

Jurassic Parliament Mastering meetings using Robert's Rules

Great Citizen Advisory Meetings

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Jurassic Parliament

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Jurassic Parliament Mastering meetings using Robert's Rules

Our topics

- I. Introduction
- II. Meeting discussion, Point of Order, Appeal
- III. How to do this?
- IV. Motions and Amendments
- V. Authority and role of chair, members, and staff
- VI. Citizen advisory committee pitfalls
- VII. Public comment
- VIII. The right kind of control
- IX. Conclusion

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Jurassic Parliament Mastering meetings using Robert's Rules

I. Introduction

Why are we here?

To invigorate you to run effective meetings
to serve your community

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Jurassic Parliament Mastering meetings using Robert's Rules

After taking this training you will be able to:

1. Apply the principle that the authority of the group is more important than any single individual
2. Follow best practices for discussion.
3. Respond to disorder or difficult people.
4. Make Motions and Amendments.
5. Avoid common citizen advisory committee pitfalls.
6. Run effective public comment sessions.

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Jurassic Parliament Mastering meetings using Robert's Rules

Disclaimer

The material contained in this presentation is based upon the principles and practices of parliamentary procedure. I am not an attorney and nothing in this presentation constitutes legal advice.

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Jurassic Parliament Mastering meetings using Robert's Rules

Call meeting to order

- Sit in the chair reserved for the person running the meeting.
- Rap the gavel lightly one time (if you have one) and announce, "This meeting of the Bonny Dino Planning Commission is called to order."
- Ask the clerk to take the roll.
- Announce that a quorum is present (or not).

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Quorum

- The “quorum” is the minimum number of voting members who must be present for business to be done.
- For local governments, usually it is a majority (more than half) of the fixed positions in the body.
- “Quorum” is different from “votes cast.”
- If you lose your quorum, you can't do business.

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Serial meeting

- Local government bodies must not create a “walking quorum” or a “serial meeting.”
- When members of the body talk or email with each other outside of meetings, such that a quorum is discussing the body's business, the Open Public Meetings Act has been violated.
- You can talk to other people, as long as the number is less than a quorum.

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Agenda

- Prepared by leadership, but within control of the body (subject to notice requirements, of course).
- Robert's Rules says that if you follow the standard “Order of Business,” you don't need to vote to adopt an agenda.
- However, many bodies do vote. Takes a majority vote to adopt, and a 2/3 vote to change later in the meeting.

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Purpose of minutes

According to Robert's Rules, the purpose of minutes is:

**to record the actions taken
by the body.**

Minutes record what is DONE, not what is SAID.

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Meeting minutes

- We recommend “action” or “summary” minutes, not detailed minutes.
- Should record what is done, not what is said.
- For certain topics such as conflict of interest, main points made should be included.
- Do not include “he said, she said.” This is a waste of time and effort and makes minutes less useful.

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Detailed minutes are a bad idea because...

- It violates the fundamental purpose of minutes.
- It can create liability for the organization or individuals in case of a lawsuit.
- It tends to personalize and politicize the discussion.
- It can intimidate participants, preventing them from speaking freely.
- It absorbs too much staff time and takes the group's time.
- It makes it harder to find the actions taken.

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MRSC & JP article

*Less Is More:
Action Minutes Save Time, Serve the Agency Best*


<https://mrsc.org/stay-informed/mrsc-insight/august-2023/action-minutes>

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Guidelines for Meeting Minutes in Local Government



Meeting minutes recording the actions taken by your council or board are a fundamental part of the meeting process. These are our guidelines for local government meeting minutes. They refer to ordinary business and work or study meetings of councils, boards and committees. Public hearings are governed by different rules.

▶ WHAT KIND OF MINUTES?

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II. Meeting discussion, Point of Order, and Appeal

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Principle of Equality

All members have equal rights, privileges and obligations.

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Key Point

Discussion in committee and commission meetings IS NOT A CONVERSATION. It has its own rules.

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Fundamental guideline

No one may speak a second time until everyone who wishes to do so has spoken once.

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Jurassic Parliament Mastering meetings using Robert's Rules

Fundamental guideline

No one may speak a second time until everyone who wishes to do so has spoken once.

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Why don't we follow this?

- Committees and commissions tend to discuss their affairs in conversational mode.
- In conversations, dominant people tend to dominate.
- Agreeable people tend to let them.
- Must have a structure to make sure that everyone has an equal chance to speak.
- This is both fair and efficient.

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Equity and inclusion


- This rule is also the best way to ensure that each person has an equal voice.
- The system is formal but inclusive.
- It will make for robust discussion and advance your equity goals.

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- Note that this guideline pertains to discussion on the substantive issues.
- The chair will speak more than others on procedural matters, because they have the role of facilitating the discussion during the meeting.

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Point of Order
flying dinosaur

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Point of Order

flying dinosaur

- When ANOTHER MEMBER breaks one of the rules, a member may make a POINT OF ORDER.
- Chair rules on the point.

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Point of Order

- A motion claiming that a procedural mistake has been made.
- According to Robert, can be made only by a member.
- We recommend that key staff be authorized also.
- Public may not raise a Point of Order.

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Process Point of Order

1. Member: *Point of Order!*
2. Chair: *State your point.*
3. Member: *That remark breaks our rules of decorum.*
4. Chair: *The point is well taken. Members may not use this term.*

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Point of Order

- You can make this at any time, except during voting.
- Do not have to be recognized.
- May interrupt a speaker if necessary.
- Must be timely – made at the time of the offense.

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Language tip

- Use the “third person” to keep things neutral and lessen conflict.
- Note that the chair states the general rule.
- The chair is speaking on behalf of the rules of procedure.
- DO NOT SAY “You are out of order” or “You made a mistake.”

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When in doubt, ask the group!

- Chair can always ask the group to decide if a Point of Order is correct (“well-taken”) or not.

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- Member A: *That statement is just a bunch of baloney!*
- Member B: *Point of Order!*
- Chair: *State your point.*
- Member B: *The word “baloney” is insulting!*
- Chair: *The chair is in doubt and will ask the group to decide.*

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- Chair: *All those who believe that the word “baloney” is insulting, say “aye.”*
- Members in favor: *Aye!*
- Chair: *All those who believe it is not insulting, say “no!”*
- Members opposed: *No!*
- Chair: *The ayes have it, the word baloney is insulting and may not be used, OR The noes have it, the word baloney is not insulting and may be used.*

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Chair doesn't have to say "Point of Order"

- The chair has the duty of maintaining order and decorum, so doesn't need to say "Point of Order."
- Just needs to take appropriate action.

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Chair subject to same rules

- If the chair breaks one of the rules, a member may raise a Point of Order.
- The chair rules on own behavior, which seems odd, but is the way the system works.

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Why make a Point of Order?

- Make a Point of Order if a rule has been broken.
- DO NOT make a Point of Order because you think someone has made a factual mistake, or you disagree with what they said.
- Speak about that when it is your turn to discuss.

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No further discussion

- Once the chair has ruled on a Point of Order, the only allowable form of discussion is to appeal the ruling.

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Appeal

The most important motion in all of Robert's Rules –
and the least known!

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Chair's rulings can be appealed

- The CHAIR enforces order and decorum.
- The GROUP is the final authority.
- Any TWO MEMBERS can appeal a ruling of the chair (one member appeals and one seconds the appeal).
- EXCEPTION: If the ruling is a matter on which there cannot be two reasonable interpretations, the ruling cannot be appealed.

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Appealing a ruling of the chair

- Member A: *Chair, Point of Order.*
- Chair: *State your point.*
- Member A: *My esteemed colleague has used the term "cream-faced loon" in referring to the Secretary. According to Robert's Rules, insults are not allowed in debate.*
- Chair: *The point is well taken. Members will refrain from using improper language.*

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- Member B: *Chair, I appeal the Point of Order on the grounds that "cream-faced loon" is a literary reference and not an insult.*
- Member C: *Second!*
- Chair: *Very well, since the ruling of the chair has been appealed, the group will decide. Note that appeals pertaining to proper use of language and decorum may not be debated.*

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- Chair: *All those who believe that "cream-faced loon" is an insult, say "aye."*
- Members who agree: *Aye!*
- Chair: *All those who believe that this phrase is not an insult, say "no."*
- Members who believe it is not an insult: *No!*

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- Chair: *The ayes have it, the ruling of the chair is sustained, and members may not use this term, OR The noes have it, the ruling of the chair is not sustained, and members may use this term.*
- Clerk, *please record this outcome in the minutes.*

Note that the vote is on WHETHER THE RULING OF THE CHAIR SHOULD BE SUSTAINED.

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Further points

- Point of Order is made by one member, but an Appeal needs a second.
- Point of Order and Appeal are processed immediately. No other business can take place until they are dealt with.
- Points of Order and Appeals do not count against a member's turn to speak in debate.

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Point of Order and Appeal are the heart of democracy



In our view, the motions Point of Order and Appeal are the heart of our democracy. They provide the mechanism to stop a dictatorial chair who's acting like a "boss." They are essential for every local

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III. How to do this?

- Seek recognition before speaking.
- No one may speak a second time until everyone who wishes to do so has spoken once.
- No interrupting (in general)
- No sidebar conversations.
- Set time limits.
- Courtesy and respect are required.

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Seeking recognition

- Raise your hand and wait to speak until the presider (chair) calls your name, nods at you, or gives some other sign that you have permission to speak (you "have the floor")
- Online, you can use the "raise hand" function or raise your physical hand.
- For Zoom on the telephone, press *9 (star nine).

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Don't get into arguments!

- If you are a member, you may not argue with the chair.
- If you are the chair, don't argue with a difficult member.
- Simply state your ruling, and then say *Does the member wish to appeal this ruling?*

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Duty to remain silent

- When you have not been recognized, you have a duty to remain silent.
- The exception is a Point of Order when essential.

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Rights and Responsibilities of the Member



Weldon L. Merritt, FRP, CPP, has graciously authorized Jurassic Parliament to publish this listing of the rights and responsibilities of ordinary members of an organization.

Please note that neither the list of member rights nor the list of member responsibilities is intended to be exhaustive. In addition, neither the rights nor the responsibilities are necessarily absolute in every instance. For example, the right to debate may be cut off or limited by motions for the Previous Question or to Limit Debate. And, while a member should not vote on a matter of direct personal interest, under Robert's

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Fundamental guideline

No one may speak a second time until everyone who wishes to do so has spoken once.

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NO CROSS TALK BETWEEN MEMBERS!

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Most useful phrase

Members will kindly seek recognition before speaking.

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Language tip

Just a moment Josh, Elaine has the floor.

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HOW to do this?

- Chair can keep track of who has spoken and who wishes to speak, using a chart.
- Chair can empower vice-chair to do this – good training for them.

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SPEAKING CHART

Name	1	2	3	4	5	6	etc.
Garcia							
Jackson							
Juma							
Lee							
Patel							
Smith							
Young							

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A great method – the “round robin”

- The chair goes around the table, asking each person in turn for their opinion. People may pass and speak at the end.
- Important to have a pencil in hand, to jot down points or questions for when your turn arrives.
- Chair must wait their turn also!
- You may vary the order.
- This rule applies to questions and answers also, and to discussions with staff.
- Don't let any two people “hijack” the meeting.

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Interrupting

- When a member has the floor, they have the right to speak until they have completed their comments.
- Members may not interrupt each other.
- Chair may interrupt members when necessary to bring them to order.
- Members may interrupt to make a Point of Order when essential.

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No sidebars or texting

- No “sidebar conversations”
- No whispering! Disable the chat.
- No texting to each other or people outside during meetings.
- No posting on social media during meetings.

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Keep your camera on

- Unless technical considerations prevent it, all members should keep their camera on while participating online.
- Otherwise you are “lurking,” observing your colleagues without yourself being observed.
- This is disturbing and creates an unpleasant emotional imbalance.
- This also ensures that you maintain a quorum.

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Frustrating

- Structuring discussion in these ways can be frustrating.
- Members sometimes say, “I wish we could just hash it out and have a free-form discussion.”
- The Open Meetings Act, and the press of time, mean that usually, this won't serve your committee well.
- However...

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An occasional exception...

- Sometimes there is benefit in the conversational style or “informal discussion.”
- Chair must ensure that no one dominates.
- Do not make the conversational style your ordinary or “default” style of discussion.

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It is the duty of the chair...

To expedite business in every way compatible with the rights of members.

Robert's Rules of Order Newly Revised, 12th edition, Section 47:7 (7)

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Set time limits

- Jurassic Parliament recommends that bodies set estimated times for agenda items.
- We recommend time limits on individual member speeches – 3 or 5 minutes.
- Time limits cannot be debated.
- They can be suspended or changed by a two-thirds vote without debate.

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Time limits create productive meetings



The mayor of Alexandria, Virginia began council meetings by responding to each person giving public comment, sometimes delaying the start of regular business three hours or more. Was this reasonable? No. We need time limits to establish structure and create productive meetings. Robert's Rules says that members have the right to an efficient meeting. It takes effort to do this, and for the chair to maintain the limits, but the effort will pay off big time.

SET AN OVERALL TIME LIMIT FOR THE MEETING
If you are a private nonprofit board, a good target for a regular board meeting is two hours. After

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Fundamental guideline

Courtesy and respect towards everyone are required.

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These remarks are inappropriate

1. Personal remarks about other members (except for conflict of interest)
2. Discourteous remarks – insulting language, attacks
3. Inflammatory language
4. Criticizing past actions of the group (unless subject is under discussion, or member is about to propose to amend or rescind the action at the end of their speech)
5. Remarks that are not germane (relevant) to the discussion

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Inappropriate Remarks on Local Government Councils



If you serve as an elected official on a local government council or board, you should know the types of remarks that are inappropriate during discussion at a meeting. Robert's Rules of Order and the common parliamentary law it is based on require that:

- Members of a council or board must be courteous to one another.

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Personal remarks

The measure, not the member, is the subject of debate...The moment the chair hears such words as "fraud," "liar," or "lie" used about a member in debate, he must act immediately and decisively to correct the matter and prevent its repetition.

Robert's Rules of Order Newly Revised, 12th edition, Section 43:21

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CHEAT SHEET

WAIT! WAIT! WHAT SHOULD I SAY?

	If you are the chair, say...	If you are a member speaking about another member, say...	If you are a member speaking about the chair, say...
BIG MISTAKES			
speaking twice in a row	Members are reminded that no one may speak a second time until everyone who wishes to do so has spoken once.	Point of order. The member has spoken twice while others are waiting to speak.	Point of order. The chair does not have the right to dominate the discussion, but must speak in turn.
not seeking recognition	Members will kindly seek recognition before speaking.	Point of order. Members must seek recognition before speaking.	(not applicable)
speaking directly to another member	Members will kindly address all remarks to the chair.	Point of order. Members are supposed to speak to the chair.	(not applicable)
interrupting another person	Members will kindly refrain from interrupting one another.	Point of order. Interrupting is not allowed.	Point of order. The chair does not have the right to interrupt a member.
INAPPROPRIATE REMARKS			
personal remarks	Members will refrain from making personal remarks.	Point of order. Personal remarks are not allowed.	Point of order. Personal remarks are not allowed.
insulting language, vulgarity, vituperation	Insulting or vulgar language is not allowed at our meetings.	Point of order. The language used by the member is insulting/vulgar.	Point of order. The chair is using insulting/vulgar language.
informatory language	Informatory language is not allowed.	Point of order. That remark is informatory.	Point of order. That remark is informatory.
criticizing past actions	Members may not criticize a past action of the group during a meeting, with two exceptions.	Point of order. Members may not criticize a past action of the group during a meeting, with two exceptions.	Point of order. The chair may not criticize a past action of the group during a meeting, with two exceptions.

Note that this is proprietary information. Do not duplicate.

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Who decides?

- If any question arises whether a remark is appropriate or not, or a comment is germane, the chair rules, subject to appeal.
- The chair may also turn immediately to the group to ask the members to decide.
- Ultimately it is the GROUP'S CALL.

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Important note

- We are speaking here about discussion within your meetings.
- These prohibitions DO NOT APPLY to the public when they are giving public comment, as we will discuss in Section VII.

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SAMPLE DISCUSSION GUIDELINES FOR LOCAL GOVERNMENTS

Permission is granted to modify these guidelines as your organization prefers. Note that these guidelines refer to discussion within the body, not to comment by the public.

1. The chair of the meeting runs the meeting in the service of the body. The chair serves as the facilitator for the meeting and has the primary responsibility for maintaining order. The chair may take part in discussion, but may not answer each individual speaker back, nor lecture or criticize the members. When discussing substantive questions, the chair will usually speak and vote, if entitled to do so, after others have spoken.

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IV. Motions and Amendments

- In large groups, you must have a motion before any discussion begins.
- In small boards (up to about 12 people), it is fine to discuss things in a more casual way.
- Even so, it's best to begin with a motion.

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Main Motion

We recommend this sequence:

- Staff presents proposal in writing and answers any questions. Each member may ask one or two questions, then the next member has a turn.
- Motion is moved and seconded.
- Members discuss motion and may amend it.
- Members vote on motion.

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MAIN MOTIONS

- A main motion is a proposal to do something. It “starts the action.”
- It should be in writing if at all possible!

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Main Motion
Tyrannosaurus rex

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Main Motion

- It should be in writing if at all possible (project on screen, use 3-part form).
- It should be **clear and unambiguous**. Don't say, “I move what he just said,” or “so moved.”
- It should be phrased in the grammatical **positive**.
- It must comply with the **bylaws** and the **procedural** law of the land.
- You can have only **one main motion** at a time.

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Fundamental guideline

One thing at a time.

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To make a main motion

- At the right time, any member says, “I move that...” and states, as clearly and concisely as possible, what is proposed.

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Member must be clear

- The member has the responsibility of formulating the motion.
- Don't mix up your ideas about the subject with the motion itself. Save those for debate.

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I've been noticing that the number of wild cats is increasing in our city, and they're getting stomped on by bigger dinosaurs, so I think allowing catios would be great, it would make a huge difference to the safety of our little feline friends.

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Main Motion *Tyrannosaurus rex*

I move that we recommend to council that residents be authorized to build catios in their private yards.

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Eight steps to process a motion

1. **Member makes motion.**
2. Another member seconds motion.
3. **Chair states motion.**
4. Members debate and/or amend motion.
5. **Chair restates motion and calls for vote.**
6. Members vote on motion.
7. Chair states results of vote, whether motion passes or fails, and what happens next as a result of the vote.
8. Chair states next item of business.

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Second

- *Second the motion!*

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Second the motion

- You "second a motion" to show that you would like to talk about it.
- No need to be recognized. Just call out "second."
- It is OK to second a motion you disagree with, if you want to explain why it's a bad idea.

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If no second...

- If there is no second, the chair says, "There being no second, the motion will not be considered."
- Then moves immediately to next item of business.

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You can't speak against your own motion

- Under Robert's Rules, the maker of the motion cannot speak against it.
- If the discussion has changed their mind, they should request permission to withdraw the motion.
- The maker CAN vote against their own motion.

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Step #3 is very important!

- Presider MUST repeat the motion, or have the clerk repeat it.
- WHY? So that everyone knows what we are actually discussing.
- After step #3, the motion belongs to the group as a whole, not to the person who made it.

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Main Motion needs discussion

I move that we recommend to council that residents be authorized to build catios in their private yards.

[The maker of the motion has the right to speak first.]

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General contractor

Catios are a safe and effective way to protect cats from predators, and birds from cats. Here is an example of a nice little catio. I urge my colleagues to vote in favor of this motion.

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Photographer

I'm in favor! My cousin has built a catio, and her little pet Fuzzy is completely at home in it, as you can see from this picture.

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Architect

I think this is a terrible idea! Catio's are intrusive and will ruin the look of our city. Here's an example I saw when I visited Dinodome last week. We don't want this kind of ugly building in beautiful Bonny Dino.

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Moving to vote

- When it seems that discussion is finished, chair asks, "Is there any further discussion" or "Are you ready to vote?" If no one speaks up, take the vote.

Note that these are rhetorical questions, to see if there is any further discussion.

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Voting

- Chair repeats the motion.
- Chair says, "All those in favor say 'aye,' all those opposed say 'no.'"
- Chair announces results of vote, whether motion passes or fails, and what will happen next as a result of the vote.
- Chair announces next item of business.

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Voting

- *The "ayes" have it, the motion passes, and we will recommend to council that residents be authorized to build catios in their private yards, OR*
- *The "noes" have it, the motion fails, and we will not recommend this proposal to council.*

Note that the chair must call for the negative vote, even if it seems unanimous.

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Step #5 is also very important!

- Chair must repeat the motion before the vote is taken.
- WHY? So that everyone knows what we are actually voting on.
- Have you ever been at a meeting when once the vote is taken, someone says, "What did we just approve?" and no one knows exactly what it was?

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No debate during voting

- Nothing can interrupt the voting process.
- Members are not allowed to explain their vote during the vote, or afterwards.
- Even a Point of Order must wait until the result of the vote is announced.

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Changing your vote

- A member may change their vote up until the time the chair announces the result.
- After that time, it takes unanimous consent of the body (everyone agreeing) for the member to change their vote.
- Once the chair has moved on to the next item of business, it is too late to change a vote.

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Abstain

- Under Robert's Rules, to abstain is to do nothing.
- Abstentions are not counted.
- The chair does not call for abstentions.
- However, if you are a public body, likely you will call for and record abstentions.

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Conflict of interest

- If you have a conflict of interest, you should "recuse" yourself from the vote.
- Recusal is a special form of abstention.
- Talk with your attorney before the meeting! Don't spring it during the meeting itself.
- It may be that recusal is not enough.

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Is abstaining enough?

Resolving Financial Conflicts of Interest: Is Abstaining from Voting Enough?

<https://mrsc.org/stay-informed/mrsc-insight/february-2022/resolving-financial-conflicts-of-interest>

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MRSC

- Formerly the Municipal Research and Services Center, MRSC is a private nonprofit organization in Washington State that provides advice to local government bodies.

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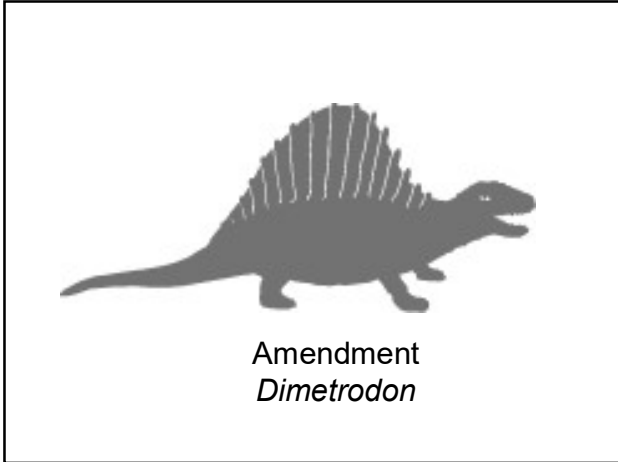
101

Conflict of interest

- If you have a conflict of interest, you should "recuse" yourself from the vote.
- Recusal is a special form of abstention.
- Talk with your attorney before the meeting! Don't spring it during the meeting itself.
- It may be that recusal is not enough.

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Amendment

Dimetrodon

- You amend a motion to improve it.
- The Amendment applies to the main motion.
- The Amendment must be germane (relevant).
- Anyone may move to amend, even the person who made the motion.

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Photographer

I move that we amend the motion by adding the words, "Provided that the plan for each patio has been approved by the Design Review Board."

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If adopted, will read:

The Commission will recommend to Council that residents will be authorized to build patios in their private yards, **provided that the plan for each patio has been approved by the Design Review Board.**

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Four ways to amend

1. Add or insert words.
2. Strike out words.
3. Strike out words and insert words in their place.
4. Substitute (not recommended!).

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Process Amendment

- The Amendment is processed using the same eight steps that we just saw for a main motion.

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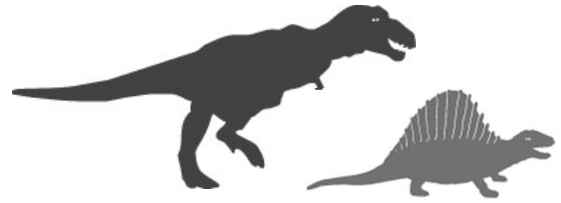
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The challenge is...

- We vote on amendments BEFORE we vote on the main motion, in order to make the main motion as good as possible—to PERFECT the motion.

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Amendment blocks Main Motion

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Fate of the Amendment

- People sometimes get confused, and don't realize that after voting on the amendment, the process continues.
- Once the fate of the amendment has been decided, debate continues on the main motion.

111

111

More amendments are possible...

- Once you've dealt with one amendment, you may have others...
- provided that they apply to a *different aspect* of the main motion.
- It takes special actions (reconsideration) to go back and change something we've already amended.

112

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The process continues

- After all amendments have been processed, the body still must vote on the AMENDED MAIN MOTION.

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V. Authority and role of chair, members, and staff

114

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Jurassic Parliament Mastering meetings using Robert's Rules

Note on role of chair

- Robert has different rules for small boards (up to about 12 people).
- In a small board, chair may make motions, second them, discuss, and vote, unless law, regulations or bylaws say otherwise.
- We recommend that chair speak and vote last, and refrain from making motions (this is a Jurassic Parliament suggestion).

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Jurassic Parliament Mastering meetings using Robert's Rules

Language tip

Would any member care to move that...

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Jurassic Parliament Mastering meetings using Robert's Rules

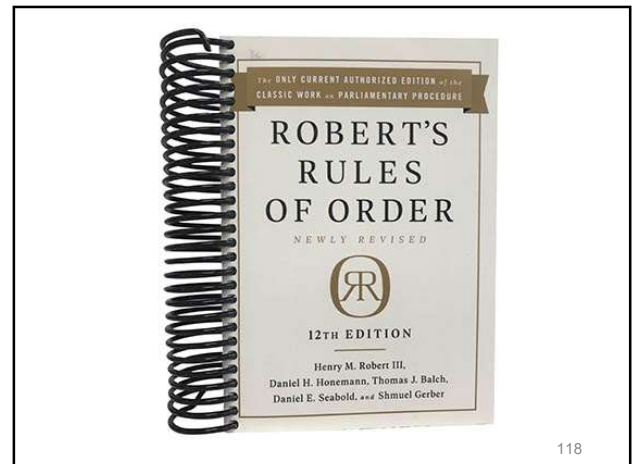
Robert's Rules of Order Newly Revised, 12th edition

Abbreviated RONR "Rules of Order Newly Revised"

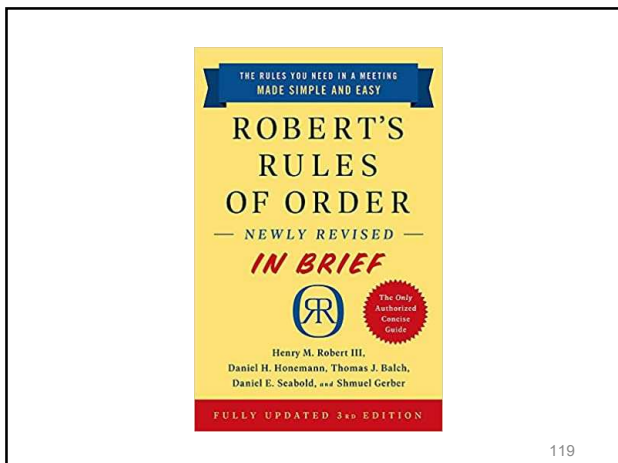
We recommend spiral-bound edition, available only from the National Association of Parliamentarians
www.parliamentarians.org

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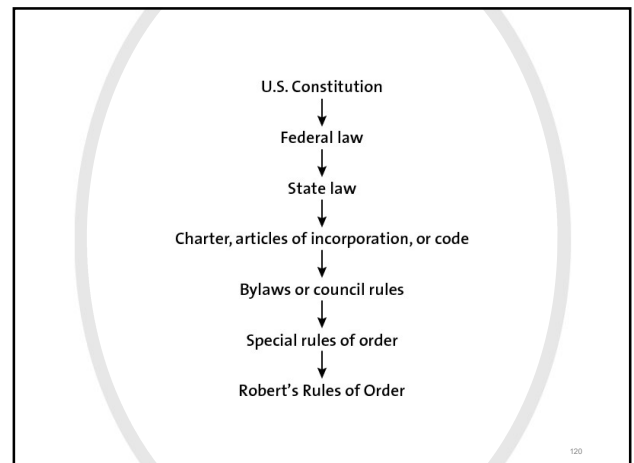
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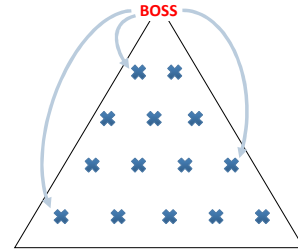
Citizen boards

- Citizen boards, committees, and commissions must follow the rules established by the Council.

121

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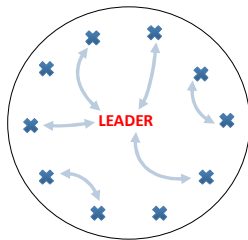
Accountability Hierarchy



122

122

Voluntary Association



123

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Key Point

Each member has an equal right to speak and to try to persuade others to accept their view.

124

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Key Point

During meetings, the chair controls the process so the group can make the decisions.

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Fundamental guideline

During meetings, the chair is the servant of the group, and the group is the final authority.

126

126

Jurassic Parliament Mastering meetings using Robert's Rules

Fundamental guideline

**During meetings,
the chair is the servant of the group,
and the group is the final authority.**

127

127

Jurassic Parliament Mastering meetings using Robert's Rules

You have both types of structure

- The citizen advisory commission, board or committee forms a voluntary association.
- The city manager and staff form an accountability hierarchy.

128

128

Jurassic Parliament Mastering meetings using Robert's Rules

What is each person's individual authority?

All members of a governing board share in a joint and collective authority which exists and can be exercised only when the group is in session.

The Standard Code of Parliamentary Procedure

129

129

Jurassic Parliament Mastering meetings using Robert's Rules

Commissioners & committee members may not do the work of the city

- Citizen volunteers care deeply about their city.
- Sometimes they have special knowledge and expertise.
- They may make suggestions to the staff, but they may not do the work of the city themselves.
- Why? They must not cross the line between legislation and administration.
- This is a legal requirement!

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Jurassic Parliament Mastering meetings using Robert's Rules

Staff are advisers, not members

- Staff are advisers to the body, not members.
- They have the right to speak in order to fulfill their function of service.
- Staff must seek recognition before speaking.

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Jurassic Parliament Mastering meetings using Robert's Rules

Staff

- Staff should be empowered to make Points of Order.
- Staff and members should not enter into conversations that "hijack" the meeting.

132

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Commission must give clarity to staff

- Don't float an idea and expect staff to make it concrete. "The staff can look into this..."
- If an individual commissioner wants the staff to do something, presider of meeting must make sure that commission agrees by taking a vote.
- Commission as a whole has the responsibility of giving clarity to the staff.
- Simply say, "I move that the staff research this..."

133

133

Successful staff interaction in local government meetings



© City of Sherborne WA, 2018.

134

Vigorous discussion

- Discussion on your motions can and should be vigorous!
- Express your views freely and don't hold back.
- Once the vote has been taken, however, things change.

135

135

It's OK to disagree

- The fact that people have different opinions is a strength. It's a good thing!
- BUT we tend to identify with our own position.
- When we are defeated, we sometimes take it personally.
- This is a mistake.

136

136

At the end of the day, the body must unite behind its decision.

- It is a basic democratic principle that the decision of the majority, voting at a properly called meeting, is the decision of the body as a whole.
- The minority must make it their decision as well.

137

137

Democracy is the worst system of government in all the world, with the exception of those others that have been tried from time to time.

Winston Churchill

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Jurassic Parliament Mastering meetings using Robert's Rules

Members have a duty

- When serving on a public body, members have a duty to uphold the decision of that body, even if they disagree with it.

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Jurassic Parliament Mastering meetings using Robert's Rules

Disagreement

- Members may express their disagreement in public, but may not attempt to UNDERMINE the decision.
- They are free to try to persuade their colleagues, during the meeting, to change the decision (within limits).

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Jurassic Parliament Mastering meetings using Robert's Rules

Lost the vote? Don't sabotage the council's action



We've had inquiries recently about elected officials who lost a vote, and then actively worked against the outcome. This amounts to trying to sabotage the council. It is wrong, wrong, wrong.

THE MAJORITY RULES
General Henry Martyn Robert, the original author of *Robert's Rules of Order*, expresses it this way:

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Jurassic Parliament Mastering meetings using Robert's Rules

What is the alternative?

The ballot box is sacred because the alternative is blood.

Elias Canetti, writer and Nobel Prize winner

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Jurassic Parliament Mastering meetings using Robert's Rules

VI. Citizen Advisory Committee Pitfalls

With thanks to Ric Stephens, Portland, Oregon

143

143

Jurassic Parliament Mastering meetings using Robert's Rules

Confusion about your job

The work of the Planning Commission is to carry out the instructions of the Council.

City of Bellevue Planning Commissioner

144

144

What is a citizen advisory committee ?

- A citizen advisory committee is a body that has been established in order to do a job ASSIGNED BY SOMEONE ELSE.
- This can be a challenge!

145

145

Situation

The planning commission is considering a request to lower the setback from 50 feet to 20 feet.

146

146

Commissioner asks:

Isn't there a better place in the city to site this hotel?

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147

Pitfall: Confusion about scope

You must answer the questions assigned to you by the Council, not propose unrelated alternatives.

148

148

Situation

The environmental commission is considering recommending setting aside some wetlands.

149

149

Commissioner says:

I think we can't address this until the University report comes out in five years.

150

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Pitfall: Asking for the moon

- It is an unfortunate fact of governance that sometimes bodies must make decisions with less than adequate information.

151

151

Situation

The staff have made a recommendation to purchase a historic farm site as a museum.

152

152

Commissioner says:

Why are the staff making this recommendation? I think we're wasting our money on staff salaries. Only citizens really understand the issues here.

153

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Pitfall: Confusion about staff role

- Confusion about staff roles takes many forms.
- Obviously we need staff—it would not be possible for residents alone to conduct the business of a modern city.
- There are other confusions as well.

154

154

Pitfall: Confusion about staff role

- Staff are employees of the city.
- The commission or committee may not direct them independently of their assigned tasks.
- Staff have a duty to remind citizen volunteers of the laws, regulations, and fiscal constraints that apply.
- This is not “sticking an oar in,” it is doing their job.

155


155

Be definite and get a grip

- Commissions and committees must come to closure with their issue and define a specific action that they recommend.
- Don't say, “I move what he just said.”
- Don't say “so moved!” unless the motion is crystal clear.
- Staff can help bring things to closure.

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156


 Jurassic Parliament Mastering meetings using Robert's Rules

Situation

The staff has carried out a survey.

157

157

 Jurassic Parliament Mastering meetings using Robert's Rules

Commissioner says:

Since I'm a professional surveyor, I can re-do the survey to verify it.

158

158


 Jurassic Parliament Mastering meetings using Robert's Rules

Pitfall: Confusion about your job

- A commissioner may have valuable particular expertise, but they are recruited to the commission as a citizen, not as a technical expert.
- Let staff be staff and citizens be citizens!

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159


 Jurassic Parliament Mastering meetings using Robert's Rules

Situation

There has been a public outcry about changes to the irrigation district boundaries.

160

160


 Jurassic Parliament Mastering meetings using Robert's Rules

Commissioner says:

Six of my neighbors are very upset about this. They've taken the trouble to come to our meetings, so we should do what they want.

161

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 Jurassic Parliament Mastering meetings using Robert's Rules

Pitfall: Deafened by decibels

Being swayed by the emotional power of a presentation is a common problem. Decisions should be rational, not determined by decibels.

Ric Stephens

162

162

Jurassic Parliament Mastering meetings using Robert's Rules

Your responsibility?

- Listen to your constituents, while accepting your own responsibility.
- You must vote based on your own best judgment, not solely in response to crowd opinion.

163

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Jurassic Parliament Mastering meetings using Robert's Rules

When public pressure is intense



At a recent workshop, a director from a school board split by pandemic-related decisions asked me what board members can do in the face of intense public pressure. These are tough times for local non-partisan government bodies, for sure. Here are some thoughts about what can be done.

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Jurassic Parliament Mastering meetings using Robert's Rules

Situation

There is mixed public opinion about a developer's plans to site a shopping center near the main road.

165

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Jurassic Parliament Mastering meetings using Robert's Rules

Commissioner says:

When we're getting so many different conflicting views on this, I think we should just punt for another six months.

166

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Jurassic Parliament Mastering meetings using Robert's Rules

Pitfall: Decision delay

A planning commission is expected to render decisions in a timely manner. Some applications suffer "death by a thousand nicks"....This is related to "death by a thousand days," which is the continuation of projects like a soap opera.

Ric Stephens

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167

Jurassic Parliament Mastering meetings using Robert's Rules

Situation

The arts commission is considering a report about the museum.

168

168


 Mastering meetings using Robert's Rules

Commissioner says:

I was on my honeymoon in Norway and I just haven't had time to study this.

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169

 Mastering meetings using Robert's Rules

Pitfall: Failure to read packet

- Commissioners MUST read their packets before the meeting!

170

170


 Mastering meetings using Robert's Rules

Situation

The commission is discussing plans for a new hiking trail along the river.

171

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 Mastering meetings using Robert's Rules

Commissioner says:

I think we have to analyze what kind of paving stones are best, so teeny-tiny rocks don't get stuck in the paws of our dinosaur residents.

172

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 Mastering meetings using Robert's Rules

Pitfall: Lost in the weeds/ analysis paralysis

- We all have a human tendency to delve into the details.
- Sometimes this leads citizen commissions astray, as they spend too much time discussing details that are not relevant to their assignment.

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 Mastering meetings using Robert's Rules

Situation

There doesn't seem to be an attractive option for the new community swimming pool. Both sites have environmental issues.

174

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Commissioner says:

The planning commission and the city can't resolve this issue. I move that we recommend that the city carry out a referendum!

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Pitfall: Shrinking from hard choices

- A commission does not have the right to decline to do its job.
- That is a waste of public resources.

176

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Situation

There's a lot of dubious activity going on the 110-acre park to the east of town.

177

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Commissioner says:

I move that all parks commissioners be issued T-shirts saying "Parks Commission" and be authorized to issue tickets to offenders.

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Pitfall: Confusion about scope

- The parks commissioners are not police officers.
- They have a much more limited job!

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Pitfalls

- Asking for the moon
- Confusion about scope
- Confusion about staff role
- Confusion about your job
- Deafened by decibels
- Decision delay
- Failure to read packet
- Lost in the weeds/analysis paralysis
- Shrinking from hard choices

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VII. Public comment Another disclaimer

Robert's Rules of Order contains very little guidance on public comment. In general, this information comes from Jurassic Parliament's experience over more than 15 years of working with local governments.

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WHY public comment?

- A board meeting is NOT A MEETING OF THE PUBLIC.
- It is a MEETING OF THE BOARD that is held in public.
- The purpose of the "public comment" period is to allow the board members to become informed about the views of the public.
- It should be carefully structured.

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Be consistent

- Best to announce rules at beginning of each session, and provide written handout.
- For the sake of fairness, rules for public comment MUST be enforced consistently.
- Public must address remarks to chair, not to individual board members or the audience.

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Follow time limits

- Ask staff to time speakers so chair is not distracted.
- Some bodies have a visible timer so speakers know when their limit is approaching.
- Speakers may not donate their time to someone else.

184

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Do not dialogue

- This is not a dialogue.
- Do not get into back-and-forth with the public. If chair starts dialoguing with the public, the situation can quickly become confusing.
- If you respond to some speakers but not to others, it can be interpreted as showing bias.

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Differing expectations

- The public may have different expectations.
- They may come to the meeting looking for answers to specific questions.
- They may want to argue.
- They may want their remarks "on the record."
- They may want to raise a "Point of Order," which they cannot do.
- Education is critical!

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Jurassic Parliament Mastering meetings using Robert's Rules

Audience relations

- Only the chair may speak to the audience as a whole.
- Individual board members may not speak to the public or recognize people in the audience.
- Discourage demonstrations—clapping, booing, whistling, stamping of feet, etc. These can chill free speech, both for board members and public.

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Jurassic Parliament Mastering meetings using Robert's Rules

Time, place and manner

- The courts have found that local governments may limit the time, place and manner of public comment.
- All such restrictions must be viewpoint-neutral.
- We recommend setting a time period for public comment (for example, 30 minutes).
- We recommend setting a 3-minute limit for individual speakers, or a 5-minute limit if a speaker represents a group.

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Jurassic Parliament Mastering meetings using Robert's Rules

If a speaker runs over...

- If a speaker runs over the limit, interrupt and request that they conclude their remarks, or simply say, "Thank you, your time is up."

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Jurassic Parliament Mastering meetings using Robert's Rules

Comment vs. disruption

- Attendees do not have the right to DISRUPT the meeting.
- However, the courts have found that mere words do not usually constitute disruption.
- In general, residents can say whatever they like during public comment.

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Jurassic Parliament Mastering meetings using Robert's Rules

How to act on dais?

- Chair and members convey interest and concern by their body language.
- They should listen to each person speaking as if there were no one else in the room (this is hard!).
- Keep a warm and pleasant expression, or a neutral face if speaker is not complimentary.

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Jurassic Parliament Mastering meetings using Robert's Rules

How to respond?

- Best approach is to thank each speaker, even if negative, and move on.
- Chair may provide brief factual information, if appropriate, which must not degenerate into lecturing or criticism.
- Don't put staff on the spot. Some bodies have a staff member off to the side, who can take the question and contact information to respond.

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Jurassic Parliament Mastering meetings using Robert's Rules

Attacks on staff

- Board members should not criticize staff in public and must be courteous to them.
- If public attacks staff, do not get defensive.
- Do not get in a hostile exchange.
- Be prepared if appropriate to defend the city manager in a calm, positive manner.
- Why? If no response is made, it can seem as if the body agrees with the criticisms.

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Jurassic Parliament Mastering meetings using Robert's Rules

No public comment in minutes

- Jurassic Parliament recommends that details of public comment should NOT be included in the minutes.
- See our blog entry, *“Don’t include detailed public comment in meeting minutes.”*

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Jurassic Parliament Mastering meetings using Robert's Rules

MRSC recommends

Since meeting minutes are subject to disclosure under the Public Records Act, if your agency chooses to include public comment in the minutes, we recommend a summary of the comment period that avoids providing personally identifiable information on individual commenters.

Blog entry *“Less is More”* August 23, 2023

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Jurassic Parliament Mastering meetings using Robert's Rules

Conclude with thanks

- At the end of the public comment period, the chair should thank the public for attending.
- Explain again that while this is not a time for dialogue, all comments and questions are taken seriously by the body.
- Sincerity and warmth on the part of the chair will make a big difference to the experience the public has at your meeting.

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Other channels

- It is essential for you to be in touch with your public, to be responsive, and to appear responsive.
- Given the limitations of the public comment period, we recommend maintaining other channels for dialogue with the public.
- Community forums, personal discussions, “coffee with the commission” (always less than a quorum), a form on your website, surveys, etc.

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Jurassic Parliament Mastering meetings using Robert's Rules

50 Guidelines for Public Comment



INTRODUCTION
In recent years the climate for public comment at local government meetings—city councils, school boards, utility districts, etc.—has become much more challenging. People everywhere are feeling the stress brought on by the pandemic’s suffering and loss, economic difficulties, greater hostility in the political sphere, and global concerns. This stress sometimes erupts in tense public meetings.

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Best practices for public comment

1. Set time limits for public comment and for individual speeches.
2. Have the public address the chair, and have the chair respond.
3. Don't engage in dialogue with the public, but have arrangements to answer their questions afterwards.
4. Speakers may not donate their time.
5. On the dais, make the effort to be, and to appear to be, listening intently to all speakers.

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VIII. The right kind of control

200

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Three things you must have:

1. Knowledge of how this system works
2. A majority on your body in favor of civility and this system.
3. The personal moxie, chutzpah, energy and drive to put it all into practice.

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201

Chair must control who speaks when

- The chair serves as a BENEVOLENT DICTATOR, enforcing the rules the group has chosen.
- Individual members must SEEK RECOGNITION before speaking.

202

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Chair controls who speaks when

- If someone speaks up without being recognized, STOP THEM.
- If someone speaks out of turn, INTERRUPT THEM.
- If someone makes insulting remarks, CUT THEM OFF.

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Duty to obey the chair

- Members have a duty to obey the chair's directions.
- If they disagree, they can't argue back.
- What can they do?

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“Generous authority”

The Art of Gathering by Priya Parker

- It’s important to be business-like and focused.
- Keep things moving.
- At the same time, show humanity and humor when appropriate.

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Strength vs. warmth

John Neffinger and Matthew Kohut

*Compelling People:
The Hidden Qualities that
Make Us Influential*

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 Jurassic Parliament Mastering meetings using Robert's Rules


Don’t be intimidated by anger

- Evolutionary psychologists tell us that anger evolved “in the service of bargaining, to resolve conflicts of interest in favor of the angry individual.”

Leonard Mlodinow, *Emotion: How Feelings Shape Our Thinking*

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 Jurassic Parliament Mastering meetings using Robert's Rules


Be aware of fear

- Fear is a primal, necessary emotion: “a neurobiological process to keep us alive.”
- The “five great fears” in Buddhism include “fear of public speaking.”
- Members may be too fearful or anxious to speak freely.

Robert Peckham, *Fear: An Alternative History of the World*

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- At the same time, members should have a healthy respect for you as leader.
- You must exercise your authority so as to leave no doubt that you will take action if necessary.
- If that results in a tinge of fear, that’s OK.

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 Jurassic Parliament Mastering meetings using Robert's Rules

Firm but not harsh.

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Jurassic Parliament Mastering meetings using Robert's Rules

Be brisk! Speak crisply!

- *Well, I guess the agenda is adopted...*
- *I'll kind of get a thumbs up from the board next week...*

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Jurassic Parliament Mastering meetings using Robert's Rules

Language tips

- Phrase things in the positive.
*We're not trying to hide anything here vs.
We're committed to being transparent.*
- Give up on the word "but." Always say "and."
- Say "kindly" not "please," which sounds like pleading.
- Say "very well" and move on.

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CHEAT SHEET

LANGUAGE TIPS FOR MEETING MANAGEMENT

SITUATION	CHAIR CAN SAY
Call to order	<i>This meeting of the [name of organization] is called to order.</i>
Unanimous consent	<i>Without objection... if there is no objection...</i>
To begin discussion	<i>It has been moved and seconded that... Is there any discussion?</i>
If there is no second	<i>Since there is no second, the motion will not be considered.</i>
To end discussion	<i>Is there any further discussion? or Are you ready to vote?</i>
Process Point of Order	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Member says, "Point of Order" 2. Chair says, "State your point." 3. Member explains issue. 4. Chair says, "The point is well taken," or "The point is not well taken."
When someone says "Point of Order" but can't explain what they mean	<i>What rule has been broken?</i>
Process Point of Information	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Member says, "Point of Information," 2. Chair replies, "State your question."

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When in doubt, ask the group!

- Chair can always ask the group to decide a question.

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Jurassic Parliament Mastering meetings using Robert's Rules

- Chair: *The chair believes that remarks about UFOs landing at our airfield are not germane, and will ask the council to decide whether the councilmember may continue speaking on this topic. All those who believe that the councilmember may continue speaking, say "aye."*
- Councilmembers in favor: *Aye!*

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- Chair: *All those who believe that the councilmember may not continue, say "No."*
- Councilmembers opposed: *No.*
- Chair: *The ayes have it and the councilmember may continue speaking, OR the noes have it and the councilmember will cease from speaking.*

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Jurassic Parliament Mastering meetings using Robert's Rules

HOW to control?

The chair should never get excited.

Robert's Rules of Order Newly Revised, 12th edition, 47:19

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Jurassic Parliament Mastering meetings using Robert's Rules

IX. Conclusion

WHY do we need rules?

Win/lose is the only game most of us understand. We have a constant unspoken need for domination and actually find no enjoyment in win/win situations.

Richard Rohr, Franciscan author

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Jurassic Parliament Mastering meetings using Robert's Rules

Keep in touch!

- You are invited to subscribe to our monthly newsletter.
- Subscribe to the blog on our website for insight, tips and inspiration, including our advice column, "Dear Dinosaur."

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MASTERING COUNCIL MEETINGS
 A GUIDEBOOK FOR ELECTED OFFICIALS AND LOCAL GOVERNMENTS

Ann G. Macfarlane, PRP, CAE
 and Andrew L. Estep, CAE

Jurassic Parliament

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Jurassic Parliament Mastering meetings using Robert's Rules

After taking this training you will be able to:

1. Apply the principle that the authority of the group is more important than any single individual.
2. Follow best practices for discussion.
3. Respond to disorder or difficult people.
4. Make Motions and Amendments.
5. Avoid common citizen advisory committee pitfalls.
6. Run effective public comment sessions.

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Jurassic Parliament Mastering meetings using Robert's Rules

Quick Guide for Citizen Advisory Committees

The work of the Citizen Advisory Committee is to carry out the council's instructions. Follow this quick guide to parliamentary procedure to take the pain out of your meetings, hold productive discussions, and serve your community better.

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Jurassic Parliament Mastering meetings using Robert's Rules

Quick Guide for Planning Commissions



The work of the Planning Commission is to carry out the council's instructions. Follow this quick guide to parliamentary procedure to take the pain out of your meetings, hold productive discussions, and serve your community better.

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Local Government Citizen Advisory Boards

Examples, options, and model practices for the effective and efficient use of advisory boards by local governments

MRSC

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Jurassic Parliament Mastering meetings using Robert's Rules

*Kindness is within our power.
Liking is not.*

Samuel Johnson, British author

225

Jurassic Parliament Mastering meetings using Robert's Rules

Serving on a local government board is like being in a marriage arranged by the citizens.

Tami Tanoue, Colorado Intergovernmental Risk Sharing Agency

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Why are we here?

To invigorate you to run effective meetings to serve your community

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