

City of Whitewater Memorandum

To: City of Whitewater Common Council

From: City Attorney Jonathan K. McDonell

Date: September 25, 2023

Re: In re: Renewal of a Motion

I would like to provide a brief overview of the rules and considerations related to renewing defeated motions as outlined in Robert's Rules of Order. Whitewater City Ordinance 2.08.020(b) provides that the Common Council should conduct its meetings in accordance with Robert's Rules of Order. Understanding these procedures can help the Council make informed decisions about revisiting previously defeated motions in its meetings.

Renewing Defeated Motions within the Same Meeting: Robert's Rules of Order emphasizes the importance of dealing with motions once in a meeting and moving forward. If a motion has been defeated during a meeting, the way to reintroduce the same motion during that same meeting is to move to reconsider the motion. Importantly, only members who voted with the prevailing side—the side that won the vote—can make a motion to reconsider. This rule is in place to prevent repeated attempts to revisit the same issue within a single meeting. This procedure is provided for in Whitewater City Ordinance 2.08.060.

Renewing Defeated Motions at a Future Meeting: However, Robert's Rules allows for greater flexibility in bringing up a previously defeated motion at a future meeting. This process is referred to as "renewing the motion." Any member, at the appropriate time during a meeting, can reintroduce a motion that was previously defeated. It is essential to note that this is only applicable if the meeting is not part of a series of meetings making up a session and if the matter is on the agenda.

Considerations for Renewing Defeated Motions: Before deciding to renew a defeated motion, it is advisable to think carefully about the implications. The democratic process relies on the majority's decisions at properly called meetings as the decisions of the entire body. Continuously revisiting issues that have already been settled can be time-consuming, lead to endless processes, and potentially alienate members. Therefore, it is crucial to assess whether there have been significant changes or new information since the initial defeat of the motion.

Special Rule of Order for Renewing Defeated Motions: In some cases, organizations may choose to establish a special rule of order to address the renewal of defeated motions. For example, a rule could require a majority vote of the board to agree to renew any motion that was defeated within the previous year. This kind of rule can help streamline the process and prevent the constant revisiting of past decisions.

Conclusion: Renewing defeated motions is a permissible action in accordance with Robert's Rules of Order, but it should be done thoughtfully and with an understanding of the potential implications. It is important to balance the need to revisit decisions with the overall efficiency and effectiveness of Council meetings.