THE UNIVERSITY of TENNESSEE
MUNICIPAL TECHNICAL ADVISORY SERVICE

In cooperation with the Tennessee Municipal League

TECHNICAL bulletin

July 16, 2008

HOW TO CONDUCT A CITY COUNCIL MEETING BASED ON ROBERT'S RULES OF ORDER

Reviewed by Melissa Ashburn, Legal Consultant

ORDER OF BUSINESS

1. **Mayor:** *The council will come to order.* (The mayor determines if there is a quorum present. The recorder enters in the minutes the names of those present.)
2. *The recorder will read the minutes of the last meeting.* The minutes are read. *Are there any corrections to the minutes?* Corrections are suggested without a motion or vote. *If there are no* (further) *corrections, the minutes stand approved as read* (as corrected).
3. *The next order of business is the presentation of petitions, memorials, and remonstrances.* Usually the recorder has such matters ready to present. If there is a delegation of citizens, the mayor should invite the group to present any matters it wishes to the council.
4. *We will have the report of the...officers* (such as a financial report by the recorder), *standing committees, and special committees.* A motion is made to adopt the financial report. If the committee report contains a recommendation, the reporting member (usually the chairman of the committee) moves that the recommendation be adopted. Otherwise, the report is filed without action.
5. *Is there any unfinished business* (second and third reading of ordinances)? Action is completed on any business not settled when last meeting was adjourned (see *Handling Main Motions*).
6. After the unfinished business...*Is there any new business* (ordinances on first reading, regulations, resolutions)?
   a. Any councilmember may introduce an ordinance, resolution, or regulation.
   b. Ordinances on first reading are usually read by caption only, with the introducer explaining the contents.
   c. Ordinances on second reading usually are read by caption only. (Charters or by-laws of some municipalities prohibit the amendment of certain ordinances after second reading.)
   d. Ordinances on third reading should be read in full. Any changes or amendments are offered at this time. By charter, some cities are not required to pass ordinances on three readings. These steps are not applicable in such instances. Each new ordinance, regulation, or resolution is read, discussed, adopted, tabled, referred to a committee, or otherwise disposed of before the next one is proposed.
7. After all the business is completed...*Are there any announcements?*
8. *If there is nothing further, the meeting will stand adjourned.* If no business is presented...*The meeting is adjourned.* If the council wishes to adjourn the meeting before all business is completed, the meeting must be adjourned by motion.

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HANDLING THE MOTIONS

1. Councilmember addresses the chair. *Mr./Madam Mayor.*
2. Mayor recognizes speaker: *Councilmember _____.*
3. **Councilmember:** *I move the adoption of this ordinance on first reading.*
4. **Another councilmember:** *I second the motion.*
5. **Mayor:** *The motion has been made by _____ and seconded that...Is there any discussion?* Discussion must be addressed to the mayor. Motion may be changed by amendment. If the council does not wish to take final action on the motion, it may dispose of the motion in some other way. [1]
6. *Does any person in the audience wish to be heard on this subject?* (Interested persons come forward.)
7. When the discussion ends...*If there is no more discussion* (silence is consent), *all in favor, please say "aye." All opposed, "no."* With dissenting votes, the mayor requests roll call. The recorder calls the roll and records the vote.
8. *The "ayes"* (or "nos") *have it. The motion is carried* (or defeated). If a question is introduced that consists of two or more independent propositions, a member may move that the question be divided into more than one proposition. Thus, one or more of the propositions may be adopted, others rejected.

AMENDMENTS TO CHANGE MOTIONS

1. After a main motion is made and seconded, a councilmember may say: *I move to amend the ordinance by...*and striking out, inserting, or substituting a word, phrase, sentence, or paragraph.
2. **Another member:** *I second the motion to amend.*
3. **Mayor:** *It has been proposed to amend Ordinance _____ to read as follows...* The mayor states the main motion and amendment so it is understood how the amendment changes in the motion. The amendment changes the motion. The amendment is handled in the same way as a main motion, with...
4. **Discussion:** *Is there any discussion?*
5. **Question:** *If there is no further discussion, the amendment is...*
6. **Vote:** *All in favor of the amendment...*The mayor announces the outcome: *The amendment is carried* (or defeated). *The motion now before the house is...*(the motion plus the amendment, if carried).

KEEPING COUNCIL MINUTES

Record what is done, not what is said. Keep the notes together in a special notebook.

Organize notes into clear, concise statements and record them in a permanent minute book to be read at the next meeting. Record each motion as a separate paragraph.

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[1] If there is a tie vote of council, the mayor votes to break the tie. (This is the usual procedure. Some charters permit the mayor to vote on all questions; some on no questions.) If the mayor isn't permitted to vote, or if permitted to vote in all cases and his/her vote results in a tie, the motion is lost. A majority vote is sufficient unless, by charter, certain items require more than a majority.

July 16, 2008

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The minutes should be read and approved by the council at the next regular or adjourned meeting.

Ordinances should be kept in an ordinance book and resolutions in a resolution book. Both ordinances and resolutions should be numbered consecutively. If separate books are kept for ordinances and resolutions, the minutes need show only a caption and space left for the number assigned when passed on final reading. Minutes should show book and page number where the ordinance/resolution is recorded.

THE RECORDER'S JOB

1. The recorder keeps an accurate record of each meeting, including in the minutes:
   - The kind of meeting (regular, special, or adjourned);
   - The date, hour, and place of meeting;
   - The name and title of officer presiding and the presence of quorum;
   - Approval of the previous minutes;
   - A record of reports;
   - A record of each main motion (unless it is withdrawn) with the name of person who made the motion;
   - A record of points of order and appeals;
   - A record of all the other motions (unless withdrawn);
   - A record of roll calls;
   - The time of adjournment;
   - Signatures of the recorder and mayor.
2. The recorder records the presence and absence of councilmembers.
3. The recorder keeps a copy of the charter, with amendments properly entered.
4. The recorder keeps a record of all committees.
5. The recorder provides to the mayor before each meeting a list of pending and potential business.
6. The recorder notifies the councilmembers that special meetings are called.

THE MAYOR'S DUTIES

1. The mayor calls the meeting to order.
2. The mayor keeps the meeting to its order of business.
3. The mayor handles the discussion in an orderly way by:
   - giving councilmembers who wish a chance to speak;
   - permitting audience participation at the appropriate times;
   - tactfully keeping all speakers to the rules of order, and to the question; and
   - trying to give pro and con speakers alternating chances to speak.
4. The mayor does not enter into discussion, except to explain matters that he/she is sponsoring.
5. The mayor clearly states each motion before it is discussed, and before it is voted upon. The mayor may suggest motions (such as for adjournment), but not make them.
6. The mayor puts motions to a vote and announces the outcome. He or she may vote in case of a tie (unless prohibited by charter).
7. The mayor informs the council of parliamentary procedure.
8. The mayor appoints committees when he/she is authorized to do so.

July 16, 2008

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FINAL FORM OF MINUTES OF COUNCIL MEETING

The final council minutes:

- should be typewritten or written legibly in permanent ink;
- should have a wide margin for corrections;
- should not be defaced. Corrections should be made by bracketing the erroneous portions and stating corrections in the wide margin;
- should be kept in book form. If in longhand, a bound book should be used; if typewritten, use a loose-leaf, lock minute book. If using the latter, number each page; and
- should be signed, when approved, by the recorder and mayor.

RULES FOR HANDLING MOTIONS

Types of Motions	Order of Handling	Must Be Seconded	Can Be Discussed	Can Be Amended	Vote Required	Vote Can Be Reconsidered
MAIN MOTION						
To present a proposal to assembly	Cannot be made if any other motion is pending	Yes	Yes	Yes	Majority	Yes
SUBSIDIARY MOTIONS						
To postpone indefinitely action on a motion	Has precedence over above motion	Yes	Yes	No	Majority	Affirmative vote only
To amend (improve) a main motion	Has precedence over above motions	Yes	Yes	Yes, but only once	Majority	Yes
To refer a motion to committee (for special consideration)	Has precedence over above motions	Yes	Yes	Yes	Majority	Yes
To postpone definitely (to a certain time) action on a motion	Has precedence over above motions	Yes	Yes	Yes	Majority	Yes
To limit the discussion to a certain time	Has precedence over above motions	Yes	No	Yes	2/3	Yes
To call for a vote (to end discussion at once and vote)	Has precedence over above motions	Yes	No	No	2/3	No
To table a motion (to lay it aside until later)	Has precedence over above motions	Yes	No	No	Majority	No
INCIDENTAL MOTIONS						
To suspend a rule temporarily (e.g., to change the order of business)	No	Yes	No	No	2/3	No
To withdraw or modify a motion (to prevent a vote or inclusion in minutes)[i]	These motions have precedence over motion to which they pertain	No	No	No	Majority	Negative vote only
To rise to a point of order (to enforce rules or program)[ii]		No	No	No	No vote, chairperson rules	No
To appeal from the decision of the mayor (must be made immediately)		Yes	Yes*	No	Majority	Yes
PRIVILEGED MOTIONS						
To call for orders of the day (to keep the meeting to the program or the order of business)[ii]	Has precedence over above motions	No	No	No	No vote required[iii]	No
Questions of privilege (to bring up an urgent matter such as noise, discomfort, etc.	Has precedence over above motions	No	No	No	Majority	No
To take recess	Has precedence over above motions	Yes	Yes**	Yes	Majority	No
To adjourn	Has precedence over above motions	Yes	No	No	Majority	No
To set next meeting time	Has precedence over above motions	Yes	Yes**	As to time & place	Majority	Yes
UNCLASSIFIED MOTIONS						
To make a motion from the table (to bring up a tabled motion for consideration)[iv]	Cannot be made if any other motion is pending	Yes	No	No	Majority	No
To reconsider (to bring up discussion and obtain a vote on a previously decided motion)[v]		Yes	Yes*	No	Majority	No
To rescind (repeal a decision on a motion)[vi]		Yes	Yes*	No	Majority or 2/3	Yes

[i] The mover may request to withdraw or modify his/her motion without the consent of anyone before the motion has been put to council for consideration. When the motion is before the council and if there is no objection from a member, the mayor announces that the motion is withdrawn or modified. If anyone objects, the request is put to a vote.

[ii] A member may interrupt the speaker who has the floor to rise to a point of order or appeal, to call for orders of the day, or to raise a question of privilege.

[iii] Orders of the day may be changed by a motion to suspend the rules (see Incidental Motions).

[iv] A motion can be taken from the table during the meeting when it was tabled or the next meeting.

[v] A motion to reconsider may be made only by those who voted on the prevailing side. A motion to reconsider must be made during the meeting when it was decided, or on the next succeeding day if the meeting is carried over.

[vi] It is impossible to rescind any action taken as the result of a motion, but the unexecuted part may be rescinded. Notice must be given one meeting before the voter is taken. If voted on immediately, a two-thirds vote to rescind is necessary.

* Yes, when motion is debatable.

** Yes, if no motion is pending.

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