



**Mission Springs Water District**  
**Board of Directors Handbook**

Adopted by Resolution No. 2020-02

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## **SECTION 1 - INTRODUCTION**

Our democratic form of government requires that public officials be impartial, independent, and responsible to the people they represent, and that government decisions and policies are made through proper channels of government structure; that public office not be used for personal gain; and that the public has confidence in the integrity of its government. This Board of Directors Handbook (“Board Handbook”) is intended to establish ethical standards of conduct for the Board of Directors of the Mission Springs Water District (“District”), by confirming the Board of Directors commitment to transparency; setting forth those acts or actions that are incompatible with the best interest of the District and the public: ensuring disclosure by the District’s elected and appointed officials of private financial or other interests in matters affecting the District; and ensuring compliance with applicable laws. The provisions and purpose of this Board Handbook are deemed by the Board of Directors (“Directors”) to be in the best interest of the District, and the standards established herein are intended to supplement and be cumulative to all applicable state and federal laws, policies and regulations otherwise applicable to the District and its elected and appointed officials. The policies and procedures set forth in this Board Handbook are intended to supplement, without preempting, existing state and federal laws.

The elected and appointed officials of the District, including the Board of Directors and the General Manager, hold office for the benefit of the public and are bound to uphold the Constitution and laws of the United States and the state of California, and to foster respect for all levels of government. They are bound to observe both the letter and the spirit of the law in their official acts, with the highest standards of morality, integrity and honesty, and to discharge faithfully the duties of their office regardless of personal considerations, recognizing that the public interest must be their primary concern. Their conduct in both their official and private affairs should be above reproach at all times.

The development of the Board Handbook represents the commitment of the Mission Springs Water District Board of Directors to the development of specific best practice performance criteria essential to their role as elected public officials. This commitment also extends to the General Manager. This Board Handbook is considered a ‘living document’ and as such can be amended or modified at the discretion of the Board of Directors.

## **SECTION 2 – EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

The District’s core values of Professionalism, Accountability, Respect, Integrity, Servant Attitude, Excellence, and Stewardship serve as the foundation for development of this Handbook. These core values, along with specific criteria related to the performance of public officials, were used in identifying the appropriate Best Practices for members of the Board and the General Manager. An annual review of the approved and adopted best practices outlined in the Board Handbook would serve as a continual reminder of the Board’s role in policy governance and principles of behavior as a “Best of Class” water agency. The document will also serve as a valuable tool in the orientation and education of new Board members and staff in the future.

**Section 2.01 - Board Best Practices**

- Ethical standards and accountable leadership
- Public confidence and integrity
- Compliance with the letter and spirit of existing laws and policies
- Dedication to superior service
- Personalized standards of conduct

**SECTION 3 – CULTURE: VISION AND CORE VALUES**

The Board and the General Manager understand the importance and value of a positive and constructive culture to the overall performance of the District. This culture in large part is a product of the District’s goal of performing as a “Best of Class” public agency, individually and corporately. Whether in the capacity of an elected or appointed Director, or as an employee of the District, our primary responsibility is to serve the District’s customers.

**Section 3.01 –Vision**

The Board has adopted vision to guide the planning and application of policies and procedures, including the development of the best governance or management practices identified in this Board Handbook. It is the responsibility of each Board member and the General Manager to know, understand, and carry out the vision and its objectives within their respective capacities. The vision falls under the following categories:

- MSWD is a leader and innovator in the water industry.
- MSWD Employees are highly qualified, innovative and continuously functioning at the highest levels of teamwork and performance excellence.
- MSWD maintains a culture of responsibility while providing the highest levels of customer service.
- MSWD has the foresight to anticipate the future and is adaptable and resilient to overcome any challenge it faces.

**Section 3.02 – Core Values**

The District has approved core values that represent performance standards and expectations for the Board members and staff. These core values are descriptive of the District’s culture.

**Professionalism** – MSWD employees conduct themselves with professionalism. Professionalism describes the standards of conduct, performance, knowledge and skill necessary to perform our specific role within the organization.

**Accountability** – MSWD employees take ownership of our decisions and accept responsibility for our actions. We are accountable to the public we serve.

**Respect** – We respect all people on the basis of their human worth. In order to earn respect we must first give respect.

**Integrity** – MSWD employees operate with the highest degree of integrity. We are honest and hold ourselves to moral principles and ethical standards.

**Servant Attitude** – MSWD employees consider the other person as more important than one’s self. This Servant Attitude considers the impacts of our actions on others and the organization before self.

**Excellence** – MSWD employees strive for excellence and are conscious of our performance at all times. We are committed to continuous learning and innovation ensuring that our services exceed expectations.

**Stewardship** – Stewardship embodies the ethical behavior of accepting responsibility and management of a resource – water. We operate the District as a public trust as stewards of this precious resource.

## **SECTION 4 – AUTHORITY, ROLE OF THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS AND GENERAL GUIDELINES**

### **Section 4.01 - Authority**

The District is an independent public agency, which provides water service to the land and inhabitants within its boundaries. The District operates under the authority of the County Water District Law, Division 12 of the California Water Code, commencing with Section 30000. The District is governed by an elected Board of Directors (“Board”) which has the authority to oversee the business and affairs of the District. The Board is authorized to delegate some of those powers. The Board has the power to employ and set terms and conditions for employment of the General Manager, who in turn has been delegated management authority over District employees.

In order for the Board to function in an effective manner, it is important that Directors understand their respective roles and relationship to other members of the Board and to staff. This also requires an understanding of the performance expectations necessary to carry out the duties of a Board member.

The officers of the Board consist of the President and Vice-President. The General Manager of the District also serves as the Secretary of the Board. Officers of the District are appointed by the Board annually or as otherwise may be determined by the Board.

#### **Section 4.02 – Responsibilities of Office**

Elected officials and appointed officials hold office for the benefit of the public and are bound to uphold the Constitution and laws of the United States and the State of California, and local public laws, and to foster respect for all levels of government. They are bound to observe and comply with both the letter and the spirit of the law in their official acts, the highest standards of morality and honesty and to discharge faithfully the duties of their office regardless of personal considerations, recognizing that the public interest must be their primary concern. Their conduct in both their official and private affairs should be above reproach at all times. Signed copies of the Oath of Office taken by each Board Member and the General Manager are included in the Board of Directors Handbook.

District officials should never exceed their authority, violate the law or ask others to do so. They should work in full cooperation with other public officials and employees unless prohibited from doing so by law or by legally required or recommended confidentiality of their responsibilities or work.

As State law requires, no one who holds office, or who is seeking election or appointment to any office or employment with the District shall, directly or indirectly, use, promise, threaten, or attempt to use, any office, authority, or influence, whether then possessed or merely anticipated, to confer upon or secure for any person, or to aid or obstruct any person in securing, or to prevent any person from securing, any position, nomination, confirmation, promotion, or change in compensation or position, within the State or the District, upon consideration or condition that the vote or political influence or action of such person or another shall be given or used on behalf of, or withheld from, any candidate, officer, or party, or upon any other corrupt condition of consideration. This prohibition shall apply to urging or discouraging an individual employee's action inconsistent with the policies established herein, or the employee's terms or conditions of employment or the law.

#### **Section 4.03 – Role of the Board**

The primary role of the Board of Directors is to establish policies that guide and direct activities of the District in fulfilling its mission. The decisions and actions of the Board constitute the "policy or action" of the Board and shall recognize the actions of the Board even when there may be opinions that differ from the majority opinion or action.

The Board has three (3) major responsibilities:

1. Promote the best interests of the District's customers by establishing policies that support the Board's vision and core values for the District and by ensuring the implementation of those policies. Policies include the governing principles, plans, and approved actions of the organization. Policy-making is the process of visionary planning and should reflect the broadest possible principles and provide parameters within which staff can operate. Policy-making sets the overall direction for the District.
2. Assure the fiscal health of the District. The Board establishes policies that ensure fiscal stability and the effective use of funds. In order to achieve this, each fiscal year the Board adopts a budget covering the anticipated revenues and expenditures of the District. Additionally, the Board annually adopts and monitors cash reserves and investment policies.
3. Hire a General Manager to manage the day-to-day operations of the District. The Board holds the General Manager accountable for the effective operational management of the District. It also has a responsibility to properly evaluate the General Manager on an annual basis.

#### **Section 4.04 – Best Practices General Guidelines**

1. The Board of Directors provides policy direction and leadership for the District.
2. The Board is responsible for ensuring that the District is an innovative and well-managed agency.
3. The Board exercises authority only as the governing body of the District, and not as individuals.
4. The Board understands and provides leadership in regional, state and national issues affecting the operation and management of the District. The General Manager supports the Board as needed or required.
5. The Board respects the role of constituents in the governance of the District, encourages their participation and consults with key stakeholders when and where appropriate.
6. The Board recognizes and respects the distinctions between its policy-setting role and the day-to-day implementation of Board policy by staff. The Board does not direct the activities of staff, and communicates issues or concerns through the General Manager.
7. Board members are official representatives of the District and represent the District in various community and water industry events.
8. Board members model the highest levels of ethical and professional behavior as public officials and representatives of the District.
9. Board members maintain a high level of communication with the General Manager and notify the General Manager of their availability or unavailability in a timely manner.  
Board members inform the General Manager of any specific information related to the District's business that they want to receive from outside agencies or organizations, and are provided such information in a timely manner.
10. Board members may request information from the General Manager. The General Manager shall advise the Board if the requested information should be placed on the Board meeting agenda or the appropriate committee agenda to effect a policy change, or approve an expenditure of public funds.

## **SECTION 5 – ROLE AND RESPONSIBILITY OF THE PRESIDENT AND VICE-PRESIDENT OF THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS**

### **Section 5.01 - President of the Board**

1. The President of the Board of Directors is selected annually, at the end of the calendar year, by a majority vote of the Board, unless otherwise modified by the Board.
2. The President is the head of the Board.
3. The President chairs the meetings of the Board, calls the meeting to order, presides over Board meetings, including the conduct of the Board and those in attendance, entertains and repeats motions properly before the Board, puts motions to a vote, and announces the results of votes taken by the Board.
4. The President votes with the Board members.
5. Each President's individual style is unique. Diversity is encouraged.
6. The President acts as the ceremonial head or representative of the District at various civic functions. In his/her absence, the Vice-President or other shall fulfill the President's role. If both the Board President and Vice President are unavailable, the Board President may designate a Board Member to represent the District.
7. The President is the designated spokesperson for the Board to the general public. The President may elect to appoint one of the other Board members to serve in this capacity.
8. The President acts as the signatory on all documents requiring execution by the Board.
9. The President is responsible for making appointments to Ad Hoc Board Committees and terminates the role and function of Ad Hoc committees as necessary.
10. To the extent possible, the President advises the Board of any formal or informal communication and correspondence sent or received by the President, regarding District business.
11. The President regularly communicates with the General Manager and keeps other Board members fully informed on matters of District business at the next Board Meeting in compliance with the Brown Act.
12. The President provides guidance to the Board fairly and impartially in the conduct of official business before the Board of Directors.
13. The President personally addresses issues which may rise between and among members of the Board. Individual Directors or the General Manager may inform the President of any issue or concern brought to their attention related to the performance of any other member of the Board.
14. The President is responsible for ensuring decorum at Board meetings and that they are conducted in an orderly, professional and respectful manor.

### **Section 5.02 - Vice-President of the Board**

1. The Vice-President of the Board of Directors is selected annually at the end of the calendar year, by a majority vote of the Board, unless otherwise modified by the Board.
2. The Vice-President has no rights or authority different from any other member of the Board.

3. In the event the position of the President is vacated prior to the expiration of the term, the Vice-President becomes the President for the remaining term, unless otherwise directed by the Board.
4. In the event of an early vacancy in the position of Vice-President, the Board determines, by vote, a replacement for the remaining term.
5. The Vice-President serves in the capacity of the President of the Board of Directors, pro tem, in his/her absence.

## **SECTION 6 – PRINCIPLES OF BEHAVIOR AND PERFORMANCE EXPECTATIONS OF THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS**

### **Section 6.01 – Principles of Behavior and Performance Expectations**

1. The Board and the General Manager act as a participatory team with respect to all of the District's functions. It is critical that Board members maintain informal and professional relationships with one another, and with the General Manager.
2. The Board values a visionary, constructive, high-energy work environment, and the District, and its constituents benefit from that environment.
3. Board members are representatives of the District's culture and core values at all times. As ambassadors, they lead by example in their interactions with one another and members of the public, and their behavior should be representative of the organization's values.
4. The Board values open and honest communication, with open agendas. Board members communicate concerns and address those concerns, including controversial issues, in a timely, professional and appropriate manner in order to maintain a constructive functional relationship.
5. Board members are knowledgeable and supportive of District policies and procedures, including rules and regulations governing communications among Board members, which include electronic, written and verbal communications.
6. The Board works for the common good of its customers and stakeholders and not for any private or personal interest. Board members are trained and knowledgeable of conflict of interest requirements for holding public office. The Board receives regular training on conflicts of interest and their financial interest reporting requirements under state law.
7. Board members always come to Board meetings prepared and are responsible for initiating resolutions. The Board and General Manager observe the "no surprises rule." Issues are not used to surprise, embarrass or unduly draw attention to individual agendas or issues. The General Manager shall inform the Board President (and legal counsel where appropriate) of important issues that arise after the posting of the agenda.
8. Board members practice continued professional development in their role as Directors of the District.
9. Board members are respectful and considerate of each other, the General Manager and the District's staff, as well as Board traditions. Every effort will be taken to foster a professional working relationship and refrain from personal attacks against one another and staff. This cooperative and respectful

relationship extends to behaviors and actions by Board members within the community and away from an official public function or meeting.

10. Board members should never exceed their authority or breach the law or ask others to do so.
11. Board members conduct themselves in a professional manner modeling and enforcing the values of the organization as a “best of class” agency.

## **SECTION 7 – BOARD OF DIRECTORS’ INTERACTION AND COMMUNICATION**

### **Section 7.01 – Board Member Interaction**

1. Board members maintain informal and professional relationships with each other.
2. Board members will direct comments to the merits of issues and items before them through the Board President, while refraining from personal attacks against other Board Members, the General Manager, members of the public and District staff. If a Board member has a grievance with another Board member, he/she should first discuss it privately with that person. This should always be done in compliance with the Brown Act. If the matter is unresolved, the Board member should go to the General Manager and the General Manager shall work with Legal Counsel informally in an attempt to resolve the matter.
3. Board members are representatives of the District’s culture and core values at all times, and lead by example in their interactions with others. Board Members should be accurate and truthful in their communications with other members of the Board, the General Manager and the Public.
4. Board members are responsible for being familiar with and knowledgeable of the District’s travel and expense reporting policies for Board members. All expenses, travel, meals and meetings attended by Board members at District expense should be for District benefit and accurately reported when reimbursement is sought.
5. When attending meetings or conferences, Board members are ambassadors and representatives of the District and should conduct themselves professionally.
6. Board members shall not request the use of, use or permit others to use District-owned vehicles, equipment, materials, personnel or property for personal convenience or profit, except when such services are available to the public generally, or provided as a District policy for use of such official in the conduct of official business or otherwise as set by District policy.
7. Board members are aware of the rules governing communication among themselves and others in compliance with the California Open Meetings Law (also known as the Brown Act). This includes communications by electronic, written and verbal means and methods, and through an intermediary. Board members receive regular training regarding the requirements of the Brown Act, the Political Reform Act (conflict of interest laws), and the Public Records Act.
8. Board members shall be fair, accurate, and truthful when communicating with the general public and using social media regarding District issues, activities, and business.
9. Board members function as a team to further the interests of the District and the members of the public it serves.

## **SECTION 8 – ROLE OF THE GENERAL MANAGER, BOARD INTERACTION WITH STAFF, AND ROLE OF DISTRICT LEGAL COUNSEL**

### **Section 8.01 - Role of the General Manager**

One of the most important decisions the Board of Directors makes is the selection of a General Manager. The Board must be able to support the decisions of the General Manager and grant him/her the authority to manage and lead the District. The General Manager is the only employee and agent of the Board, and the individual to whom the Board delegates its authority to manage and administer the District's daily operations in accordance with policies approved by the Board. This position is important because to be successful, the District requires leadership and vision from its General Manager. The General Manager has two primary roles: as chief executive officer charged with the administration of the District's business, and as advisor or counselor to the Board on matters related to the fulfillment of their duties. The General Manager represents the District to its many constituencies.

The success of the relationship between the Board of Directors and the General Manager depends on a shared sense of purpose or vision, open and honest communication, and mutual support for their respective roles. Both parties must also understand that the relationship itself is paradoxical, with inherent tensions. The General Manager is charged with carrying out Board policy directives, and at the same time, looks to the Board for guidance and leadership.

It is the General Manager's responsibility to ensure that the Board members have the information needed to make informed decisions. The General Manager promptly alerts Board Members to problems and issues to prevent surprises or misinformation. Board members expect the General Manager to make recommendations on issues before the Board.

### **Section 8.02 - Board Interaction with the General Manager**

1. The General Manager recommends annual goals, which are approved by the Board of Directors as a part of the General Manager performance review process.
2. The Board provides the General Manager with constructive feedback on his/her performance annually, in a written evaluation.
3. Board members are encouraged to contact the General Manger about any subject related to the operations of the District. Similarly, the General Manger may discuss District-related issues with any Board member, in compliance with the Brown Act.
4. The Board's concerns regarding overall District operations, specific issues or problems with District staff are addressed through the General Manager.
5. The General Manager is charged with handling internal District matters, including matters regarding District personnel.
6. Allegations against the General Manager shall be directed to Legal Counsel for further action.
7. The General Manager keeps the Board apprised of matters affecting the District.

8. Board members are encouraged to advise the General Manager or his designate when they will be unavailable to carry out their duties as Directors, or out of town.

### **Section 8.03 - Board Interaction with Staff**

Board members shall not direct staff to take or refrain from taking a particular action related to District operations. Requests for staff time or assistance are made only through the General Manager.

Conducting the business of the District at official meetings of the Board should be done efficiently and professionally. Board members are encouraged to make every effort to contact the General Manager prior to a board meeting regarding questions related to agenda items so that the General Manager can provide the most accurate and prepared response.

### **Section 8.04 - Role of District's Legal Counsel**

1. The District's legal counsel (Legal Counsel) represents the District as an entity and works in collaboration with the Board and General Manager, but does not represent individual Board members or the General Manager.
2. Legal Counsel's primary day-to-day point of contact is the General Manager.
3. Legal Counsel, as needed, consults with the Board and the General Manager on items of concern related to any facet of District operations.
4. Legal Counsel reviews all Board agendas, and is present in closed sessions where litigation and/or District liability will be discussed.
5. When it is in the best interests of the District to retain specialized legal advice in addition to that provided by the District's Legal Counsel, the General Manager and Legal Counsel will coordinate and oversee the special counsel work as appropriate.
6. Legal Counsel is pro-active in informing and protecting the District and the Board from any potential violations and conflicts that may arise in the performance of their duties. Board members should contact Legal Counsel in advance of meetings to discuss any legal concerns or seek advice regarding conflict of interest issues.

## **SECTION 9 – CUSTOMER AND PUBLIC COMMUNICATIONS**

### **Section 9.01 – Customer Communications**

1. Board members represent the District and its customers in a manner that best reflects the professional standards, values and mission of the District.
2. Customer concerns and inquiries, including those generated through social media or electronic format, are referred to the General Manager or his/her designated staff member.
3. The General Manager will provide the Board with a written or verbal report of customer concerns or inquiries that cannot be handled routinely, along with any response made by staff to the concern or inquiry.
4. Customer inquiries at official meetings of the Board should be directed by the Board President to the General Manager for response.
5. The Board is informed by the General Manager of significant, sensitive, urgent and/or repetitive communication inquiries. The General Manager will oversee any appropriate recommended follow-up and response.
6. Board members refer responses and inquiries regarding customer concerns to the General Manager.
7. Information or an action that may have the potential to expose the District to liability and possible legal action will be shared with the General Manager and legal counsel followed by the Board at a noticed, closed session meeting of the Board of Directors.

## **SECTION 10 – CONDUCT OF MEETINGS OF THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS**

### **Section 10.01 – General Guidelines for Conduct of Board Meetings – Rosenberg’s Rules of Order**

1. All noticed meetings are conducted using Rosenberg’s Rules of Order (“Rosenberg’s Rules”) as a procedural guideline. Rosenberg’s Rules are intended to provide for constructive and efficient conduct of meetings.
2. Meetings of the Board are called, posted and conducted in accordance with the Open Meetings Law (“Brown Act”). A quorum of the Board must be present for a meeting to be held or decisions made.
3. The General Manager is responsible for setting the agenda for all Board meetings, in consultation with the Board President and Legal Counsel. Any Director may request that an item be placed on the agenda by request to the General Manager and President of the Board. Where appropriate, a requested item may be referred By the General Manager or Board President to a Board committee for study, review, decision or referral to the Board for determination.
4. The General Manager confers with the President of the Board regarding, and reviews agendas for upcoming meetings, prior to posting.
5. The General Manager informs the Board of significant items that will be placed on future agendas for Board consideration and/or decision.

6. Directors should refrain from responding directly to public comments at meetings of the Board. The Board President will refer matters raised by public comments to the General Manager for follow-up, as appropriate. Directors may briefly ask clarifying questions. Occasionally, a prompt response may be offered when an obvious answer or resolution is available, provided this is done in compliance with the Brown Act. Directors should refrain from debating or making decisions in response to public comments.
7. The President of the Board presides at all meetings, and decides all points of order and procedure during meetings. The President is responsible for the maintenance of order and decorum at all Board meetings. No person should be allowed to speak who has not first been recognized by the President. All questions and remarks should be addressed to the President as the presiding officer. No member of the Board should speak more than once upon any one subject until every other member of the Board wishing to speak on the subject shall have been given the opportunity to speak. No Board member shall interfere with the orderly progress of a Board meeting. The President will entertain a motion on any item on the Board agenda. Members of the public shall be given three minutes to speak on agenda items. In order to ensure the orderly progress of Board meetings, the Board President regulates the amount of time to be dedicated to a particular agenda item.
8. Each Director may be allowed to make technical points or ask clarifying questions prior to the making of a motion.
9. A roll call vote on any item may be requested by a Director, at the discretion of the President. The results of the roll call vote shall be recorded in the minutes of the action taken. Roll call votes are encouraged in connection with resolutions, ordinances and action after a public hearing.
10. The Board works diligently to achieve a common understanding of all action items. At the request of a Director, and the discretion of the President, an item on which unanimity may not be achieved may be referred to a committee to consider a resolution of the issue prior to a vote.
11. Once an agenda item has been approved by the Board of Directors, the disposition is considered the "action" of the Board, recognized by the individual members as the decision of the District. Board members shall at all times respect the will of the majority on matters properly before and acted upon by the Board.

### **Section 10.02 - Consent Agenda**

1. The District utilizes a Consent Agenda to approve routine business matters, such as minutes, operational production reports, project status reports, cash reports and approval of previously approved budgetary items.
2. If a Director has a question on a Consent Agenda item, he/she is encouraged to contact the General Manager for clarification prior to the meeting, rather than having it pulled for separate discussion during the meeting.
3. Items may be pulled from the Consent Agenda for a separate vote, upon approval of the President of the Board. The balance of the Consent Agenda shall be voted on prior to consideration of any item pulled for separate vote.

**Section 10.03 - Closed Session**

All Closed Session discussions and materials are considered legal and confidential information, and as such, shall not be shared or distributed outside the Closed Session unless reportable action has been taken, in which case Legal Counsel will make any required report of action taken, in open session. All Closed Sessions are conducted in accordance with the Brown Act. Documents shared in closed session shall not to be distributed or disclosed outside of Closed Session without clear authorization from Legal Counsel and the General Manager. This prohibition applies also to disclosure of confidential information to representatives of other agencies and/or the media.

Closed Sessions may be held at times other than the regular meetings of the Board of Directors so long as the meeting is posted pursuant to all applicable requirements of the Brown Act.

A Board Member should refer requests for information regarding Closed Session items to the General Manager who, in consultation with Legal Counsel, will provide an appropriate response.

**SECTION 11 – ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITY OF STANDING COMMITTEES AND SPECIAL COMMITTEES****Section 11.01 – Role and Responsibility of Committees**

1. Committees of the Board of Directors, including Standing and Ad Hoc Committees, are given authority to obtain more information, investigate, and provide reports or recommendations to the full Board. The committee format allows the Board to conduct its business more efficiently.
2. Standing Committees are established, and may be renamed or have their functions changed or terminated, by the Board. Standing Committees consist of two Board members, one of whom may be appointed as the Committee Chair. Standing Committee meetings are open to the public and subject to provisions of the Brown Act. Other Board members may attend Standing Committee meetings, but may not participate in the meetings.
3. Staff, at the direction of the General Manager, may provide support for Standing Committees by preparing agendas, staff reports, distributing materials, and performing other administrative functions as directed and approved by the General Manager. Standing Committee members may request staff assistance only through the General Manager.
4. Ad Hoc Committees are established for a limited purpose and duration, usually to review and report to the Board on an item of special but limited interest. Members of Ad Hoc Committees are appointed and serve at the pleasure of the President of the Board, and their terms expire upon completion of the project or issue for which the Committee was formed or at the recommendation of the Board President.
5. Copies of Committee agendas are made available to the entire Board. If members of Committee are in disagreement on a recommendation, the issue may be brought to the full Board for consideration.

## **SECTION 12 – COMPLAINT RESOLUTION PROCEDURES**

### **Section 12.01 – General Guidelines for Complaint Resolution Procedures**

The Board Handbook establishes standards of performance and expectations for governance for members of the Board of Directors. The District's core values of Professionalism, Accountability, Respect, Integrity, Servant Attitude, Excellence, and Stewardship define the performance expectations for Board members and staff. As adopted, the Board Handbook is the policy of the Board related to the standards and performance expectations contained therein.

It is intended that the standards of conduct established in this Board Handbook be self-enforcing by the Board and its members. However, the Board recognizes that there may be instances where even after receiving guidance and counsel to resolve unintentional (or intentional) violation, a party may continue to violate the provisions hereof, or an individual's repeated or egregious disregard and conscious intent to violate the agreed-upon standards of conduct are clearly demonstrated. In those cases, sanctions may apply and would occur in a public meeting. In the event that members of the Board breach this policy or any other applicable state, local or federal law, they may be subject to sanction or disciplinary action by the Board as outlined below.

### **Section 12.02 - Informal Sanction – Admonishment**

Admonishment is the least severe form of sanction or disciplinary action. A verbal or written admonishment may be directed to a Board member, reminding him or her that a particular type of behavior is in violation of this Board Handbook, District policy or law, and that, if it is found to have occurred, or is repeated, could subject the Board member to censure, the most severe disciplinary action.

An admonishment may be issued in response to a particular alleged action or actions. An admonishment may be issued by the Board prior to any findings of fact regarding allegations, and because it is a warning or reminder, would not necessarily require an investigation or separate hearings to determine whether the allegations are true.

An admonishment should be directed to a particular member or members of the Board based on a particular action (or set of actions) that has been determined by the Board to be in violation of District policy or law but is considered by the Board to not be sufficiently serious to require censure or other form of disciplinary action.

An admonishment may be issued upon the Board's review and consideration of a written or verbal allegation of a Handbook or policy violation. The member accused of such violation shall be entitled to notice of the allegation and will have an opportunity to provide a written or verbal response to the allegation prior to any action by the Board. A sanction may be issued by the Board of Directors and because it is not punishment or discipline, would not necessarily require an investigation or separate hearings.

**Section 12.03 - Formal Sanction or Censure**

Before the imposition of any formal sanction, the accused shall be entitled to a formal investigation, notice of the allegation, and opportunity to respond.

**Section 12.04 - Investigative Process**

All complaints regarding Board member conduct shall be filed with the General Manager. Once the complaint is filed, the General Manager shall convene a meeting with the complainant, accused, and the District's Legal Counsel. Each allegation shall be considered in a manner that is fair to all parties involved in the allegation(s), ensuring that due process is respected and provided. This will include allowing all members of the Board named in the allegation(s) an opportunity to consider and respond to the allegation(s).

If the General Manager and Board President determines that it is warranted, the complaint may be referred to the appropriate enforcement authority or authorities for investigation. If the complaint has merit, a report of the findings along with the accused individual's defense is presented to the Board of Directors for majority action. If there is no merit, the matter is disposed of.

When the Board of Directors decides, based on findings of the investigation and the accused individual's defense, that a violation has occurred, the Board may decide, by resolution, take the further disciplinary action including censure.

**Section 12.05 – Censure**

Censure is the most severe form of action contemplated in this Board Handbook. Censure is a formal statement of the Board of Directors officially reprimanding one or more of its members. It is punitive action, which serves as a penalty imposed for wrongdoing, but it carries no fine or suspension of the rights of the Board member as an elected official. Censure should be used only where the Board of Directors has determined that the violation of policy is a serious offense.

Any member of the Board of Directors who fails to comply with the terms of this Handbook, a Board or District policy or any applicable law or regulation is subject to censure by a majority vote of the Board. Censure by a majority vote of the Board may include revocation of appointment(s) to Standing Committees, Ad Hoc Committees or outside organizations. Examples of other punitive action that may be considered with censure include, but are not limited to, the following: issuance of an official letter of censure or reprimand, including denial of paid attendance at and travel to and from said functions or events not considered necessary to the censured Director's role as an elected official. The Board of Directors reserves the right to establish an ad hoc committee to: (1) investigate and review allegations of unethical conduct, unlawful conduct or conduct that violates the terms of this Handbook, a Board or District policy or any applicable law or regulation; and (2) make recommendations to the full Board for censure and/or discipline, as the majority of the Board deems appropriate.

**SECTION 13 – COMMITMENT TO BOARD OF DIRECTORS’ BEST PRACTICES**

As a member of the Mission Springs Water District Board of Directors, I have read the Board of Directors Handbook, and understand the expectations placed on me as an elected official and representative of the District. I am committed to upholding the public trust and representing the best interests of the District and its customers, by complying with the Board Handbook. By signing this letter commitment to Board of Directors Best Practices, I am pledging to comply with the terms of the Board of Directors Handbook, Board and District policies and all applicable laws and regulations. I further commit to conduct myself professionally as a Board Member and to carry out my duties with integrity and competence, which may be above and beyond what may otherwise be required by law, including but not limited to the following:

1. I shall help create and maintain an atmosphere of professionalism, respect and civility where individual Directors, District staff and the public are free to express their ideas and strive to work together to their full potential.
2. I shall conduct my personal business and public affairs with honesty, accuracy, integrity, fairness and respect for others.
3. I shall keep the common good of the Mission Springs Water District and those it serves as my highest priority and focus on achieving constructive solutions for the benefit of the District and the public.
4. I shall avoid and discourage conduct which is harmful to the best interests of the Mission Springs Water District.
5. I shall respect the decisions of the Board of Directors, acting through its majority, including its policies and procedures, and avoid utilizing the District’s financial resources in a wasteful, manner.
6. I shall not interfere with the orderly progress of District Board meetings or the meetings of its committees;
7. I shall not interfere with the execution by the General Manager of his/her powers and duties, or give direction, assignments or orders to his/her staff without the General Manager’s prior consent;
8. I shall be accurate and truthful when communicating as a Board Member of the District, including communications about District issues, activities and/or business;
9. I shall treat all people with whom I come into contact in a professional and respectful manner and consistent with the way I wish to be treated by others.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Title: \_\_\_\_\_

I have read the Board of Directors Handbook and understand the expectations placed on me as an appointed official of the District

\_\_\_\_\_  
General Manager/Board Secretary

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**APPENDIX A**

**Rosenberg's Rules of Order Summary**



# Rosenberg's Rules of Order

REVISED 2011

*Simple Rules of Parliamentary Procedure for the 21st Century*

*By Judge Dave Rosenberg*



## MISSION AND CORE BELIEFS

To expand and protect local control for cities through education and advocacy to enhance the quality of life for all Californians.

## VISION

To be recognized and respected as the leading advocate for the common interests of California's cities.

### About the League of California Cities

Established in 1898, the League of California Cities is a member organization that represents California's incorporated cities. The League strives to protect the local authority and autonomy of city government and help California's cities effectively serve their residents. In addition to advocating on cities' behalf at the state capitol, the League provides its members with professional development programs and information resources, conducts education conferences and research, and publishes Western City magazine.

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### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Dave Rosenberg is a Superior Court Judge in Yolo County. He has served as presiding judge of his court, and as presiding judge of the Superior Court Appellate Division. He also has served as chair of the Trial Court Presiding Judges Advisory Committee (the committee composed of all 58 California presiding judges) and as an advisory member of the California Judicial Council. Prior to his appointment to the bench, Rosenberg was member of the Yolo County Board of Supervisors, where he served two terms as chair. Rosenberg also served on the Davis City Council, including two terms as mayor. He has served on the senior staff of two governors, and worked for 19 years in private law practice. Rosenberg has served as a member and chair of numerous state, regional and local boards. Rosenberg chaired the California State Lottery Commission, the California Victim Compensation and Government Claims Board, the Yolo-Solano Air Quality Management District, the Yolo County Economic Development Commission, and the Yolo County Criminal Justice Cabinet. For many years, he has taught classes on parliamentary procedure and has served as parliamentarian for large and small bodies.



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## INTRODUCTION

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The rules of procedure at meetings should be simple enough for most people to understand. Unfortunately, that has not always been the case. Virtually all clubs, associations, boards, councils and bodies follow a set of rules — *Robert's Rules of Order* — which are embodied in a small, but complex, book. Virtually no one I know has actually read this book cover to cover. Worse yet, the book was written for another time and for another purpose. If one is chairing or running a parliament, then *Robert's Rules of Order* is a dandy and quite useful handbook for procedure in that complex setting. On the other hand, if one is running a meeting of say, a five-member body with a few members of the public in attendance, a simplified version of the rules of parliamentary procedure is in order.

Hence, the birth of *Rosenberg's Rules of Order*.

What follows is my version of the rules of parliamentary procedure, based on my decades of experience chairing meetings in state and local government. These rules have been simplified for the smaller bodies we chair or in which we participate, slimmed down for the 21st Century, yet retaining the basic tenets of order to which we have grown accustomed. Interestingly enough, *Rosenberg's Rules* has found a welcoming audience. Hundreds of cities, counties, special districts, committees, boards, commissions, neighborhood associations and private corporations and companies have adopted *Rosenberg's Rules* in lieu of *Robert's Rules* because they have found them practical, logical, simple, easy to learn and user friendly.

This treatise on modern parliamentary procedure is built on a foundation supported by the following four pillars:

1. **Rules should establish order.** The first purpose of rules of parliamentary procedure is to establish a framework for the orderly conduct of meetings.
2. **Rules should be clear.** Simple rules lead to wider understanding and participation. Complex rules create two classes: those who understand and participate; and those who do not fully understand and do not fully participate.
3. **Rules should be user friendly.** That is, the rules must be simple enough that the public is invited into the body and feels that it has participated in the process.
4. **Rules should enforce the will of the majority while protecting the rights of the minority.** The ultimate purpose of rules of procedure is to encourage discussion and to facilitate decision making by the body. In a democracy, majority rules. The rules must enable the majority to express itself and fashion a result, while permitting the minority to also express itself, but not dominate, while fully participating in the process.

### Establishing a Quorum

The starting point for a meeting is the establishment of a quorum. A quorum is defined as the minimum number of members of the body who must be present at a meeting for business to be legally transacted. The default rule is that a quorum is one more than half the body. For example, in a five-member body a quorum is three. When the body has three members present, it can legally transact business. If the body has less than a quorum of members present, it cannot legally transact business. And even if the body has a quorum to begin the meeting, the body can lose the quorum during the meeting when a member departs (or even when a member leaves the dais). When that occurs the body loses its ability to transact business until and unless a quorum is reestablished.

The default rule, identified above, however, gives way to a specific rule of the body that establishes a quorum. For example, the rules of a particular five-member body may indicate that a quorum is four members for that particular body. The body must follow the rules it has established for its quorum. In the absence of such a specific rule, the quorum is one more than half the members of the body.

### The Role of the Chair

While all members of the body should know and understand the rules of parliamentary procedure, it is the chair of the body who is charged with applying the rules of conduct of the meeting. The chair should be well versed in those rules. For all intents and purposes, the chair makes the final ruling on the rules every time the chair states an action. In fact, all decisions by the chair are final unless overruled by the body itself.

Since the chair runs the conduct of the meeting, it is usual courtesy for the chair to play a less active role in the debate and discussion than other members of the body. This does not mean that the chair should not participate in the debate or discussion. To the contrary, as a member of the body, the chair has the full right to participate in the debate, discussion and decision-making of the body. What the chair should do, however, is strive to be the last to speak at the discussion and debate stage. The chair should not make or second a motion unless the chair is convinced that no other member of the body will do so at that point in time.

### The Basic Format for an Agenda Item Discussion

Formal meetings normally have a written, often published agenda. Informal meetings may have only an oral or understood agenda. In either case, the meeting is governed by the agenda and the agenda constitutes the body's agreed-upon roadmap for the meeting. Each agenda item can be handled by the chair in the following basic format:



**First**, the chair should clearly announce the agenda item number and should clearly state what the agenda item subject is. The chair should then announce the format (which follows) that will be followed in considering the agenda item.

**Second**, following that agenda format, the chair should invite the appropriate person or persons to report on the item, including any recommendation that they might have. The appropriate person or persons may be the chair, a member of the body, a staff person, or a committee chair charged with providing input on the agenda item.

**Third**, the chair should ask members of the body if they have any technical questions of clarification. At this point, members of the body may ask clarifying questions to the person or persons who reported on the item, and that person or persons should be given time to respond.

**Fourth**, the chair should invite public comments, or if appropriate at a formal meeting, should open the public meeting for public input. If numerous members of the public indicate a desire to speak to the subject, the chair may limit the time of public speakers. At the conclusion of the public comments, the chair should announce that public input has concluded (or the public hearing, as the case may be, is closed).

**Fifth**, the chair should invite a motion. The chair should announce the name of the member of the body who makes the motion.

**Sixth**, the chair should determine if any member of the body wishes to second the motion. The chair should announce the name of the member of the body who seconds the motion. It is normally good practice for a motion to require a second before proceeding to ensure that it is not just one member of the body who is interested in a particular approach. However, a second is not an absolute requirement, and the chair can proceed with consideration and vote on a motion even when there is no second. This is a matter left to the discretion of the chair.

**Seventh**, if the motion is made and seconded, the chair should make sure everyone understands the motion.

This is done in one of three ways:

1. The chair can ask the maker of the motion to repeat it;
2. The chair can repeat the motion; or
3. The chair can ask the secretary or the clerk of the body to repeat the motion.

**Eighth**, the chair should now invite discussion of the motion by the body. If there is no desired discussion, or after the discussion has ended, the chair should announce that the body will vote on the motion. If there has been no discussion or very brief discussion, then the vote on the motion should proceed immediately and there is no need to repeat the motion. If there has been substantial discussion, then it is normally best to make sure everyone understands the motion by repeating it.

**Ninth**, the chair takes a vote. Simply asking for the “ayes” and then asking for the “nays” normally does this. If members of the body do not vote, then they “abstain.” Unless the rules of the body provide otherwise (or unless a super majority is required as delineated later in these rules), then a simple majority (as defined in law or the rules of the body as delineated later in these rules) determines whether the motion passes or is defeated.

**Tenth**, the chair should announce the result of the vote and what action (if any) the body has taken. In announcing the result, the chair should indicate the names of the members of the body, if any, who voted in the minority on the motion. This announcement might take the following form: “The motion passes by a vote of 3-2, with Smith and Jones dissenting. We have passed the motion requiring a 10-day notice for all future meetings of this body.”

## Motions in General

Motions are the vehicles for decision making by a body. It is usually best to have a motion before the body prior to commencing discussion of an agenda item. This helps the body focus.

Motions are made in a simple two-step process. First, the chair should recognize the member of the body. Second, the member of the body makes a motion by preceding the member’s desired approach with the words “I move . . .”

A typical motion might be: “I move that we give a 10-day notice in the future for all our meetings.”

The chair usually initiates the motion in one of three ways:

1. **Inviting the members of the body to make a motion**, for example, “A motion at this time would be in order.”
2. **Suggesting a motion to the members of the body**, “A motion would be in order that we give a 10-day notice in the future for all our meetings.”
3. **Making the motion**. As noted, the chair has every right as a member of the body to make a motion, but should normally do so only if the chair wishes to make a motion on an item but is convinced that no other member of the body is willing to step forward to do so at a particular time.

## The Three Basic Motions

There are three motions that are the most common and recur often at meetings:

**The basic motion**. The basic motion is the one that puts forward a decision for the body’s consideration. A basic motion might be: “I move that we create a five-member committee to plan and put on our annual fundraiser.”

**The motion to amend.** If a member wants to change a basic motion that is before the body, they would move to amend it. A motion to amend might be: “I move that we amend the motion to have a 10-member committee.” A motion to amend takes the basic motion that is before the body and seeks to change it in some way.

**The substitute motion.** If a member wants to completely do away with the basic motion that is before the body, and put a new motion before the body, they would move a substitute motion. A substitute motion might be: “I move a substitute motion that we cancel the annual fundraiser this year.”

“Motions to amend” and “substitute motions” are often confused, but they are quite different, and their effect (if passed) is quite different. A motion to amend seeks to retain the basic motion on the floor, but modify it in some way. A substitute motion seeks to throw out the basic motion on the floor, and substitute a new and different motion for it. The decision as to whether a motion is really a “motion to amend” or a “substitute motion” is left to the chair. So if a member makes what that member calls a “motion to amend,” but the chair determines that it is really a “substitute motion,” then the chair’s designation governs.

A “friendly amendment” is a practical parliamentary tool that is simple, informal, saves time and avoids bogging a meeting down with numerous formal motions. It works in the following way: In the discussion on a pending motion, it may appear that a change to the motion is desirable or may win support for the motion from some members. When that happens, a member who has the floor may simply say, “I want to suggest a friendly amendment to the motion.” The member suggests the friendly amendment, and if the maker and the person who seconded the motion pending on the floor accepts the friendly amendment, that now becomes the pending motion on the floor. If either the maker or the person who seconded rejects the proposed friendly amendment, then the proposer can formally move to amend.

### Multiple Motions Before the Body

There can be up to three motions on the floor at the same time. The chair can reject a fourth motion until the chair has dealt with the three that are on the floor and has resolved them. This rule has practical value. More than three motions on the floor at any given time is confusing and unwieldy for almost everyone, including the chair.

When there are two or three motions on the floor (after motions and seconds) at the same time, the vote should proceed *first* on the *last* motion that is made. For example, assume the first motion is a basic “motion to have a five-member committee to plan and put on our annual fundraiser.” During the discussion of this motion, a member might make a second motion to “amend the main motion to have a 10-member committee, not a five-member committee to plan and put on our annual fundraiser.” And perhaps, during that discussion, a member makes yet a third motion as a “substitute motion that we not have an annual fundraiser this year.” The proper procedure would be as follows:

**First**, the chair would deal with the *third* (the last) motion on the floor, the substitute motion. After discussion and debate, a vote would be taken first on the third motion. If the substitute motion *passed*, it would be a substitute for the basic motion and would eliminate it. The first motion would be moot, as would the second motion (which sought to amend the first motion), and the action on the agenda item would be completed on the passage by the body of the third motion (the substitute motion). No vote would be taken on the first or second motions.

**Second**, if the substitute motion *failed*, the chair would then deal with the second (now the last) motion on the floor, the motion to amend. The discussion and debate would focus strictly on the amendment (should the committee be five or 10 members). If the motion to amend *passed*, the chair would then move to consider the main motion (the first motion) as *amended*. If the motion to amend *failed*, the chair would then move to consider the main motion (the first motion) in its original format, not amended.

**Third**, the chair would now deal with the first motion that was placed on the floor. The original motion would either be in its original format (five-member committee), or if *amended*, would be in its amended format (10-member committee). The question on the floor for discussion and decision would be whether a committee should plan and put on the annual fundraiser.

### To Debate or Not to Debate

The basic rule of motions is that they are subject to discussion and debate. Accordingly, basic motions, motions to amend, and substitute motions are all eligible, each in their turn, for full discussion before and by the body. The debate can continue as long as members of the body wish to discuss an item, subject to the decision of the chair that it is time to move on and take action.

There are exceptions to the general rule of free and open debate on motions. The exceptions all apply when there is a desire of the body to move on. The following motions are not debatable (that is, when the following motions are made and seconded, the chair must immediately call for a vote of the body without debate on the motion):

**Motion to adjourn.** This motion, if passed, requires the body to immediately adjourn to its next regularly scheduled meeting. It requires a simple majority vote.

**Motion to recess.** This motion, if passed, requires the body to immediately take a recess. Normally, the chair determines the length of the recess which may be a few minutes or an hour. It requires a simple majority vote.

**Motion to fix the time to adjourn.** This motion, if passed, requires the body to adjourn the meeting at the specific time set in the motion. For example, the motion might be: “I move we adjourn this meeting at midnight.” It requires a simple majority vote.

**Motion to table.** This motion, if passed, requires discussion of the agenda item to be halted and the agenda item to be placed on “hold.” The motion can contain a specific time in which the item can come back to the body. “I move we table this item until our regular meeting in October.” Or the motion can contain no specific time for the return of the item, in which case a motion to take the item off the table and bring it back to the body will have to be taken at a future meeting. A motion to table an item (or to bring it back to the body) requires a simple majority vote.

**Motion to limit debate.** The most common form of this motion is to say, “I move the previous question” or “I move the question” or “I call the question” or sometimes someone simply shouts out “question.” As a practical matter, when a member calls out one of these phrases, the chair can expedite matters by treating it as a “request” rather than as a formal motion. The chair can simply inquire of the body, “any further discussion?” If no one wishes to have further discussion, then the chair can go right to the pending motion that is on the floor. However, if even one person wishes to discuss the pending motion further, then at that point, the chair should treat the call for the “question” as a formal motion, and proceed to it.

When a member of the body makes such a motion (“I move the previous question”), the member is really saying: “I’ve had enough debate. Let’s get on with the vote.” When such a motion is made, the chair should ask for a second, stop debate, and vote on the motion to limit debate. The motion to limit debate requires a two-thirds vote of the body.

**NOTE:** A motion to limit debate could include a time limit. For example: “I move we limit debate on this agenda item to 15 minutes.” Even in this format, the motion to limit debate requires a two-thirds vote of the body. A similar motion is a *motion to object to consideration of an item*. This motion is not debatable, and if passed, precludes the body from even considering an item on the agenda. It also requires a two-thirds vote.

## Majority and Super Majority Votes

In a democracy, a simple majority vote determines a question. A tie vote means the motion fails. So in a seven-member body, a vote of 4-3 passes the motion. A vote of 3-3 with one abstention means the motion fails. If one member is absent and the vote is 3-3, the motion still fails.

All motions require a simple majority, but there are a few exceptions. The exceptions come up when the body is taking an action which effectively cuts off the ability of a minority of the body to take an action or discuss an item. These extraordinary motions require a two-thirds majority (a super majority) to pass:

**Motion to limit debate.** Whether a member says, “I move the previous question,” or “I move the question,” or “I call the question,” or “I move to limit debate,” it all amounts to an attempt to cut off the ability of the minority to discuss an item, and it requires a two-thirds vote to pass.

**Motion to close nominations.** When choosing officers of the body (such as the chair), nominations are in order either from a nominating committee or from the floor of the body. A motion to close nominations effectively cuts off the right of the minority to nominate officers and it requires a two-thirds vote to pass.

**Motion to object to the consideration of a question.** Normally, such a motion is unnecessary since the objectionable item can be tabled or defeated straight up. However, when members of a body do not even want an item on the agenda to be considered, then such a motion is in order. It is not debatable, and it requires a two-thirds vote to pass.

**Motion to suspend the rules.** This motion is debatable, but requires a two-thirds vote to pass. If the body has its own rules of order, conduct or procedure, this motion allows the body to suspend the rules for a particular purpose. For example, the body (a private club) might have a rule prohibiting the attendance at meetings by non-club members. A motion to suspend the rules would be in order to allow a non-club member to attend a meeting of the club on a particular date or on a particular agenda item.

## Counting Votes

The matter of counting votes starts simple, but can become complicated.

Usually, it’s pretty easy to determine whether a particular motion passed or whether it was defeated. If a simple majority vote is needed to pass a motion, then one vote more than 50 percent of the body is required. For example, in a five-member body, if the vote is three in favor and two opposed, the motion passes. If it is two in favor and three opposed, the motion is defeated.

If a two-thirds majority vote is needed to pass a motion, then how many affirmative votes are required? The simple rule of thumb is to count the “no” votes and double that count to determine how many “yes” votes are needed to pass a particular motion. For example, in a seven-member body, if two members vote “no” then the “yes” vote of at least four members is required to achieve a two-thirds majority vote to pass the motion.

What about tie votes? In the event of a tie, the motion always fails since an affirmative vote is required to pass any motion. For example, in a five-member body, if the vote is two in favor and two opposed, with one member absent, the motion is defeated.

Vote counting starts to become complicated when members vote “abstain” or in the case of a written ballot, cast a blank (or unreadable) ballot. Do these votes count, and if so, how does one count them? The starting point is always to check the statutes.

In California, for example, for an action of a board of supervisors to be valid and binding, the action must be approved by a majority of the board. (California Government Code Section 25005.) Typically, this means three of the five members of the board must vote affirmatively in favor of the action. A vote of 2-1 would not be sufficient. A vote of 3-0 with two abstentions would be sufficient. In general law cities in

California, as another example, resolutions or orders for the payment of money and all ordinances require a recorded vote of the total members of the city council. (California Government Code Section 36936.) Cities with charters may prescribe their own vote requirements. Local elected officials are always well-advised to consult with their local agency counsel on how state law may affect the vote count.

After consulting state statutes, step number two is to check the rules of the body. If the rules of the body say that you count votes of “those present” then you treat abstentions one way. However, if the rules of the body say that you count the votes of those “present and voting,” then you treat abstentions a different way. And if the rules of the body are silent on the subject, then the general rule of thumb (and default rule) is that you count all votes that are “present and voting.”

Accordingly, under the “present and voting” system, you would **NOT** count abstention votes on the motion. Members who abstain are counted for purposes of determining quorum (they are “present”), but you treat the abstention votes on the motion as if they did not exist (they are not “voting”). On the other hand, if the rules of the body specifically say that you count votes of those “present” then you **DO** count abstention votes both in establishing the quorum and on the motion. In this event, the abstention votes act just like “no” votes.

*How does this work in practice?*

*Here are a few examples.*

Assume that a five-member city council is voting on a motion that requires a simple majority vote to pass, and assume further that the body has no specific rule on counting votes. Accordingly, the default rule kicks in and we count all votes of members that are “present and voting.” If the vote on the motion is 3-2, the motion passes. If the motion is 2-2 with one abstention, the motion fails.

Assume a five-member city council voting on a motion that requires a two-thirds majority vote to pass, and further assume that the body has no specific rule on counting votes. Again, the default rule applies. If the vote is 3-2, the motion fails for lack of a two-thirds majority. If the vote is 4-1, the motion passes with a clear two-thirds majority. A vote of three “yes,” one “no” and one “abstain” also results in passage of the motion. Once again, the abstention is counted only for the purpose of determining quorum, but on the actual vote on the motion, it is as if the abstention vote never existed — so an effective 3-1 vote is clearly a two-thirds majority vote.

Now, change the scenario slightly. Assume the same five-member city council voting on a motion that requires a two-thirds majority vote to pass, but now assume that the body **DOES** have a specific rule requiring a two-thirds vote of members “present.” Under this specific rule, we must count the members present not only for quorum but also for the motion. In this scenario, any abstention has the same force and effect as if it were a “no” vote. Accordingly, if the votes were three “yes,” one “no” and one “abstain,” then the motion fails. The abstention in this case is treated like a “no” vote and effective vote of 3-2 is not enough to pass two-thirds majority muster.

Now, exactly how does a member cast an “abstention” vote?

Any time a member votes “abstain” or says, “I abstain,” that is an abstention. However, if a member votes “present” that is also treated as an abstention (the member is essentially saying, “Count me for purposes of a quorum, but my vote on the issue is abstain.”) In fact, any manifestation of intention not to vote either “yes” or “no” on the pending motion may be treated by the chair as an abstention. If written ballots are cast, a blank or unreadable ballot is counted as an abstention as well.

Can a member vote “absent” or “count me as absent?” Interesting question. The ruling on this is up to the chair. The better approach is for the chair to count this as if the member had left his/her chair and is actually “absent.” That, of course, affects the quorum. However, the chair may also treat this as a vote to abstain, particularly if the person does not actually leave the dais.

## The Motion to Reconsider

There is a special and unique motion that requires a bit of explanation all by itself; the motion to reconsider. A tenet of parliamentary procedure is finality. After vigorous discussion, debate and a vote, there must be some closure to the issue. And so, after a vote is taken, the matter is deemed closed, subject only to reopening if a proper motion to consider is made and passed.

A motion to reconsider requires a majority vote to pass like other garden-variety motions, but there are two special rules that apply only to the motion to reconsider.

First, is the matter of timing. A motion to reconsider must be made at the meeting where the item was first voted upon. A motion to reconsider made at a later time is untimely. (The body, however, can always vote to suspend the rules and, by a two-thirds majority, allow a motion to reconsider to be made at another time.)

Second, a motion to reconsider may be made only by certain members of the body. Accordingly, a motion to reconsider may be made only by a member who voted in the majority on the original motion. If such a member has a change of heart, he or she may make the motion to reconsider (any other member of the body — including a member who voted in the minority on the original motion — may second the motion). If a member who voted in the minority seeks to make the motion to reconsider, it must be ruled out of order. The purpose of this rule is finality. If a member of minority could make a motion to reconsider, then the item could be brought back to the body again and again, which would defeat the purpose of finality.

If the motion to reconsider passes, then the original matter is back before the body, and a new original motion is in order. The matter may be discussed and debated as if it were on the floor for the first time.

## Courtesy and Decorum

The rules of order are meant to create an atmosphere where the members of the body and the members of the public can attend to business efficiently, fairly and with full participation. At the same time, it is up to the chair and the members of the body to maintain common courtesy and decorum. Unless the setting is very informal, it is always best for only one person at a time to have the floor, and it is always best for every speaker to be first recognized by the chair before proceeding to speak.

The chair should always ensure that debate and discussion of an agenda item focuses on the item and the policy in question, not the personalities of the members of the body. Debate on policy is healthy, debate on personalities is not. The chair has the right to cut off discussion that is too personal, is too loud, or is too crude.

Debate and discussion should be focused, but free and open. In the interest of time, the chair may, however, limit the time allotted to speakers, including members of the body.

Can a member of the body interrupt the speaker? The general rule is “no.” There are, however, exceptions. A speaker may be interrupted for the following reasons:

**Privilege.** The proper interruption would be, “point of privilege.” The chair would then ask the interrupter to “state your point.” Appropriate points of privilege relate to anything that would interfere with the normal comfort of the meeting. For example, the room may be too hot or too cold, or a blowing fan might interfere with a person’s ability to hear.

**Order.** The proper interruption would be, “point of order.” Again, the chair would ask the interrupter to “state your point.” Appropriate points of order relate to anything that would not be considered appropriate conduct of the meeting. For example, if the chair moved on to a vote on a motion that permits debate without allowing that discussion or debate.

**Appeal.** If the chair makes a ruling that a member of the body disagrees with, that member may appeal the ruling of the chair. If the motion is seconded, and after debate, if it passes by a simple majority vote, then the ruling of the chair is deemed reversed.

**Call for orders of the day.** This is simply another way of saying, “return to the agenda.” If a member believes that the body has drifted from the agreed-upon agenda, such a call may be made. It does not require a vote, and when the chair discovers that the agenda has not been followed, the chair simply reminds the body to return to the agenda item properly before them. If the chair fails to do so, the chair’s determination may be appealed.

**Withdraw a motion.** During debate and discussion of a motion, the maker of the motion on the floor, at any time, may interrupt a speaker to withdraw his or her motion from the floor. The motion is immediately deemed withdrawn, although the chair may ask the person who seconded the motion if he or she wishes to make the motion, and any other member may make the motion if properly recognized.

## Special Notes About Public Input

The rules outlined above will help make meetings very public-friendly. But in addition, and particularly for the chair, it is wise to remember three special rules that apply to each agenda item:

**Rule One:** Tell the public what the body will be doing.

**Rule Two:** Keep the public informed while the body is doing it.

**Rule Three:** When the body has acted, tell the public what the body did.



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## ROSENBERG'S RULES OF ORDER CHEAT SHEET

To:	You say:	Interrupt Speaker	Second Needed	Debatable	Amendable	Vote Needed
Adjourn	"I move that we adjourn" (Only needed prior to the end of the agenda)	No	Yes	No	No	Majority
Recess	"I move that we recess until..."	No	Yes	No	Yes	Majority
Complain about noise, room temp., etc.	"Point of privilege"	Yes	No	No	No	Chair Decides
Suspend further consideration of	"I move that we table it"	No	Yes	No	No	Majority
End debate	"I move the previous question" or "Call the question"	No	Yes	No	No	2/3
Postpone consideration of	"I move we postpone this matter until..."	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Majority
Introduce a motion	"I move that..." or "I move to..."	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Majority
Amend a motion	"I move that this motion be amended by..." (You can also ask for a friendly amendment, which is less formal; if mover and second concur, no vote needed)	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Majority
Refer to a Committee	"I move that the question be referred to a committee for more study"	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Majority

The above listed motions and points are listed in established order of precedence. When any one of them is pending, you may not introduce another that is listed below, but you may introduce another that is listed above it.

To:	You say:	Interrupt Speaker	Second Needed	Debatable	Amendable	Vote Needed
Object to procedure or personal affront	"Point of order"	Yes	No	No	No	Chair decides
Request information	"Point of information"	Yes	No	No	No	None
Object to considering some undiplomatic or improper matter	"I object to consideration of this question" (This would generally just be used if something is not on the agenda)	Yes	No	No	No	2/3
Reconsider something already disposed of	"I move we now (or later) reconsider our action relative to..." (Only a member of the prevailing side can make a motion to reconsider)	Yes	Yes	Only if original motion	No	Majority
Vote on a ruling by the Chair	"I appeal the Chair's decision"	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Majority

The motions, points and proposals listed above have no established order of preference; any of them may be introduced at any time except when meeting is considering one of the top three matters listed from the first chart (Motion to Adjourn, Recess or Point of Privilege).

**APPENDIX B**

**Signed Oath of Office**