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4/9/2026



Parliamentary Procedures

SC Municipal Finance Officers,
Clerks and Treasurers Association
Spring Academy

Thursday, April 9, 2026
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Municipal Association of SC



Our goal is to avoid this...



What is Parliamentary Procedure?

Parliamentary Law:

- The general body of rules and precedents governing deliberative assemblies.
- Developed from British Parliament and refined in legislatures worldwide.

What is Parliamentary Procedure?

Parliamentary Procedure:

- Parliamentary law as applied in a specific organization.
- Incorporates the body's own bylaws, rules of order, and customs.

Robert's Rules of Order, right?

But Actually

SECTION 5-7-250. Council meetings; rules and procedures for meetings; freedom of information; emergency ordinances.

- a) The council, after public notice shall meet regularly at least once in every month at such times and places as the council may prescribe by rule. Special meetings may be held on the call of the mayor or of a majority of the members.

But Actually

- b) The council **shall determine its own rules and order of business** and shall provide for keeping minutes of its proceedings which shall be a public record.
- c) **Procedures for meetings** of a municipal governing body shall not conflict with the provisions of the general laws of the state with regard to freedom of information.

And Maybe



7 Principles - Rules of Procedure

1. The board must act as a body.
2. The board should conduct its business orderly and efficiently.
3. The board must act by at least a majority.
4. Every member should have an equal opportunity to participate.

7 Principles - Rules of Procedure

5. Rules of procedure should be followed consistently and uniformly.
6. Decisions should be based on the merits, not on manipulation of the rules.
7. Rules should help, not hinder.

www.masc.sc/sites/default/files/uploads/administration/conductingmtgshndbk.pdf

7 Core Questions for Rules of Procedure

1. Agenda
2. Quorum
3. Motions
4. Debate
5. Voting
6. Postponing / Reviving Matters
7. Managing Public Input

Core Question 1: Agenda

- Council responsible
- In practice, best to deligate to one person
- How to add an item to the agenda?
- Approve agenda?

- www.masc.sc/uptown/03-2024/avoid-adopting-agenda-action-item

Core Question 2: Quorum

- Defined as “majority of membership,” which means more than ½ of total seats.
- What if a member temporarily steps out?
- What about vacancies?

- www.masc.sc/uptown/03-2020/handling-quorums-correctly

Core Question 2: Quorum *Related Question of "Majority"*

A motion is approved by majority vote. Consider different types of majority:

- **Simple:** A majority of those present at a meeting.
- **Positive:** A majority of the total membership of the body, whether they are present or not.

In the absence of an applicable law or rule, a simple majority can act.

Core Question 3: Motions *Framework and Issues*

- Only one substantive (main) motion may be pending at a time. Multiple secondary or procedural motions may be pending at the same time.
- Do you require a motion before any discussion, or do you allow discussion prior to a motion being made?
- Are seconds to motions always required?
- Are all motions debatable?
- When is a motion out of order?

Core Question 3: Motions *Making a Motion*

First: A member makes a motion.

- The moving member must first be recognized by chair. This is what it means to “have the floor.”
- When a motion is poorly worded, the chair has the option to assist in clarifying. Ordinarily, motions should be in writing to avoid confusion. In any event, make sure to state the motion carefully.
- Unless there is a contrary local rule, the chair can make motion. He or she should be cautious in doing so.

Core Question 3: Motions *Making a Motion*



“Madam Mayor”

“I’d like to make a motion”

“I **move** approval of the resolution”

“Yes, Councilman Knight”

“You have the floor”

Core Question 3: Motions *Seconding a Motion*

Second: A member seconds the motion.

- Seconding a motion implies only that a member wishes to hear discussion. Why is there a second?
- No second...the motion dies. This is procedurally different from voting down a motion.
- Some items do not require a second – point of order, point of information, committee recommendations, and others.
- Member may second a motion without recognition by the chair.

Core Question 3: Motions *Restating a Motion*

Third: The chair restates the motion.

- The chair's restatement formally places the motion for action before the members.
- The chair may (and often should) restate the motion during debate.
- The chair may (and often should) remind the body if it strays from the currently pending question.
- The body is required to do something with the motion before moving to the next item.

Core Question 3: Motions

Main Motions

- A main motion brings a substantive question to the body for consideration.
- Main motions are the foundation of council action; all other motions relate to them.
- Only one main motion may be pending at a time.
- A main motion requires a second, is debatable, and may be amended.
- Example: A motion to adopt an ordinance or approve a contract.



Core Question 3: Motions

Secondary Motions

A secondary motion is one made while a main motion is pending, to affect how the body considers or handles it.

- Subsidiary motions apply directly to the main motion (e.g., amend, postpone, refer, close debate).
- Privileged motions are urgent matters not related to the main motion (e.g., recess, adjourn, questions of privilege).
- Incidental motions arise out of the process itself and may be thought of as raising procedural questions (e.g., point of order, appeal, suspend rules).
- Motions that bring a question back revisit previously disposed matters (e.g., reconsider, rescind, take from the table).



Core Question 3: Motions *The Robert's Rules Approach*



Core Question 3: Motions *The Robert's Rules Approach*

- All main motions and secondary motions have a number or rank.
- While a main motion is pending, higher ranking motions may be made but lower ranking motions are “Out of Order.”
- There are 13 motions with ranks.

Core Question 3: Motions *The Robert's Rules Approach*

Main motions and secondary motions have a rank.

Think of climbing up and down a ladder:

- Higher on the ladder is IN ORDER.
- Lower on the ladder is OUT OF ORDER.

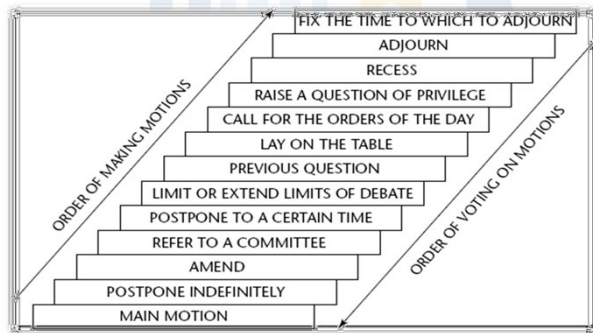
Higher ranking motions must be disposed of before a lower ranking motion is in order.

Core Question 3: Motions *The Robert's Rules Approach*

- | | |
|--|--------------------------------------|
| 1. Fix the Time to Which to Adjourn | 8. Limit or Extend Limits of Debate |
| 2. Adjourn | 9. Postpone to a Time Certain |
| 3. Recess | 10. Commit or Refer |
| 4. Raise a Question of Privilege | 11. Amend (Primary or Secondary) |
| 5. Call for the Orders of the Day | 12. Postpone Indefinitely |
| 6. Lay on the Table | 13. Main Motion |
| 7. Previous Question | |

Core Question 3: Motions

The Robert's Rules Approach



Core Question 3: Motions

Motion to Amend

Amendments change how the main motion will read before it is finally subjected to a vote.

Three basic types of amendments:

- Add, strike, or substitute words, phrases, or entire sections.

Layers of amendment allowed:

- One amendment to the main motion (primary amendment).
- One amendment to that amendment (secondary amendment).
- *No further amendments beyond that.*

Requirements for amendments:

- Must relate directly to the pending motion (must be **germane**).
- Only one question can be pending at a time (motion → amendment → amendment to amendment).

Core Question 3: Motions *Motion to Amend*

A motion to amend should not have as its intent a reversal of the main motion. For example, if the main motion is to “approve a requested rezoning,” it is not a proper motion to submit an amendment to “not approve a requested rezoning.”

Core Question 3: Motions *Closing Debate*

- A motion for the **previous question**, or “calling the question,” ends debate and moves immediately to a vote on the pending motion(s).
- It may be made only when no one else has the floor.
- It is not debatable and cannot be amended, but it does require a second and a 2/3 vote to adopt.
- If adopted, debate ends and the body votes immediately; if defeated, debate continues.

Core Question 3: Motions *Point of Order or Information*

- A **point of order** challenges a rules violation, may interrupt if urgent, is ruled on by the chair, is not debatable, and needs no second.
- A **point of information** requests factual clarification, cannot debate, is raised when the speaker yields (or urgently with the chair's permission), and is answered by the chair.

Core Question 3: Motions *Motion to Suspend the Rules*

- A **motion to suspend the rules** allows the body to set aside its normal parliamentary rules for a specific situation. It cannot be used to suspend bylaws, local ordinances, state statutes, or constitutional requirements. It applies only to rules of procedure adopted by the body itself.
- It requires a second, is not debatable, and requires a 2/3 vote to approve. It applies only to the immediate situation and does not create precedent.
- Examples of proper use:
 - Allow a non-member (e.g., citizen, staff, or attorney) to speak in debate.
 - Extend or shorten speaking time limits.
 - Rearrange the order of the agenda.
 - Take up a matter out of its usual sequence.

Core Question 4: Debate

- The maker of the motion is allowed to speak first. When a motion had been made and seconded, an effective chair will ask something like, “Would you like to explain why you support the matter you have moved?”
- The member who made the motion should not speak against the motion, but neither the member who made the motion nor the member who seconded it are required to vote in favor of the motion.

Core Question 5: Voting

- Chair repeats the full motion before voting.
- Record recusals and abstentions in the minutes.
- Tie vote defeats the motion.
- Voting may occur by unanimous consent, voice vote, show of hands, or roll call. Remember that FOIA requires the minutes to contain “the substance of all matters proposed, discussed or decided and, at the request of any member, a record, by an individual member, of any votes taken.”

Core Question 5: Voting

General or Unanimous Consent.

- Used properly, this voting method improves efficiency.
- Example: “If no objection, the minutes are approved.”
- If a member objects, the chair restates the motion and follows normal procedures.

Core Question 5: Voting *Abstention*

- Members may abstain unless local rules say otherwise.
- **Recusal**: member cannot vote; **Abstention**: member could vote but chooses not to.
- Abstentions are noted but not counted as “yes” or “no.”
- Motions usually pass if a majority of members **present and voting** vote in favor.
- In South Carolina, abstaining members count toward quorum; recused members do not.

Core Question 5: Voting *Recusal*

RECUSAL STATEMENT

Member Name: _____

Meeting Date: _____

Agenda Item: Section _____ Number: _____

Topic: _____

The Ethics Act, SC Code §§11-700, provides that no public official may knowingly use his office to obtain an economic interest for himself, a family member of his immediate family, an individual with whom he is associated, or a business with which he is associated. No public official may make, participate in making, or influence a governmental decision in which he or any such person or business has an economic interest. Failure to recuse oneself from an issue in which there is or may be conflict of interest is the sole responsibility of the council member. (1991 Op. Att. Gen. No. 94-17.) A written statement describing the matter requiring action and the nature of the potential conflict of interest is required.

Justification to Recuse:
 Professionally employed by or under contract with principal
 Owns or has vested interest in principal or property
 Other: _____

Date: _____ Member

Approved by Parliamentarian: _____

www.masc.sc/uptown/05-2025/ethics-rules-conflicts-interest-and-recusals



Core Question 5: Voting *Tie Votes*

- For advisory matters (e.g., planning commission recommendations), a tie or failed vote is reported as *“no recommendation.”*
- Normally, a tie vote defeats the motion.
- Avoid framing motions to manipulate outcomes; motions should be worded affirmatively to change the status quo.



Core Question 6: Postponing and Reviving Matters

These are technically motions, often misused, but important to consider separately.

Postpone to a certain time: Delays debate to a specific time; discussion will resume.

Postpone indefinitely: Kills the main motion without a direct vote; if adopted, motion fails for the session.

Lay on the table: Temporarily sets aside a motion for urgent business; dies if not taken up again; not for postponing.

Core Question 6: Postponing and Reviving Matters

- **Take from the table**: Revives a motion laid aside earlier in the same meeting; must act before adjournment; majority vote.
- **Reconsider**: Reopens a motion already voted on; only by someone on the winning side; protects against hasty decisions; majority vote.
- **Rescind/Repeal**: Cancels a previously adopted motion; any member may move.

Core Question 7: Public Input *Public Hearing Protocols*

- State law requires public hearings for some matters (e.g., budgets, rezoning) to ensure due process.
- Public hearings let the public share views and the body gather information, not debate.
- Procedures must be applied consistently and fairly.



Core Question 7: Public Input *Public Hearing Protocols*

- Citizens address remarks to the Chair, not staff or members.
- Board should not debate speakers; chair may ask clarifying questions.
- Set and enforce clear, consistent time limits for each speaker.
- Typical order: applicant presentation → support → opposition → applicant rebuttal.



Core Question 7: Public Input
Public Hearing Protocols

- Chair rules out personal attacks or irrelevant remarks.
- Prepare for accusations; maintain firm but respectful tone.
- Include protocols in agenda; chair reads ground rules at start (*or use pre-recorded video*).

Core Question 7: Public Input
Optional Public Comment Periods

- State law **does not** require public comment periods at city/town meetings.
- Many municipalities allow them to promote transparency and citizen engagement.
- If allowed, rules should set time limits, civility, and relevancy.
- www.masc.sc/uptown/01-2026/public-comment-periods-need-rules-and-fairness

Questions and Comments?

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