

Role of the Presiding Officer

...according to Robert's Rules

Kacie Paxton, MMC, Borough Clerk

- 1. Know the rules of your organization – (Defend yourself against lawsuits)**
 - a. What type of meeting are you presiding over – legislative or quasi-judicial?
 - b. Do you vote?
 - c. What are your rules for quorum? What can you do without a quorum?
 - d. What are your rules for attendance? Can the presiding officer preside remotely?

- 2. Keep meetings on track - (Expedite business)**
 - a. Keeps discussion germane
 - b. Discourage repetition
 - c. Keep it rolling by eliminating side conversations
 - d. State, Restate, and State the Result

- 3. Maintain decorum at meetings (Preserve the rights of the minority)**
 - a. Determine who has the right to speak.
 - b. Be neutral and allow other members to speak first.
 - c. Be fair and impartial. Permit “pro” and “con” equal time. If you feel strongly about an issue and want to participate in debate with strong comments, pass the gavel.
 - d. Explain/clarify issues without bias.
 - e. Refrain from debate unless passing the gavel.
 - f. Facilitate instead of dictate.

- 4. Determine how formal you should be at the meeting.**
 - a. Consider the items on your agenda. Are they serious and/or controversial? Are there substantial financial risks to be considered?
 - b. Consider citizen comments and your audience.
 - c. Is it a special meeting for a specific purpose?
 - d. Discuss with staff when it is appropriate to relax the rules.

- 5. Communicate.**
 - a. Listen. Citizens want to be heard. Members want to be heard.
 - b. Observe. Watch for nonverbal cues.
 - c. Speak clearly, concisely, directly.

- 6. Prepare a script. (Or have your clerk prepare a script.)**
 - a. Be prepared, but also be prepared to be flexible. Remember Rule #5.
 - b. Prepare for rulings.

- 7. Other Presiding Officer duties according to Robert's:**
 - a. Sign documents for the organization.
 - b. Conduct ceremonial matters for the organization.
 - c. Serve as representative of the organization.
 - d. Make appointments for the organization.