for bringing business before the Village Board for action.

Basic steps

- Item is introduced by staff
- A member seeks recognition from the presiding officer.
- Once recognized, the member states the motion clearly: "I move that the Village Board approve..."
- Another member seconds the motion.
- The Chair restates the motion to place it before the Board.
- The motion is then open for discussion.
- The Chair calls for a vote and announces the result.

Good practice

- state motions in clear, affirmative language
- make the motion specific enough that everyone understands the exact action proposed
- phrase the motion as an action of the Board, not as a discussion topic

Example

"I move to approve the proposal from ABC Paving in the amount of \$48,500 for the Maple Street resurfacing project."

2. Before the Chair States the Motion

Until the Chair formally repeats the motion to the body, the maker of the motion may usually withdraw or modify it without Board permission. Once the Chair states the motion, it belongs to the Board as a whole, not to the maker alone.

3. How to Amend a Motion

An amendment changes the wording of a pending motion before final action is taken. Its purpose is to improve the motion or make it more precise.

Permitted forms of amendment

- inserting words
- striking out words
- striking out and inserting words
- substituting one paragraph or resolution for another

Example

Main motion: "I move to approve the purchase of two police vehicles." Amendment: "I move to amend the motion by inserting 'not to exceed \$110,000' after 'vehicles.'" If adopted, the main motion becomes: "I move to approve the purchase of two police vehicles not to exceed \$110,000."

4. Rules for Amendments

- An amendment must be germane, meaning it must relate directly to the subject of the main motion.
- An amendment cannot introduce a completely new subject.
- Only one primary amendment to the main motion may be pending at a time.
- A secondary amendment may be made to the primary amendment, but no third level is allowed.

Voting order

- secondary amendment
- primary amendment, as amended if applicable
- main motion, as amended if applicable

5. Division of the Question

If a motion contains more than one separable item or action, a member may move to divide the question so each part is considered and voted on separately.

How to request division

- A member states: "I move to divide the question."
- The motion to divide requires a second.

- If there is objection, the Board votes on whether division is proper.

When division is proper

- each part relates to a distinct action or subject
- each part could stand on its own if adopted separately

Example

“I move to approve the purchase of a pickup truck and authorize construction of a salt storage building.” These are separate actions and may be divided into separate votes.

When division is not proper

A motion should not be divided if its parts are so closely connected that separating them would make the question confusing, incomplete, or ineffective.

Important distinction

- Division of the question = splitting one motion into separate votes
- Division of the assembly = requiring a more verifiable vote when a member doubts the result of a voice vote

6. Friendly Amendments

Under Robert’s Rules, there is technically no separate category of “friendly amendment” once a motion is pending before the Board. Even if the maker agrees with the change, the amendment should be handled through the formal process unless there is unanimous consent before objection is raised.

Best practice for a Village Board

- Ask the Chair to clearly state whether the change is accepted by unanimous consent, or
- Process the change as a formal amendment with a second and vote

7. Common Errors to Avoid

- Discussing a proposal before a motion is pending
- Making vague motions, such as “I move we do something about the road issue”
- Treating major rewrites as informal edits without a vote
- Allowing amendments that reverse or exceed the scope of the original motion
- Failing to restate the amended motion before final vote
- Combining multiple unrelated actions into one motion when separate motions would be clearer

8. Practical Guidance for the Chair and Clerk

Chair

- Require motions to be stated clearly
- Restate each motion, amendment, and divided question before debate
- Keep debate focused on the pending question
- Announce the exact wording of the motion before voting

Clerk

- Record the final wording of the motion actually voted on
- Note whether amendments passed or failed
- Record each divided vote separately in the minutes
- Avoid paraphrasing in a way that changes meaning