



ONLINE DEMO

How to Use a Consent Agenda to Save Time and Focus on Critical Matters

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As a municipal clerk, your enemy is the clock. You have a slate full of responsibilities and live in a deadline-driven environment where you are perpetually working to pull documents, content, agendas, minutes, and other vital materials together before the next meeting or respond to citizen requests expeditiously. In working with clerks in municipalities of all sizes across the country, we've heard time and again over the years that one of their best kept time-saving secrets is to use a consent agenda. This agenda type helps them to ensure well-organized and efficient meetings and streamline routine meeting item approvals. We dug deeper into this topic to learn how more clerks can leverage this time-saving tactic.

What Are Consent Agendas?

A consent agenda (also known by Roberts Rules of Order as a “consent calendar”)



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discussion points into a single agenda item. In so doing, approved in one action, rather than through the filing of

Time-Saving Benefits of Consent Agendas



Think about the amount of time spent at each meeting reviewing and approving routine, recurring items that do not require debate or discussion. Now imagine grouping all those topics and approving them with one action. Depending on the agenda's length, clerks report saving as many as 30 minutes at each meeting with a consent agenda. Time they typically spend filing motions for routine items is reallocated to discussing more critical topics that require debate and team planning.

Consent Agenda Implementations

While local requirements and councils/boards typically determine if and how they will use consent agendas, municipalities that use consent agendas may adopt a rule of order that allows the use of the consent agenda process. Clerks who follow this process recommend the following procedures:

- All documentation associated with consent items must be provided to meeting participants in advance so that they can still make an informed vote on all grouped items. Team members *must* review the documentation before the meeting to ensure that they are informed of the issues that are to be passed as part of the consent group.
- Meeting members must be given an opportunity to ask associated questions—and have them answered—before the vote. Questions and answers should be shared with all meeting participants. Simple questions, clarifications, or short amounts of dialogue relative to a consent item may be discussed after the motion, but before approval. What is important is not to remove consent items entirely from the consent agenda for the sole purpose of answering a question, as this would undermine the efficiency of the consent



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However, if an item needs to be moved out of the consent

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- On meeting day, clerks include the consent agenda as part of the meeting



- At the start of the meeting, the meeting chair asks meeting attendees if anyone wants to discuss any items listed on the consent agenda.
- If it is determined that an item on the consent agenda requires discussion, it is removed from the consent portion and addressed individually. For future meetings in which there is no question or concern over the item, it may be placed back into the agenda's consent portion.
- An item from the consent agenda must be moved at the request of any team member if the individual wants to vote against the specific item—as the item no longer has the team's consolidated approval. Consent agendas may not be used to force the approval of items through a process that eliminates their review.
- The meeting chair reads aloud the remaining consent items and may move to adopt the consent agenda as a whole. A vote doesn't need to be taken on the consent agenda. Instead, the items may be approved, pending the absence of any objections.
- The clerk includes the full text of all resolutions and reports approved as part of the consent group in the minutes.

What Types of Items are Included in the Consent Portion of the Agenda?

The following types of items are sometimes included in the consent portion of meeting agendas:

- Topics of a routine/recurring nature
 - Procedural decisions
 - Noncontroversial issues that do not require debate or deliberation
- discussed for which the team has come to a consensus, but no official vote



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The following items may be well-suited as consent items:



- Financial reports or any other reports that are informational only and that do not require debate
- The mayor/county executive's report
- Individual program/department reports
- Committee appointments
- Staff appointments that require confirmation

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