

**Jurassic Parliament** Mastering meetings using Robert's Rules

## Great Town Meetings

Ann G. Macfarlane, Professional Registered Parliamentarian  
Jurassic Parliament

Town of Boulder, Utah  
By videoconference  
Tuesday, September 19, 2023

1

**Jurassic Parliament** Mastering meetings using Robert's Rules

## Our topics

- I. Preparing for the meeting
- II. At the meeting
- III. Meeting discussion, Point of Order, Appeal
- IV. How to do this?
- V. Motions and Amendments
- VI. Who's in charge?
- VII. Citizen advisory committee pitfalls
- VIII. The right kind of control
- IX. Public comment
- X. Conclusion

2

**Jurassic Parliament** Mastering meetings using Robert's Rules

## I. Preparing for the meeting

### Why are we here?

To invigorate you to run effective meetings  
to serve your community

3

**Jurassic Parliament** Mastering meetings using Robert's Rules

## After taking this training you will be able to:

1. Apply the principle that the authority of the group is more important than any single individual
2. Follow best practices for discussion.
3. Respond to disorder or difficult people.
4. Make Motions and Amendments.
5. Avoid common citizen advisory committee pitfalls.
6. Run effective public comment sessions.

4

**Jurassic Parliament** Mastering meetings using Robert's Rules

## Disclaimer

The material contained in this presentation is based upon the principles and practices of parliamentary procedure. I am not an attorney and nothing in this presentation constitutes legal advice.

5

**Jurassic Parliament** Mastering meetings using Robert's Rules

## Town government

- Your town is governed by a Council consisting of five members with equal standing.
- One member is elected Mayor.
- The Mayor has the right to make motions, second them, take part in discussion, and vote.
- We recommend that the Mayor speak last, and refrain from making motions. These are Jurassic Parliament suggestions, not in Robert's Rules.

6

**Jurassic Parliament** Mastering meetings using Robert's Rules

---

## Planning Commission

- Your Planning Commission plays a significant role in your government.
- It is subordinate to the Town Council.

7

7

**Jurassic Parliament** Mastering meetings using Robert's Rules

---

## Staff

- You have three staff members at present:
  - Council Clerk
  - Planning Commission Clerk
  - Zoning Administrator
- Much of the work of the Town is done by volunteers.
  - Park Committee
  - Cemetery Committee
  - Others?

8

8

**Jurassic Parliament** Mastering meetings using Robert's Rules

---

## Preparing for meetings

- It is essential that staff prepare an agenda packet before each Town Council and Planning Commission meeting, so that participants have the material that they are going to consider in a timely fashion.
- A week is desirable, but if that is not possible, materials should be sent out at least 3 business days before the meeting.
- Members have the duty of reading the packet in advance!

9

9

**Jurassic Parliament** Mastering meetings using Robert's Rules

---

## Contents?

- How to join the meeting
- Draft agenda for the meeting
- Draft minutes of the last meeting and of any special meetings
- Reports on topics included in the agenda
- Reference materials
- Written public comments received before the deadline.

10

10

**Jurassic Parliament** Mastering meetings using Robert's Rules

---

## Email and version control

- The clerks have the heavy responsibility of managing email notifications and version control of records.
- You must develop an effective archive system for emails.
- This may also include texts, if they are sent on town business.
- It is essential to name each file with a distinctive title, so you know what version is being considered.

11

11

**Jurassic Parliament** Mastering meetings using Robert's Rules

---

## Utah Municipal Clerks Association

- **Certified Records Officer**
- Each city or town in the State of Utah is required to have a Certified Records Officer. Each officer must certify yearly with the State Archives Division. The Utah League of Cities and Towns hosts a yearly training/testing session for us at the Fall League meetings in Salt Lake. Certification may also be done online at the State Archives website.
- **Online Records Officer Certification**
- If you have questions about becoming a Certified Records Officer, or online training, and certification, you can call the State Archives at 801-531-3863 or click the link [Online Records Officer Certification](#).
- The State Archives provides an online records officer training workshop. Click the link to the [State Records Training Videos](#).
- Visit [www.umca.org](http://www.umca.org) for more.

12

12

## Agenda

- Prepared by leadership, but within control of council (subject to notice requirements, of course).
- Robert's Rules says that if you follow the standard "Order of Business," you don't need to vote to adopt an agenda.
- However, many bodies do vote. Takes a majority vote to adopt, and a 2/3 vote to change later in the meeting.

13

13

## Simplified Standard Order of Business

- Approval of minutes
- Officers' remarks and reports
- Committee reports
- Unfinished business (not "old" business)
- New business (if your town includes this)

14

14

*The City Council desires to provide adequate time for administration and staff analysis, fact finding, and preparation.*

*Except in extraordinary or unusual circumstances, all items that are not routine in nature shall, when presented, include a completed Council agenda bill.*

City of SeaTac Administrative Procedures

15

15

## Regular agenda/consent agenda

**Question:** *What's the difference between the regular agenda and the consent agenda?*

- The regular agenda lays out the items to be taken up at a particular meeting.
- It follows your "Order of Business."
- The agenda may include, as a single item, "Adoption of the consent agenda."

16

16

## Consent agenda

- A "consent agenda" lists items that are expected not to be controversial.
- If any member requests that an item be removed from the consent agenda, it is done on request.
- The item is then placed at its proper place in the regular agenda.
- Some cities create a line item to process removed items right after the consent agenda.

17

17

## Consent agenda

- The consent agenda CANNOT BE DISCUSSED OR DEBATED.
- It is adopted with a single vote.
- The minutes must list all the items that were approved.

18

18

## Don't include reports in consent agenda

- It is fine to include vouchers and minutes on the consent agenda.
- The consent agenda should NOT include informational financial reports or reports from advisory or outside bodies.
- These can be noted as "received for filing."

19

19

## WHY?

- A vote to APPROVE, ADOPT or ACCEPT a report means that the body accepts the report and its recommendations in their entirety.

20

20

## Study sessions

- Many bodies hold "study sessions," either as a separate meeting, or part of a regular meeting.
- This is a more relaxed approach, in which you can explore possibilities and share information. You will not take action.
- Discussion is more informal. However, the chair must make sure that no one dominates.

21

21

## Sample items

- In-depth exploration of complex issues.
- Citizen presentations
- Q&A between board members and staff
- Information sharing about board member concerns
- Recommendations from board to staff regarding items to present at future meetings.

22

22

## II. At the meeting

23

23

## Quorum

- The "quorum" is the minimum number of voting members who must be present for business to be done.
- For local governments, it is usually a majority (more than half) of the fixed positions on the council.
- "Quorum" is different from "votes cast."
- If you lose your quorum, you can't do business.

24

24

## Call meeting to order

- Sit in the chair reserved for the person running the meeting.
- Rap the gavel lightly one time and announce, "This meeting of the Dinodee Town Council is called to order."
- Ask the clerk to take the roll.
- Announce that a quorum is present (or not).

25

25

## Quorum

- The "quorum" is the minimum number of voting members who must be present for business to be done.
- For local governments, it is usually a majority (more than half) of the fixed positions on the council.
- "Quorum" is different from "votes cast."
- If you lose your quorum, you can't do business.

26

26

## Serial meeting

- Local government bodies must not create a "walking quorum" or a "serial meeting."
- When members of the body talk or email with each other outside of meetings, such that a quorum is discussing the body's business, the Open & Public Meetings Act has been violated.
- You can talk to other people, as long as the number is less than a quorum.

27

27

## One-way communication

- Staff may send emails to all council or commission members.
- However, it is critical that the members DO NOT USE "reply all," since this can lead to a serial meeting.
- Staff, or a single member, may not email or contact each member of the body individually on a given topic and collect their responses, unless it is a purely administrative matter (what time to meet, etc.)

28

28

## Purpose of minutes

According to Robert's Rules, the purpose of minutes is:

**to record the actions taken  
by the body.**

Minutes record what is DONE, not what is SAID.

29

29

## Meeting minutes

- We recommend "action" or "summary" minutes, not detailed minutes.
- Should record what is done, not what is said.
- For certain topics such as conflict of interest, main points made should be included.
- Do not include "he said, she said." This is a waste of time and effort and makes minutes less useful.

30

### Detailed minutes are a bad idea because...

- It violates the fundamental purpose of minutes.
- It can create liability for the organization or individuals in case of a lawsuit.
- It tends to personalize and politicize the discussion.
- It can intimidate participants, preventing them from speaking freely.
- It absorbs too much staff time and takes the group's time.
- It makes it harder to find the actions taken.

31

31

### For the planning commission...

- It is clear that minutes of your planning commission meetings serve an administrative purpose.
- You need more detail than Robert's Rules requires.
- Even so, we suggest that you strive to capture these in "summary" form.
- List conclusions and future actions needed, by name when appropriate.
- Avoid recording opinions.

32

32

### Guidelines for Meeting Minutes in Local Government



Meeting minutes recording the actions taken by your council or board are a fundamental part of the meeting process. These are our guidelines for local government meeting minutes. They refer to ordinary business and work or study meetings of councils, boards and committees. Public hearings are governed by different rules.

#### ▶ WHAT KIND OF MINUTES?

34

33

### III. Meeting discussion, Point of Order, and Appeal

34

### Principle of Equality

All members have equal rights, privileges and obligations.

35

35

### Key Point

Discussion in council meetings IS NOT A CONVERSATION. It is DEBATE and has its own rules.

36

36

## Fundamental guideline

**No one may speak a second time until everyone who wishes to do so has spoken once.**

37

37

## Why don't we follow this?

- Councils tend to discuss their affairs in conversational mode.
- In conversations, dominant people tend to dominate.
- Agreeable people tend to let them.
- Must have a structure to make sure that everyone has an equal chance to speak.
- This is both fair and efficient.

38

38

## Equity and inclusion

- This rule is also the best way to ensure that each person has an equal voice.
- The system is formal but inclusive.
- It will make for robust discussion and advance your equity goals.

39

39



Point of Order  
*flying dinosaur*

40

## Point of Order *flying dinosaur*

- When ANOTHER MEMBER breaks one of the rules, a member may make a POINT OF ORDER.
- Chair rules on the point.

41

41

## Point of Order

- A motion claiming that a procedural mistake has been made.
- According to Robert, can be made only by a member.
- We recommend that key staff be authorized also.
- Public may not raise a Point of Order.

42

42

## Process Point of Order

1. Member: *Point of Order!*
2. Chair: *State your point.*
3. Member: *That comment breaks our rules of decorum.*
4. Chair: *The point is well taken. Members may not use this term.*

43

43

## Point of Order

- You can make this at any time, except during voting.
- Do not have to be recognized.
- May interrupt a speaker if necessary.
- Must be timely – made at the time of the offense.

44

44

## Language tip

- Use the “third person” to keep things neutral and lessen conflict.
- Note that the chair states the general rule.
- The chair is speaking on behalf of the rules of procedure.
- DO NOT SAY “You are out of order” or “You made a mistake.”

45

45

## If someone is confused...

- If a councilmember has trouble explaining what the Point of Order is about, you can ask:

*What rule has been broken?*

46

46

## When in doubt, ask the group!

- Chair can always ask the group to decide if a Point of Order is correct (“well-taken”) or not.

47

47

Member A: *That statement is just a bunch of baloney!*

Member B: *Point of Order!*

Chair: *State your point.*

Member B: *The word “baloney” is insulting!*

Chair: *The chair is in doubt and will ask the group to decide.*

48

48



Chair: *All those who believe that the word "baloney" is insulting, say "aye."*

Members in favor: *Aye!*

Chair: *All those who believe it is not insulting, say "no!"*

Members opposed: *No!*

Chair: *The ayes have it, the word baloney is insulting and may not be used, OR The noes have it, the word baloney is not insulting and may be used.*

49

49

## Chair doesn't have to say "Point of Order"

- The chair has the duty of maintaining order and decorum, so doesn't need to say "Point of Order."
- Just needs to take appropriate action.

50

50

## Chair subject to same rules

- If the chair breaks one of the rules, a member may raise a Point of Order.
- The chair rules on own behavior, which seems odd, but is the way the system works.

51

51

## Why make a Point of Order?

- Make a Point of Order if a rule has been broken.
- DO NOT make a Point of Order because you think someone has made a factual mistake, or you disagree with what they said.
- Speak about that when it is your turn to discuss.
- A Point of Order does not count as a "turn" in discussion.

52

52

## Why make a Point of Order?

*In ordinary meetings it is undesirable to raise points of order on minor irregularities of a purely technical character, if it is clear that no one's rights are being infringed upon and no real harm is being done to the proper transaction of business.*

*Robert's Rules of Order Newly Revised, 12<sup>th</sup> edition, Section 23:4*

53

53

## No further discussion

- Once the chair has ruled on a Point of Order, the only allowable form of discussion is to appeal the ruling.

54

54

## Appeal

The most important motion in all of Robert's Rules – and the least known!

55

55

## Chair's rulings can be appealed

- The CHAIR enforces order and decorum.
- The GROUP is the final authority.
- Any TWO MEMBERS can appeal a ruling of the chair (one member appeals and one seconds the appeal).
- EXCEPTION: If the ruling is a matter on which there cannot be two reasonable interpretations, the ruling cannot be appealed.

56

56

## Appealing a ruling of the chair

Member A: *Chair, Point of Order.*

Chair: *State your point.*

Member A: *My esteemed colleague has used the term "cream-faced loon" in referring to the Secretary. According to Robert's Rules, insults are not allowed in debate.*

Chair: *The point is well taken. Members will refrain from using improper language.*

57

57

Member B: *Chair, I appeal the Point of Order on the grounds that "cream-faced loon" is a literary reference and not an insult.*

Member C: *Second!*

Chair: *Very well, since the ruling of the chair has been appealed, the group will decide. Note that appeals pertaining to proper use of language and decorum may not be debated.*

58

58

Chair: *All those who believe that "cream-faced loon" is an insult, say "aye."*

Members who agree: *Aye!*

Chair: *All those who believe that this phrase is not an insult, say "no."*

Members who disagree: *No!*

59

59

Chair: *The ayes have it, the ruling of the chair is upheld, and members may not use this term, OR The noes have it, the ruling of the chair is not sustained, and members may use this term.*

*Clerk, please record this outcome in the minutes.*

Note that the vote is on whether the decision of the chair shall be SUSTAINED.

60

60

**Jurassic Parliament** Mastering meetings using Robert's Rules

## Further points

- Point of Order is made by one member, but an Appeal needs a second.
- Point of Order and Appeal are processed immediately. No other business can take place until they are dealt with.
- Points of Order and Appeals do not count against a member's turn to speak in debate.

61

**Jurassic Parliament** Mastering meetings using Robert's Rules

## Debatable?

- Point of Order cannot be debated.
- Appeals pertaining to language, decorum, and the order of business cannot be debated.
- When an appeal can be debated, the process is different from anything else in Robert's Rules.

62

**Jurassic Parliament** Mastering meetings using Robert's Rules

Point of Order and Appeal are the heart of democracy



In our view, the motions Point of Order and Appeal are the heart of our democracy. They provide the mechanism to stop a dictatorial chair who's acting like a "boss." They are essential for every level

63

**Jurassic Parliament** Mastering meetings using Robert's Rules

## IV. How to do this?

- Seek recognition before speaking.
- No one may speak a second time until everyone who wishes to do so has spoken once.
- No interrupting (in general)
- No sidebar conversations.
- Set time limits.
- Courtesy and respect are required.

64

**Jurassic Parliament** Mastering meetings using Robert's Rules

## Seeking recognition

- Raise your hand and wait to speak until the presider (chair) calls your name, nods at you, or gives some other sign that you have permission to speak (you "have the floor")
- Online, you can use the "raise hand" function or raise your physical hand.
- For Zoom on the telephone, press \*9 (star nine).

65

**Jurassic Parliament** Mastering meetings using Robert's Rules

## Duty to remain silent

- When you have not been recognized, you have a duty to remain silent.
- The exception is a Point of Order when essential.

66

**Jurassic Parliament** Mastering meetings using Robert's Rules

## Rights and Responsibilities of the Member



Weldon L. Merrin, FRP, CPP, has graciously authorized Jurassic Parliament to publish this listing of the rights and responsibilities of ordinary members of an organization.

Please note that neither the list of member rights nor the list of member responsibilities is intended to be exhaustive. In addition, neither the rights nor the responsibilities are necessarily absolute in every instance. For example, the right to debate may be cut off or limited by motions for the Previous Question or to Limit Debate. And, while a member should not vote on a matter of direct personal interest, under Robert's

67

**Jurassic Parliament** Mastering meetings using Robert's Rules

## Fundamental guideline

**No one may speak a second time until everyone who wishes to do so has spoken once.**

68

**Jurassic Parliament** Mastering meetings using Robert's Rules

## NO CROSS TALK BETWEEN MEMBERS!

69

**Jurassic Parliament** Mastering meetings using Robert's Rules

## HOW to do this?

- Chair can keep track of who has spoken and who wishes to speak, using a chart.
- Chair can empower vice-chair to do this – good training for them.

70

**SPEAKING CHART**

Name	1	2	3	4	5	6	etc.
Garcia							
Jackson							
Juma							
Lee							
Patel							
Smith							
Young							

71

**Jurassic Parliament** Mastering meetings using Robert's Rules

## A great method – the “round robin”

- The chair goes around the table, asking each person in turn for their opinion. People may pass and speak at the end.
- Important to have a pencil in hand, to jot down points or questions for when your turn arrives.
- Chair must wait their turn also!
- This rule applies to questions and answers also, and to discussions with staff.
- Don't let any two people “hijack” the meeting.

72

## Interrupting

- When a member has the floor, they have the right to speak until they have completed their comments.
- Members may not interrupt each other.
- Chair may interrupt members when necessary to bring them to order.
- Members may interrupt to make a Point of Order when essential.

73

73

## No sidebars or texting

- No “sidebar conversations”
- No whispering!
- No texting to each other or people outside during meetings.
- No posting on social media during meetings.

74

74

## Keep your camera on

- Unless technical considerations prevent it, all councilmembers should keep their camera on while participating online.
- Otherwise you are “lurking,” observing your colleagues without yourself being observed.
- This is disturbing and creates an unpleasant emotional imbalance.
- This also ensures you maintain quorum.

75

75

## Frustrating

- Structuring discussion in these ways can be frustrating.
- Board members sometimes say, “I wish we could just hash it out and have a free-form discussion.”
- The Open Meetings Act, and the press of time, mean that usually, this won't serve your board well.
- However...

76

76

## An occasional exception...

- Sometimes there is benefit in the conversational style or “informal discussion.”
- It can be useful at study sessions or in committee meetings.
- Chair must ensure that no one dominates.
- Do not make the conversational style your ordinary or “default” style of discussion.

77

77

## It is the duty of the chair...

*To expedite business in every way compatible with the rights of members.*

Robert's Rules of Order Newly Revised, 12<sup>th</sup> edition 47:7 (7)

78

78

## Set time limits

- Jurassic Parliament recommends that councils set estimated times for agenda items.
- We recommend time limits on individual councilmember speeches – 3 or 5 minutes.
- Time limits cannot be debated.
- They can be suspended or changed by a two-thirds vote without debate.

79

79

## How many times?

- In large assemblies, each member may speak twice on each motion, per day.
- In small boards, this limit does not apply.
- Some councils adopt a two-time limit.
- This can be suspended by a two-thirds vote without debate.

80

80

## Time limits create productive meetings



The mayor of Alexandria, Virginia began council meetings by responding to each person giving public comment, sometimes delaying the start of regular business three hours or more. Was this reasonable? No. We need time limits to establish structure and create productive meetings. Robert's Rules says that members have the right to an efficient meeting. It takes effort to do this, and for the chair to maintain the limits, but the effort will pay off big time.

**SET AN OVERALL TIME LIMIT FOR THE MEETING**  
If you are a private nonprofit board, a good target for a regular board meeting is two hours. After

81

81

## Unanimous consent

- Form of voting—a type of “fast track.”
- Very efficient for minor procedural matters.
- Presider suggests something, and if you agree, REMAIN SILENT. Silence means consent.
- If you don't want to proceed in this way, say “OBJECTION.”
- Presider then abandons the fast track to use the regular method.

82

82

## Fundamental guideline

**Courtesy and respect towards everyone are required.**

83

83

## These remarks are inappropriate

1. Personal remarks about other members (except for conflict of interest)
2. Discourteous remarks – insulting language, attacks
3. Inflammatory language
4. Criticizing past actions of the group (unless subject is under discussion, or member is about to propose to amend or rescind the action at the end of their speech)
5. Remarks that are not germane (relevant) to the discussion

84

84

## Inappropriate Remarks on Local Government Councils



If you serve as an elected official on a local government council or board, you should know the types of remarks that are inappropriate during discussion at a meeting, Robert's Rules of Order and the common parliamentary law it is based on require that:

- Members of a council or board must be courteous to one another.

85

## Personal remarks

*The measure, not the member, is the subject of debate...The moment the chair hears such words as "fraud," "liar," or "lie" used about a member in debate, he must act immediately and decisively to correct the matter and prevent its repetition.*

*Robert's Rules of Order Newly Revised, 12<sup>th</sup> edition, Section 43:21*

86

86

## CHEAT SHEET

### WAIT! WAIT! WHAT SHOULD I SAY?

	If you are the chair, say...	If you are a member speaking about another member, say...	If you are a member speaking about the chair, say...
<b>BIG MISTAKES</b>			
speaking twice in a row	Members are reminded that no one may speak a second time until everyone who wishes to do so has spoken once.	Point of order. The member has spoken twice while others are waiting to speak.	Point of order. The chair does not have the right to dominate the discussion, but must speak in turn.
not seeking recognition	Members will kindly seek recognition before speaking.	Point of order. Members must seek recognition before speaking.	Not applicable.
speaking directly to another member	Members will kindly address all remarks to the chair.	Point of order. Members are supposed to speak to the chair.	(not applicable)
interrupting another person	Members will kindly refrain from interrupting one another.	Point of order. Interrupting is not allowed.	Point of order. The chair does not have the right to interrupt a member.
<b>INAPPROPRIATE REMARKS</b>			
personal remarks	Members will refrain from making personal remarks.	Point of order. Personal remarks are not allowed.	Point of order. Personal remarks are not allowed.
insulting language, vulgarities, attacks	Insulting or vulgar language is not allowed at our meetings.	Point of order. The language used by the member is insulting/vulgar.	Point of order. The chair is using insulting/vulgar language.
inflammatory language	Inflammatory language is not allowed.	Point of order. That remark is inflammatory.	Point of order. That remark is inflammatory.
criticizing past actions	Members may not criticize a past action of the group during a meeting, with two exceptions.*	Point of order. Members may not criticize a past action of the group during a meeting, with two exceptions.*	Point of order. The chair may not criticize a past action of the group during a meeting, with two exceptions.*

Note that this is proprietary information. Do not duplicate.

87

## The focus of our meeting is...

- Words on paper.
- Focus on the motions and not on the people who make the motions.
- We recommend that councilmembers take this approach outside the meeting also.
- Focus on actions taken and do not criticize colleagues outside the meeting.

88

88

## Who decides?

- If any question arises whether a remark is appropriate or not, or a comment is germane, the chair rules, subject to appeal.
- The chair may also turn immediately to the group to ask the members to decide.
- Ultimately it is the GROUP'S CALL.

89

89

## Important note

- We are speaking here about discussion within council or commission meetings.
- These prohibitions DO NOT APPLY to the public when they are giving public comment.

90

90

## SAMPLE DISCUSSION GUIDELINES FOR LOCAL GOVERNMENTS

*Permission is granted to modify these guidelines as your organization prefers. Note that these guidelines refer to discussion within the body, not to comment by the public.*

1. The chair of the meeting runs the meeting in the service of the body. The chair serves as the facilitator for the meeting and has the primary responsibility for maintaining order. The chair may take part in discussion, but may not answer each individual speaker back, nor lecture or criticize the members. When discussing substantive questions, the chair will usually speak and vote, if entitled to do so, after others have spoken.

91

## V. Motions and Amendments

92

92

### Main Motion *Tyrannosaurus rex*

- A main motion is the usual and customary way to start the action of discussion and decision-making.
- For small boards (up to about 12 people), it is OK to have discussion before a motion is moved. Jurassic Parliament recommends moving the motion before discussing it whenever possible.

93

93



Main Motion  
*Tyrannosaurus rex*

94

### Main Motion

We recommend this sequence:

- Staff presents proposal in writing and answers any questions. Each councilmember may ask one or two questions, then the next member has a turn.
- Motion is moved and seconded.
- Members discuss motion and may amend it.
- Members vote on motion.

95

95

### Draft motions

- It is perfectly fine to include proposed or “draft” motions in an agenda.
- This can be very helpful in advancing the work of the body.
- The body is not obliged to take them up.
- Someone must “move” the motion – propose it – for the body to consider it.

96

96



## When can you make a new motion?

- 1) If the agenda contains a draft motion in an agenda bill, you can move it at the proper time.
- 2) You can make a motion spontaneously when a subject is being discussed, if it is germane.
- 3) You can make a motion spontaneously under "New Business," if your body includes that heading in its agenda.

97

97

## Characteristics of Main Motion

- It should be in writing if at all possible (project on screen, use 3-part form).
- It should be **clear** and unambiguous. Don't say, "I move what he just said," or "so moved."
- It should be phrased in the grammatical **positive**.
- It must comply with the **bylaws** and the **procedural** law of the land.
- You can have only **one main motion** at a time.

98

98

## Fundamental guideline

**One thing at a time.**

99

99

## How do you introduce a Main Motion?

Three little words:

*I move that...*

100

100

## Member must be clear

- The member has the responsibility of formulating the motion.
- Don't mix up your ideas about the subject with the motion itself. Save those for debate.

101

101

*I've been noticing that the number of wild cats is increasing in our city, and they're getting stomped on by bigger dinosaurs. It's important that the town do something to protect them, so I think allowing catios would be great, this fits in with our mandate to serve all species and it will make the little kitties safer.*

102

102

**Jurassic Parliament** Mastering meetings using Robert's Rules

---

## State the exact motion clearly

*I move that residents be authorized to build catios in their private yards.*

103

103

**Jurassic Parliament** Mastering meetings using Robert's Rules

---

## You can request a moment to write it down

- May I have a few minutes to write this motion down?
- Chair may also request that motion be written.
- Can use 3-part motion forms.

104

104

**Jurassic Parliament** Mastering meetings using Robert's Rules

---

## Second

*Councilmember Smith seconds the motion!*

105

105

**Jurassic Parliament** Mastering meetings using Robert's Rules

---

## Clerk should speak up

- If the clerk did not hear who seconded the motion, they should speak up.  
*The clerk inquires, who seconded this motion?*
- In general, clerk MUST do this when lack of clarity prevents doing the job, and council must be patient!

106

106

**Jurassic Parliament** Mastering meetings using Robert's Rules

---

## Second the motion

- You “second a motion” to show that you would like to talk about it.
- No need to be recognized. Just call out “second.”
- It is OK to second a motion you disagree with, if you want to explain why it’s a bad idea.

107

107

**Jurassic Parliament** Mastering meetings using Robert's Rules

---

## If no second...

- If there is no second, the chair says:  
*There being no second, the motion will not be considered.*
- Then moves immediately to next item of business.

108

108

**Jurassic Parliament** Mastering meetings using Robert's Rules

## No second required?

- Robert's Rules states that no second is needed in small boards (up to about 12) or in committees.
- Nevertheless, Jurassic Parliament recommends that a second be required in local government councils and boards.
- It's fine not to require a second in committees, if you wish. However, most committees do.

109

109

**Jurassic Parliament** Mastering meetings using Robert's Rules

## You can't speak against your own motion

- Under Robert's Rules, the maker of the motion cannot speak against it.
- If the discussion has changed their mind, they should request permission to withdraw the motion.
- The maker CAN vote against their own motion.

110

110

**Jurassic Parliament** Mastering meetings using Robert's Rules

## Eight steps to process a motion

1. **Member makes motion.**
2. Another member seconds motion.
3. **Chair states motion.**
4. Members debate and/or amend motion.
5. **Chair restates motion and calls for vote.**
6. Members vote on motion.
7. Chair states results of vote, whether motion passes or fails, and what happens next as a result of the vote.
8. Chair states next item of business.

111

111

**Jurassic Parliament** Mastering meetings using Robert's Rules


## Main Motion

### *Tyrannosaurus rex*

Residents will be authorized to build catios in their private yards.

112

112



**Main Motion**  
*Tyrannosaurus rex*

113

**Jurassic Parliament** Mastering meetings using Robert's Rules

## Friendly member makes Point of Information

- *Chair, Point of Information. I'm confused! What exactly IS a "catio"?*
- *A catio is a patio for cats. Here's an example.*

114

114

# Eight Steps To Process A Motion

**Member A:** *I move that we hold a cruise on Dino Bay.*

**Member B:** *I second the motion!*

**Chair:** It has been moved and seconded that we hold a cruise on Dino Bay. We will now debate the motion. [debate]

**Chair:** Are you ready to vote?

The motion is that we hold a cruise on Dino Bay. All those in favor say “aye.” All those opposed say “no.” The “ayes” have it, the motion passes, and we will hold a cruise on Dino Bay. The Social Committee will make the plans for this event. Our next item of business is...

## Eight steps to process a motion

1. Member makes a \_\_\_\_\_.
2. Another \_\_\_\_\_ seconds motion.
3. Chair states \_\_\_\_\_.
4. Members \_\_\_\_\_ and/or amend motion.
5. Chair restates \_\_\_\_\_ and calls for the vote.
6. Members \_\_\_\_\_ on motion.
7. Chair states results of vote, whether motion \_\_\_\_\_, and what happens as result of vote.
8. Chair states next item of \_\_\_\_\_.

In taking the vote, the presider must call for the \_\_\_\_\_ or the vote is not legitimate.

The presider has a duty to make things clear so that members understand what they are doing.

© Jurassic Parliament 2019. All rights reserved.

P.O. Box 77553, Seattle, WA 98177  
TEL 206.542.8422 | EMAIL [info@jurassicparliament.com](mailto:info@jurassicparliament.com)  
[www.jurassicparliament.com](http://www.jurassicparliament.com)



## Point of Information

Note that “Point of Information” is a QUESTION. It is also called “Request for Information.” It cannot be used to GIVE information.

115

115

## Language tip

If someone uses this motion incorrectly, chair can ask:

*What information does the member need in order to decide how to vote?*

116

116

## Step #3 is very important!

- Presider MUST repeat the motion, or have the clerk repeat it.
- After step #3, the motion belongs to the group as a whole, not to the person who made it.
- WHY? So that everyone knows what we are actually discussing.

117

117

## General contractor

*I feel that catios will allow our dear feline friends to experience the outdoors without getting hurt or endangering other wildlife. I urge my colleagues to vote in favor of this motion.*

118

118

## Photographer

*I'm in favor! My cousin has built a catio, and her little pet Fuzzy is completely at home in it, as you can see from this picture.*

119

119

## Architect

*I think this is a terrible idea! Catios are intrusive and will ruin the look of our town. Here's an example I saw when I visited Dinodome last week. We don't want this kind of ugly building in beautiful Dinodee.*

120

120

**Jurassic Parliament** Mastering meetings using Robert's Rules

## Moving to vote

- When it seems that discussion is finished, chair asks, “Is there any further discussion?” or “Are you ready to vote?” and then, if no one speaks up, takes the vote.
- These are rhetorical questions, to see if anyone has more to say.

121

121

**Jurassic Parliament** Mastering meetings using Robert's Rules

## Step #5 is also very important!

- Chair must repeat the motion before the vote is taken.
- Have you ever been at a meeting when once the vote is taken, someone says, “What did we just approve?” and no one knows exactly what it was?
- WHY? So that everyone knows what we are actually voting on.

122

122

**Jurassic Parliament** Mastering meetings using Robert's Rules

## Voting

- Chair repeats the motion.
- Chair says, “All those in favor say ‘aye,’ all those opposed say ‘no.’”
- Chair announces results of vote, whether motion passes or fails, and what will happen next as a result of the vote.
- Chair announces next item of business.

123

123

**Jurassic Parliament** Mastering meetings using Robert's Rules

## Voting

*The “ayes” have it, the motion passes, and residents will be authorized to build catios in their private yards,*  
OR  
*The “noes” have it, the motion fails, and we will not implement this proposal.*

- Note that on a voice vote, the chair must call for the negative vote, even if it seems obvious that the vote is unanimous.

124

124

**Jurassic Parliament** Mastering meetings using Robert's Rules

## Voting

- There is no fixed rule about recording the vote in the minutes.
  - The motion passed/the motion failed.
  - The motion passed by 3 votes to 2.
  - The motion passed with members Smith, Jones and Robinson voting in favor, and members Green and Black voting against.

125

125

**Jurassic Parliament** Mastering meetings using Robert's Rules

## Don't do this!

- The motion passed with members Green and Black voting against.

126

126

## No debate during voting

- Nothing can interrupt the voting process.
- Members are not allowed to explain their vote during the vote, or afterwards.
- Even a Point of Order must wait until the result of the vote is announced.

127

127

## Changing your vote

- A member may change their vote up until the time the chair announces the result.
- After that time, it takes unanimous consent of the body (everyone agreeing) for the member to change their vote.
- Once the chair has moved on to the next item of business, it is too late to change a vote.

128

128

## Abstain

- Under Robert's Rules, to abstain is to do nothing.
- Abstentions are not counted.
- The chair does not call for abstentions.
- However, if you are a public body, likely you will call for and record abstentions.

129

129

## Conflict of interest

- If you have a conflict of interest, you should "recuse" yourself from the vote.
- Recusal is a special form of abstention.
- Talk with your attorney before the meeting! Don't spring it during the meeting itself.
- Maple Valley rules are extensive and helpful.
- It may be that recusal is not enough.

130

130

## See MRSC post

Resolving Financial Conflicts of Interest:  
Is Abstaining from Voting Enough?

[www.mrsc.org](http://www.mrsc.org)

131

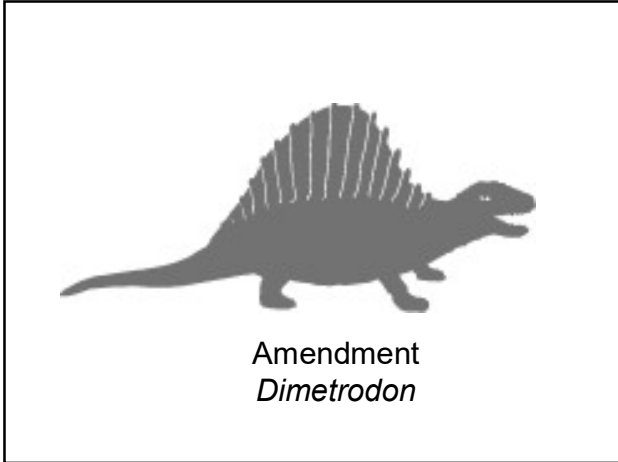
131

## MRSC

- Formerly the Municipal Research and Services Center, MRSC is a private nonprofit organization in Washington State that provides advice to local government bodies.

132

132



133

Jurassic Parliament Mastering meetings using Robert's Rules

## Amendment

### *Dimetrodon*

- You amend a motion to improve it.
- The Amendment applies to the main motion.
- The Amendment must be germane (relevant).
- Anyone may move to amend, even the person who made the motion.

134

134

Jurassic Parliament Mastering meetings using Robert's Rules

## Amendment

Engineer: *I move that we amend the motion by adding the words, "Provided that the plan for each catio is approved by the Design Review Board."*

135

135

Jurassic Parliament Mastering meetings using Robert's Rules

## If adopted, will read:

Residents will be authorized to build catios in their private yards, **provided that the plan for each catio is approved by the Design Review Board.**

136

136

Jurassic Parliament Mastering meetings using Robert's Rules

## Four ways to amend

1. Add or insert words.
2. Strike out words.
3. Strike out words and insert words in their place.
4. Substitute (not recommended).

137

137

Jurassic Parliament Mastering meetings using Robert's Rules

## Process Amendment

- The Amendment is processed using the same eight steps that we just saw for a main motion.

138

138




**Jurassic Parliament** Mastering meetings using Robert's Rules

## The challenge is...

- We vote on amendments BEFORE we vote on the main motion, in order to make the main motion as good as possible—to PERFECT the motion.

139

139



Amendment blocks Main Motion

140

140

**Jurassic Parliament** Mastering meetings using Robert's Rules

## Fate of the Amendment

- People sometimes get confused, and don't realize that after voting on the amendment, the process continues.
- Once the fate of the amendment has been decided, debate continues on the main motion.

141

141

**Jurassic Parliament** Mastering meetings using Robert's Rules

## More amendments are possible...

- Once you've dealt with one amendment, you may have others...
- provided that they apply to a *different aspect* of the main motion.
- It takes special actions (reconsideration) to go back and change something we've already amended.

142

142

**Jurassic Parliament** Mastering meetings using Robert's Rules

## The process continues

- After all amendments have been processed, the body still must vote on the AMENDED MAIN MOTION.

143

143

**Jurassic Parliament** Mastering meetings using Robert's Rules

## "Friendly amendment"

- People often process "friendly amendment" the wrong way.
- DO NOT turn to maker and seconder to ask if they accept the amendment – this give them improper power.
- Handle this the same as any other amendment.
- Ask, "Is there a second?" etc.
- Once a motion has been stated by the chair, the maker and seconder have same rights as any other member.

144

144

**Jurassic Parliament** Mastering meetings using Robert's Rules


---

## No amendments in minutes

- According to Robert's Rules of Order, details of each amendment and how it was voted on ARE NOT INCLUDED in the minutes.
- "After discussion and amendment, the following motion was adopted..."

145

145



Call the Question  
*Triceratops*

146

**Jurassic Parliament** Mastering meetings using Robert's Rules

---

## Call the Question *Triceratops*

- This is a motion to stop debate and vote immediately.
- The technical name is "Call for the Previous Question."
- Sometimes people interrupt others to make this motion, which is not allowed.
- You must be recognized.

147

147

**Jurassic Parliament** Mastering meetings using Robert's Rules

---

## Call the Question *Triceratops*

- People often process this motion wrong.
- You cannot simply cut off debate by saying "question."
- It requires a **second**.
- It cannot be **debated or amended**.
- It takes a **two-thirds** vote to pass.

148

148

**Jurassic Parliament** Mastering meetings using Robert's Rules

---

## VI. Who's in charge?

149

149

**Jurassic Parliament** Mastering meetings using Robert's Rules

---

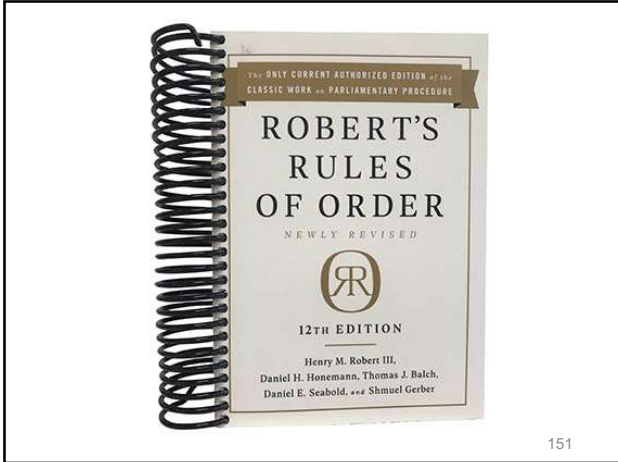
*Robert's Rules of Order Newly Revised,  
12<sup>th</sup> edition*

Abbreviated RONR  
"Rules of Order Newly Revised"

We recommend spiral-bound edition,  
available only from the  
National Association of Parliamentarians  
[www.parliamentarians.org](http://www.parliamentarians.org)

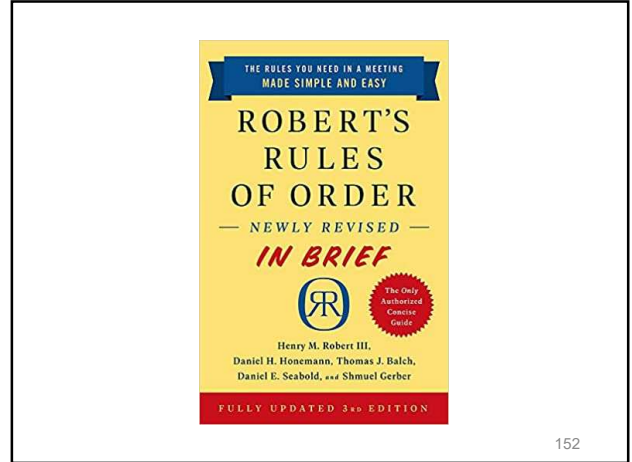
150

150



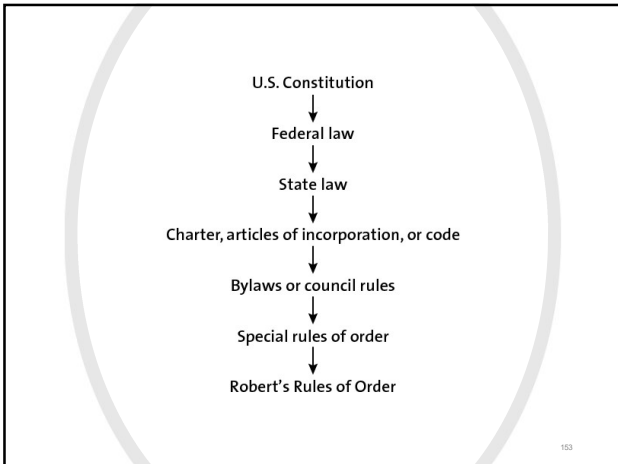
151

151



152

152



153

153

**Jurassic Parliament** Mastering meetings using Robert's Rules

## Your rules have higher authority

- You may choose the rules that suit your council or board best, and they have higher authority than Robert's Rules.
- Committees are bound by the rules set by council.

154

154

**Jurassic Parliament** Mastering meetings using Robert's Rules

## Planning Commission draft bylaws

"Amendments must be transmitted to the Town Council for review." – should add **and approval.**

155

155

**Jurassic Parliament** Mastering meetings using Robert's Rules

## Planning Commission draft bylaws

"Amendments must be transmitted to the Town Council for review." – should add **and approval.**

156

156

Jurassic Parliament Mastering meetings using Robert's Rules

## Accountability Hierarchy

157

Jurassic Parliament Mastering meetings using Robert's Rules

## Voluntary Association

158

Jurassic Parliament Mastering meetings using Robert's Rules

## Key Point

Each member has an equal right to speak and to try to persuade others to accept their view.

159

Jurassic Parliament Mastering meetings using Robert's Rules

## Key Point

During meetings, the chair controls the process so the group can make the decisions.

160

Jurassic Parliament Mastering meetings using Robert's Rules

## Fundamental guideline

During meetings, the chair is the servant of the group, and the group is the final authority.

161

Jurassic Parliament Mastering meetings using Robert's Rules

## You have both types of structure

- The town council forms a voluntary association.
- The mayor and staff form an accountability hierarchy.

162

## Staff are advisers, not members

- Staff are not members of the body. Their participation is limited.
- They have the right to speak in order to fulfill their function of service.

163

163

## Staff speaking

- Staff members must seek recognition before speaking.
- Staff members do not opine about the content of the discussion, unless it applies to their duties or presentation topic.

164

164

## When should the clerk speak up?

1. When the clerk is asked a question.
2. When there is a simple administrative point to make, such as skipping an item by mistake.
3. When the clerk is not able to perform their job because of lack of clarity on the part of the council.
4. If permission has been given to make a Point of Order, when the clerk sees that a serious procedural error is in process or likely to occur.

165

165

## What is each member's individual authority?

*All members of a governing board share in a joint and collective authority which exists and can be exercised only when the group is in session.*

The Standard Code of Parliamentary Procedure

166

166

## Vigorous discussion

- Discussion on motions can and should be vigorous!
- Express your views freely and don't hold back.
- Once the vote has been taken, however, things change.

167

167

## It's OK to disagree

- The fact that people have different opinions is a strength. It's a good thing!
- BUT we tend to identify with our own position.
- When we are defeated, we sometimes take it personally.
- This is a mistake.

168

168

**Jurassic Parliament** Mastering meetings using Robert's Rules

---

## At the end of the day, the body must unite behind its decision.

- It is a basic democratic principle that the decision of the majority, voting at a properly called meeting, is the decision of the body as a whole.
- The minority must make it their decision as well.

169

169

**Jurassic Parliament** Mastering meetings using Robert's Rules

---

*Democracy is the worst system of government in all the world, with the exception of those others that have been tried from time to time.*

Winston Churchill

170

170

**Jurassic Parliament** Mastering meetings using Robert's Rules

---

## Bottom line

- In a democracy, HOW we decide things is more important than WHAT we decide.
- Courtesy and respect, no surprises, no unilateral action, no end-runs...these are essential for the system to work.

171

171

**Jurassic Parliament** Mastering meetings using Robert's Rules

---

## Members have a duty

- When serving on a public body, members have a duty to uphold the decision of that body, even if they disagree with it.

172

172

**Jurassic Parliament** Mastering meetings using Robert's Rules

---

## Disagreement

- Members may express their disagreement in public, but may not attempt to UNDERMINE the decision.
- They are free to try to persuade their colleagues, during the meeting, to change the decision (within limits).

173

173

**Jurassic Parliament** Mastering meetings using Robert's Rules

---

## We all want to be right

- It's human nature to be unhappy when you oppose the decision.
- Our current culture places a strong premium on individuality.
- I invite you to commit yourself to a bigger principle than your own views.

174

174

**Jurassic Parliament** Mastering meetings using Robert's Rules

## WHY?

After everyone's voice is heard, including the minority, it is the majority that make the decision.

175

**Jurassic Parliament** Mastering meetings using Robert's Rules

## Lost the vote? Don't sabotage the council's action



We've had inquiries recently about elected officials who lost a vote, and then actively worked against the outcome. This amounts to trying to sabotage the council. It is wrong, wrong, wrong.

**THE MAJORITY RULES**  
General Henry Martyn Robert, the original author of *Robert's Rules of Order*, expresses it this way:

176

**Jurassic Parliament** Mastering meetings using Robert's Rules

## What is the alternative?

*The ballot box is sacred because the alternative is blood.*

Elias Canetti, Nobel Prize winner

177

**Jurassic Parliament** Mastering meetings using Robert's Rules

## VII. Citizen Advisory Committee Pitfalls

*With thanks to Ric Stephens, Portland, Oregon*

178

**Jurassic Parliament** Mastering meetings using Robert's Rules

## Confusion about your job

*The work of the Planning Commission is to carry out the instructions of the Council.*

City of Bellevue Planning Commissioner

179

**Jurassic Parliament** Mastering meetings using Robert's Rules

## What is a planning commission?

- A planning commission is a body that has been established in order to do a job ASSIGNED BY SOMEONE ELSE.
- This can be a challenge!

180

### Situation

The planning commission is considering a request to lower the setback from 50 feet to 20 feet.

181

181

### Commissioner asks:

*Isn't there a better place in the city to site this hotel?*

182

182

### Pitfall: Confusion about scope

You must answer the questions assigned to you by the Council, not propose unrelated alternatives.

183

183

### Situation

The environmental commission is considering recommending setting aside some wetlands.

184

184

### Commissioner says:

*I think we can't address this until the University report comes out in five years.*

185

185

### Pitfall: Asking for the moon

- It is an unfortunate fact of governance that sometimes bodies must make decisions with less than adequate information.

186

186



### Situation

The staff have made a recommendation to purchase a historic farm site as a museum.

187

187

### Commissioner says:

*Why are the staff making this recommendation? I think we're wasting our money on staff salaries. Only citizens really understand the issues here.*

188

188

### Pitfall: Confusion about staff role

- Confusion about staff roles takes many forms.
- Obviously we need staff—it would not be possible for residents alone to conduct the business of a modern city.
- There are other confusions as well.

189

189

### Pitfall: Confusion about staff role

- Staff are employees of the city.
- The commission or committee may not direct them independently of their assigned tasks.
- Staff have a duty to remind citizen volunteers of the laws, regulations, and fiscal constraints that apply.
- This is not “sticking an oar in,” it is doing their job.

190

190

### Situation

The staff has carried out a survey.

191

191

### Commissioner says:

*Since I'm a professional surveyor, I can re-do the survey to verify it.*

192

192

**Jurassic Parliament** Mastering meetings using Robert's Rules

## Pitfall: Confusion about your job

- A commissioner may have valuable particular expertise, but they are recruited to the commission as a citizen, not as a technical expert.
- Let staff be staff and citizens be citizens!

193

193

**Jurassic Parliament** Mastering meetings using Robert's Rules

## Situation

There has been a public outcry about changes to the irrigation district boundaries.

194

194

**Jurassic Parliament** Mastering meetings using Robert's Rules

## Commissioner says:

*Six of my neighbors are very upset about this. They've taken the trouble to come to our meetings, so we should do what they want.*

195

195

**Jurassic Parliament** Mastering meetings using Robert's Rules

## Pitfall: Deafened by decibels

*Being swayed by the emotional power of a presentation is a common problem. Decisions should be rational, not determined by decibels.*

Ric Stephens

196

196

**Jurassic Parliament** Mastering meetings using Robert's Rules

## Your responsibility?

- Listen to your constituents, while accepting your own responsibility.
- You must vote based on your own best judgment, not solely in response to crowd opinion.

197

197

**Jurassic Parliament** Mastering meetings using Robert's Rules

## When public pressure is intense



At a recent workshop, a director from a school board split by pandemic-related decisions asked me what board members can do in the face of intense public pressure. These are tough times for local non-partisan government bodies, for sure. Here are some thoughts about what can be done.

198

198

### Situation

There is mixed public opinion about a developer's plans to site a shopping center near the main road.

199

199

### Commissioner says:

*When we're getting so many different conflicting views on this, I think we should just punt for another six months.*

200

200

### Pitfall: Decision delay

*A planning commission is expected to render decisions in a timely manner. Some applications suffer "death by a thousand nicks"...This is related to "death by a thousand days," which is the continuation of projects like a soap opera.*

Ric Stephens

201

201

### Situation

The arts commission is considering a report about the museum.

202

202

### Commissioner says:

*I was on my honeymoon in Norway and I just haven't had time to study this.*

203

203

### Pitfall: Failure to read packet

- Commissioners MUST read their packets before the meeting!

204

204

### Situation

The commission is discussing plans for a new hiking trail along the river.

205

205

### Commissioner says:

*I think we have to analyze what kind of paving stones are best, so teeny-tiny rocks don't get stuck in the paws of our dinosaur residents.*

206

206

### Pitfall: Lost in the weeds/ analysis paralysis

- We all have a human tendency to delve into the details.
- Sometimes this leads citizen commissions astray, as they spend too much time discussing details that are not relevant to their assignment.

207

207

### Situation

There doesn't seem to be an attractive option for the new community swimming pool. Both sites have environmental issues.

208

208

### Commissioner says:

*The planning commission and the city can't resolve this issue. I move that we recommend that the city carry out a referendum!*

209

209

### Pitfall: Shrinking from hard choices

- A commission does not have the right to decline to do its job.
- That is a waste of public resources.

210

210

**Jurassic Parliament** Mastering meetings using Robert's Rules

---

## Situation

There's a lot of dubious activity going on the 110-acre park to the east of town.

211

211

**Jurassic Parliament** Mastering meetings using Robert's Rules

---

## Commissioner says:

*I move that all parks commissioners be issued T-shirts saying "Parks Commission" and be authorized to issue tickets to offenders.*

212

212

**Jurassic Parliament** Mastering meetings using Robert's Rules

---

## Pitfall: Confusion about scope

- The parks commissioners are not police officers.
- They have a much more limited job!

213

213

**Jurassic Parliament** Mastering meetings using Robert's Rules

---

## Pitfalls

- Asking for the moon
- Confusion about scope
- Confusion about staff role
- Confusion about your job
- Deafened by decibels
- Decision delay
- Failure to read packet
- Lost in the weeds/analysis paralysis
- Shrinking from hard choices

214

214

**Jurassic Parliament** Mastering meetings using Robert's Rules

---

## Volunteer committees

*Successful Tips for Recruiting Board and Commission Members*

<https://mrsc.org/stay-informed/mrsc-insight/july-2013/successful-tips-for-recruiting-board-and-commissio>

215

215

**Jurassic Parliament** Mastering meetings using Robert's Rules

---

## VIII. Public comment

216

216

**Jurassic Parliament** Mastering meetings using Robert's Rules

## Another disclaimer

Robert's Rules of Order contains very little guidance on public comment. In general, this information comes from Jurassic Parliament's experience over 15 years of working with local governments.

217

217

**Jurassic Parliament** Mastering meetings using Robert's Rules

## Public hearing vs public comment

- A PUBLIC HEARING is an administrative procedure governed by state law and your council rules.
- You must include testimony in the minutes.
- The PUBLIC COMMENT PERIOD is an agenda item governed by your own rules.
- We strongly recommend NOT including public comment in your meeting minutes.

218

218

**Jurassic Parliament** Mastering meetings using Robert's Rules

## WHY public comment?

- A council meeting is NOT A MEETING OF THE PUBLIC.
- It is a MEETING OF THE COUNCIL that is held in public.
- The purpose of the "public comment" period is to allow the councilmembers to become informed about the views of the public.
- It should be carefully structured.

219

219

**Jurassic Parliament** Mastering meetings using Robert's Rules

## Be consistent

- Best to announce rules at beginning of each session, and provide written handout.
- For the sake of fairness, rules for public comment MUST be enforced consistently.
- Public must address remarks to chair, not to individual councilmembers or the audience.

220

220

**Jurassic Parliament** Mastering meetings using Robert's Rules

## Follow time limits

- Ask staff to time speakers so chair is not distracted.
- Some bodies have a visible timer so speakers know when their limit is approaching.
- Speakers may not donate their time to someone else.

221

221

**Jurassic Parliament** Mastering meetings using Robert's Rules

## Do not dialogue

- This is not a dialogue.
- Do not get into back-and-forth with the public. If chair starts dialoguing with the public, the situation can quickly become confusing.
- If you respond to some speakers but not to others, it can be interpreted as showing bias.

222

222

**Jurassic Parliament** Mastering meetings using Robert's Rules

*We tell the public it is a one-way communication to the council.*

223

223

**Jurassic Parliament** Mastering meetings using Robert's Rules

**Differing expectations**

- The public may have different expectations.
- They may come to the meeting looking for answers to specific questions.
- They may want to argue.
- They may want their remarks “on the record.”
- They may want to raise a “Point of Order,” which they cannot do.
- Education is critical!

224

224

**Jurassic Parliament** Mastering meetings using Robert's Rules

**Audience relations**

- Only the chair may speak to the audience as a whole.
- Individual councilmembers may not speak to the public or recognize people in the audience.
- Discourage demonstrations—clapping, booing, whistling, stamping of feet, etc. These can chill free speech, both for councilmembers and public.

225

225

**Jurassic Parliament** Mastering meetings using Robert's Rules

**Time, place and manner**

- The courts have found that local governments may limit the time, place and manner of public comment.
- All such restrictions must be viewpoint-neutral.
- We recommend setting a time period for public comment (for example, 30 minutes).
- We recommend setting a 3-minute limit for individual speakers.

226

226

**Jurassic Parliament** Mastering meetings using Robert's Rules

**If a speaker runs over...**

- If a speaker runs over the limit, interrupt and request that they conclude their remarks, or simply inform them, “Your time is up.”

227

227

**Jurassic Parliament** Mastering meetings using Robert's Rules

**Comment vs. disruption**

- Attendees do not have the right to DISRUPT the meeting.
- However, the courts have found that mere words do not usually constitute disruption.
- In general, residents can say whatever they like during public comment.
- However, school districts may set some limits on comments about staff or students.

228

228

**Jurassic Parliament** Mastering meetings using Robert's Rules

## How to act on dais?

- Chair and members convey interest and concern by their body language.
- They should listen to each person speaking as if there were no one else in the room (this is hard!).
- Keep a warm and pleasant expression, or a neutral face if speaker is not complimentary.

229

229

**Jurassic Parliament** Mastering meetings using Robert's Rules

## How to respond?

- Best approach is to thank each speaker, even if negative, and move on.
- Chair may provide brief factual information, if appropriate, which must not degenerate into lecturing or criticism.
- Don't put staff on the spot. Invite people to address questions to staff separately.

230

230

**Jurassic Parliament** Mastering meetings using Robert's Rules

## Attacks on staff

- Councilmembers must not criticize staff in public and must be courteous to them.
- If public attacks staff, do not get defensive.
- Do not get in a hostile exchange.
- Be prepared if appropriate to defend the staff in a calm, positive manner.
- Why? If no response is made, it can seem as if the body agrees with the criticisms.

231

231

**Jurassic Parliament** Mastering meetings using Robert's Rules

## Conclude with thanks

- At the end of the public comment period, the chair should thank the public for attending.
- Explain again that while this is not a time for dialogue, all comments and questions are taken seriously by the body.
- Sincerity and warmth on the part of the chair will make a big difference to the experience the public has at your meeting.

232

232

**Jurassic Parliament** Mastering meetings using Robert's Rules

## Other channels

- It is essential for you to be in touch with your public, to be responsive, and to appear responsive.
- Given the limitations of the public comment period, we recommend maintaining other channels for dialogue with the public.
- Community forums, personal discussions, "coffee with the council" (always less than a quorum), a form on your website, surveys, etc.

233

233

**Jurassic Parliament** Mastering meetings using Robert's Rules

## 50 Guidelines for Public Comment



**INTRODUCTION**  
In recent years the climate for public comment at local government meetings—city councils, school boards, utility districts, etc.—has become much more challenging. People everywhere are feeling the stress brought on by the pandemic's suffering and loss, economic difficulties, greater hostility in the political sphere, and global concerns. This stress sometimes erupts in tense public meetings.

234

234




 Jurassic Parliament Mastering meetings using Robert's Rules

---

## IX. The right kind of control

235

235

 Jurassic Parliament Mastering meetings using Robert's Rules

---

## Three things you must have:

1. Knowledge of how this system works
2. A majority on your council in favor of civility and this system.
3. The personal moxie, chutzpah, energy and drive to put it all into practice.

236

236

 Jurassic Parliament Mastering meetings using Robert's Rules

---

## Chair must control who speaks when

- The chair serves as a BENEVOLENT DICTATOR, enforcing the rules the group has chosen.
- Individual members must SEEK RECOGNITION before speaking.

237

237

 Jurassic Parliament Mastering meetings using Robert's Rules


---

## Chair controls who speaks when

- If someone speaks up without being recognized, STOP THEM.
- If someone speaks out of turn, INTERRUPT THEM.
- If someone makes insulting remarks, CUT THEM OFF.

238

238

 Jurassic Parliament Mastering meetings using Robert's Rules


---

## Duty to obey the chair

- Members have a duty to obey the chair's directions.
- If they disagree, they can't argue back.
- What can they do?

239

239

 Jurassic Parliament Mastering meetings using Robert's Rules

---

## Don't be intimidated by anger

- Evolutionary psychologists tell us that anger evolved "in the service of bargaining, to resolve conflicts of interest in favor of the angry individual."

Leonard Mlodinow, *Emotion: How Feelings Shape Our Thinking*

240

240

**Jurassic Parliament** Mastering meetings using Robert's Rules

## Guide your members by stating the obvious

- You as chair know more about the process than anybody else.
- You must repeat yourself, and state the obvious, to help bring everyone along.

241

241

**Jurassic Parliament** Mastering meetings using Robert's Rules

## Keep things moving! Be brisk! Speak crisply!

- Well, I guess the agenda is adopted...*
- I'll kind of get a thumbs up from the board next week...*

242

242

**Jurassic Parliament** Mastering meetings using Robert's Rules

## Firm but not harsh.

243

243

**Jurassic Parliament** Mastering meetings using Robert's Rules

## CHEAT SHEET

### LANGUAGE TIPS FOR MEETING MANAGEMENT

SITUATION	CHAIR CAN SAY
Call to order	<i>This meeting of the [name of organization] is called to order.</i>
Unanimous consent	<i>Without objection... if there is no objection...</i>
To begin discussion	<i>It has been moved and seconded that... Is there any discussion?</i>
If there is no second	<i>Since there is no second, the motion will not be considered.</i>
To end discussion	<i>Is there any further discussion? or Are you ready to vote?</i>
Process Point of Order	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Member says, "Point of Order"</li> <li>Chair says, "State your point."</li> <li>Member explains issue.</li> <li>Chair says, "The point is well taken," or "The point is not well taken."</li> </ol>
When someone says "Point of Order" but can't explain what they mean	<i>What rule has been broken?</i>
Process Point of Information	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Member says, "Point of Information."</li> <li>Chair replies, "State your question."</li> </ol>

244

244

**Jurassic Parliament** Mastering meetings using Robert's Rules

## When in doubt, ask the group!

- Chair can always ask the group to decide a question.

245

245

**Jurassic Parliament** Mastering meetings using Robert's Rules

- Chair: The chair believes that remarks about UFOs landing at our airfield are not germane, and will ask the Council to decide whether the Councilmember may continue speaking on this topic. All those who believe that the Councilmember may continue speaking, say "aye."*
- Councilmembers in favor: Aye!**

246

246

**Jurassic Parliament** Mastering meetings using Robert's Rules

- Chair: *All those who believe that the Councilmember may not continue, say "No."*
- Councilmember opposed: *"No."*
- Chair: *The ayes have it and the Councilmember may continue speaking, OR the noes have it and the Councilmember will cease from speaking.*

247

**Jurassic Parliament** Mastering meetings using Robert's Rules

## HOW to control?

*The chair should never get excited.*

Robert's Rules of Order Newly Revised, 12<sup>th</sup> edition, 47:19

248

**Jurassic Parliament** Mastering meetings using Robert's Rules

## WHY do we need rules?

*Win/lose is the only game most of us understand. We have a constant unspoken need for domination and actually find no enjoyment in win/win situations.*

Richard Rohr, Franciscan author

249

**Jurassic Parliament** Mastering meetings using Robert's Rules

## Vision phase one

- Each member expresses their personal views on topics before your body with vigor, energy, commitment, and respect.

250

**Jurassic Parliament** Mastering meetings using Robert's Rules

## Vision phase two

- Once the vote is taken, personal opinions and political views are LESS IMPORTANT than the majority vote of the body.
- Members accept the decision and move on without rancor or bitterness.

251

**Jurassic Parliament** Mastering meetings using Robert's Rules

## X. Conclusion

252

**Jurassic Parliament** Mastering meetings using Robert's Rules

## Keep in touch!

- You are invited to subscribe to our monthly newsletter.
- Subscribe to the blog on our website for insight, tips and inspiration, including our advice column, "Dear Dinosaur."

www.jurassicparliament.com  
[ann@jurassicparliament.com](mailto:ann@jurassicparliament.com)  
 206-542-8422

253

253

**MASTERING COUNCIL MEETINGS**  
 A GUIDEBOOK FOR ELECTED OFFICIALS AND LOCAL GOVERNMENTS  
 Ann G. Macfarlane, PRP, CAE and Andrew L. Estep, CAE  
 Jurassic Parliament

254

**Jurassic Parliament** Mastering meetings using Robert's Rules

## After taking this training you will be able to:

1. Apply the principle that the authority of the group is more important than any single individual
2. Follow best practices for discussion.
3. Respond to disorder and difficult people.
4. Make Motions and Amendments.
5. Avoid common citizen advisory committee pitfalls.
6. Run effective public comment sessions.

255

255

**Jurassic Parliament** Mastering meetings using Robert's Rules

## The chair is not in charge of your meeting

It is a little-known fact that ultimately it is the board that is in charge of your meeting, not the chair. According to the principles of parliamentary procedure and Robert's Rules of Order, the chair runs the meeting while subject to the will of the body as a whole.

This is very different from the workplace, the military, or many other institutions in our society. Those institutions are structured as an ACCOUNTABILITY HIERARCHY, in which everyone reports, through the appropriate channels, to the BOSS at the top of the pyramid. The boss makes the ultimate decisions and is responsible for the organization's performance.

256

256

**Jurassic Parliament** Mastering meetings using Robert's Rules

## Follow four fundamental guidelines for successful meetings

©City of Tukwila, WA 2008. All rights reserved.

Robert's Rules of Order includes **four fundamental guidelines** that will create successful meetings. They are easy to say but take some effort to apply, since prevailing culture is often very different. Run your meetings according to these guidelines so your meetings—and your organization—will flourish.

257

**Jurassic Parliament** Mastering meetings using Robert's Rules

## Quick Guide for City Councils

©City of Tukwila, WA 2008. All rights reserved.

Follow this quick guide to take the pain out of your meetings, hold productive discussions, and serve your community better.

**BASICS**  
 A quorum must be present for business to be done. Usually a quorum means a majority (more than half) of the voting members in office.

258

**Jurassic Parliament** Mastering meetings using Robert's Rules

## Quick Guide for Planning Commissions




The work of the Planning Commission is to carry out the council's instructions. Follow this quick guide to parliamentary procedure to take the pain out of your meetings, hold productive discussions, and serve your community better.

259

**Jurassic Parliament** Mastering meetings using Robert's Rules

## Quick Guide for Citizen Advisory Committees



The work of the Citizen Advisory Committee is to carry out the council's instructions. Follow this quick guide to parliamentary procedure to take the pain out of your meetings, hold productive discussions, and serve your community better.

260

**Jurassic Parliament** Mastering meetings using Robert's Rules

## Best practices for public comment

1. Set time limits for public comment and for individual speeches.
2. Have the public address the chair, and have the chair respond.
3. Don't engage in dialogue with the public, but have arrangements to answer their questions afterwards.
4. Speakers may not donate their time.
5. On the dais, make the effort to be, and to appear to be, listening intently to all speakers.

261

**Jurassic Parliament** Mastering meetings using Robert's Rules

*Kindness is within our power.  
Liking is not.*

Samuel Johnson, British author

262

**Jurassic Parliament** Mastering meetings using Robert's Rules

*Serving on a local government board  
is like being in a marriage  
arranged by the citizens.*

Tami Tanoue, Colorado Intergovernmental  
Risk Sharing Agency

263

**Jurassic Parliament** Mastering meetings using Robert's Rules

## Why are we here?

To invigorate you to run effective meetings  
to serve your community

264

Disclaimer: Nothing in this presentation constitutes business or legal advice.

© Jurassic Parliament 2023. All rights reserved.

PO Box 77553, Seattle, WA 98177

Tel: 206-542-8422

Email: [ann@jurassicparliament.com](mailto:ann@jurassicparliament.com) Web: [www.jurassicparliament.com](http://www.jurassicparliament.com)

# EXCERPTS FROM THREE TYPES OF MINUTES

## Action Minutes, City of Snoqualmie WA City Council, April 11, 2022

### AB22-052: Hybrid Meeting Discussion (Part 1)

Recommended Action: Consider next steps and provide staff direction.

It was moved by Mayhew; second by Benson to:

Refer the Hybrid Meeting discussion to the next Finance and Administration meeting and that Finance and Administration come back to Council with a proposal for any changes to the Council Rules of Procedure necessary to implement Hybrid meetings.

PASSED: 5

FOR: 5 (Benson, Holloway, Laase, Mayhew, and Wotton)

## Summary Minutes, City of Burien WA Planning Commission, August 12, 2020

### b) Burien Tree Regulations – Policy Options

Brandi Eyerly, planner, reviewed threats to the urban forest and highlighted three objectives to keep in mind when developing policies to strengthen the City's tree codes, with an overall focus on environmental equity.

The commissioners considered:

- Prioritizing adding trees in areas around schools, in areas where social equity is a concern, and on public properties.
- Supporting a fee-in-lieu program and the establishment of a tree bank; the City should balance equity consideration for property owners.
- Incentivizing tree plantings on private, already developed properties.
- Considering public participatory decision-making for use of tree bank funds.
- Seeking funding sources for a full-time arborist and robust tree program.
- Ensuring the tree/landscaping requirements are reasonable for smaller lots.
- Seeking opportunities for youth programs.
- Balancing additional requirements for property owners with the taxes they already pay to support the community.

The commissioners presented numerous ideas for consideration and indicated a willingness to move forward on preparing code amendments suggested by staff in the presentation.

### **c) Meeting Minutes and Parliamentary Procedures Discussion**

Ms. McLain explained that the way minutes have previously been prepared are not in accordance with Robert's Rules of Order, which govern the Planning Commission meeting process. It was moved and seconded that summary minutes, reflecting the commissioners' discussions without individual attributions, be prepared from now on, in accordance with Robert's Rules. The motion was adopted.

## **Detailed Minutes, City of Bellevue WA City Council, August 7, 2023**

### **Amendments to 2009 Development Agreement for the Spring District Catalyst**

**Project and initiation of conformance Land Use Code Amendment to ensure compliance with RCW 36.70B.170(1).**

**City Manager Miyake introduced the briefing regarding proposed amendments to the 2009.** [staff presentation in detail, followed by discussion]

Ms. Robertson said the City is about to update the code fairly substantially in a way that will create additional public benefit in exchange for the significant density increase. She expressed concern about providing the full benefit of the density and building height increases in the new code without a commensurate public benefit from the developer. Councilmember Robertson recommended that, if the Council decides to extend the term of the DA, the developer can either proceed with the DA under the 2009 Land Use Code or develop projects under the anticipated future code amendments. [more comments]

Councilmember Stokes expressed support for the proposal as rational and beneficial, noting the extensive development in the Spring District to date. He said the 10-year extension is reasonable. He expressed support for moving forward while also considering Councilmember Robertson's recommendations. [more discussion]

Councilmember Robertson moved to direct staff to resume negotiations with Wright Runstad based on tonight's Council discussion and to return to a future Council meeting with additional information and potential revisions to the Spring District Development Agreement, to initiate the corresponding LUCA, and to create a finding of necessity for the Council to process the LUCA. Councilmember Stokes seconded the motion. The motion carried by a vote of 6-0.