



Municipal Technical Advisory Service
INSTITUTE *for* PUBLIC SERVICE

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City Council Meeting: Robert's Rules of Order

Dear Reader:

The following document was created from the MTAS website ([mtas.tennessee.edu](http://www.mtas.tennessee.edu)). This website is maintained daily by MTAS staff and seeks to represent the most current information regarding issues relative to Tennessee municipal government.

We hope this information will be useful to you; reference to it will assist you with many of the questions that will arise in your tenure with municipal government. However, the *Tennessee Code Annotated* and other relevant laws or regulations should always be consulted before any action is taken based upon the contents of this document.

Please feel free to contact us if you have questions or comments regarding this information or any other MTAS website material.

Sincerely,

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City Council Meeting: Robert's Rules of Order

Reference Number: MTAS-1006

Most cities and towns have adopted *Robert's Rules of Order, Newly Revised* (RONR) as their guideline for parliamentary procedure. The book is updated every ten years with the decennial census. The latest version is the newly revised 11th edition. If there is a contradiction between RONR and your city charter, code, or ordinance, your locally adopted legislation prevails over RONR. If your policies are silent on any of the issues in RONR, and your municipality has adopted RONR, then RONR will dictate how to proceed.

Order of Business

Reference Number: MTAS-1007

1 Mayor: *The meeting 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 is no disagreement. If there is disagreement, then the elected official motions to amend the minutes. Otherwise the mayor states: *If there are no (further) corrections, the minutes stand approved as read (as corrected).*

3. *We will have the report of the officers* (such as a financial report by the recorder), *boards, standing committees, and special committees.* A motion is made to adopt the financial report. If a 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.

4. *Is there any unfinished business?* This is sometimes referred to as "old business" but the proper term is "unfinished business" and includes such things as second readings of ordinances. Action is completed on any business not settled when last meeting was adjourned. If there is no unfinished business, the mayor states there is no unfinished business and moves right into new business.

5. After the unfinished business...*Is there any new business* (ordinances on first reading, regulations, resolutions)?

a. Any council member 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/final reading should be read in full. Charters or by-laws of some municipalities may prohibit the amendment of certain ordinances after second reading. Any changes or amendments otherwise are offered at this time. By charter, some cities are required to pass ordinances on three readings. Each new ordinance, regulation, or resolution is read, discussed, adopted, postponed, referred to a committee, or otherwise disposed of before the next one is proposed.

6. After all the business is completed...*Is there anything for the good of the order?* This is the opportunity for elected officials to make any announcements or informal observations about the work of the municipality.

7. *If there is nothing further, I'll entertain a motion to adjourn.* A member states: *I move to adjourn.* The motion requires a second and majority vote. If the motion to adjourn fails, the meeting continues. If the motion passes, the mayor states: *The ayes have it, and the meeting is adjourned.*

Handling the Motions

Reference Number: MTAS-1008

1. Council member addresses the chair. *Mr./Madam Mayor, I'd like to have the floor to make a motion.*

2. Mayor recognizes speaker: *Council member _____, you have the floor.*
3. Council member: *I move the adoption of ordinance 2017-002 on first reading.*
4. Another council member: *I second the motion, or simply Second.*
5. Mayor states the motion: *The motion to adopt ordinance 2017-002 on first reading has been made by Council member _____ and the motion has been seconded ...Is there any discussion?* This opens the floor to debate on the ordinance. The person who made the motion has the right to discuss it first. Discussion must be addressed to the mayor. The motion may be changed by amendment (another motion). If the council does not wish to take final action on the motion, it may dispose of the motion in some other way (most typically by postponing definitely [usually to the next meeting], or postponing indefinitely [which kills the motion]).
6. Under RONR decorum rules, members are allowed to speak on a motion only twice, and not for a second time until all members have had a first opportunity.
7. Debate then begins and may end one of two ways:
 - a. A member may close (end) debate by requesting the floor from the mayor, then saying: *I move the previous question*

Another elected official seconds the motion, *I second the motion or Second.*

The mayor states: *There is a motion and a second to move the previous question which is adopting ordinance 2017-002 on first reading. Those in favor of ordering the previous question say "aye"... those opposed say "no"*

The mayor states the outcome of the vote: *The ayes have it and the motion carries or The nos have it and the motion fails, so debate continues.*

If the motion carried, the mayor immediately moves into taking a vote on the ordinance: *Those in favor of adopting ordinance 2017-002 on first reading say "aye"... those opposed say "no"*
 - b. The mayor may close debate by stating: *If there is no more discussion on the motion to adopt ordinance 2017-002 on first reading, let's move to a vote.* If no one opposes (there is silence) then the mayor states: *All those in favor of adopting ordinance 2017-002 on first reading say "aye." Those opposed say "no."* If an elected official speaks out against closing debate, then debate continues.
8. Otherwise, the mayor states the outcome of the vote: *The "ayes" (or "nos") have it. The motion is carried (or defeated).*

Amendments to Change Motions

Reference Number: MTAS-1009

1. After a main motion is made and seconded, and debate has begun, an elected official may suggest a change to the legislation with another motion: *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 the legislation. The amendment changes the motion. The amendment is handled in the same way as a main motion.
4. The mayor opens the floor to debate on the amendment: *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 governing body is...* (the motion plus the amendment, if carried).

Keeping Council Minutes

Reference Number: MTAS-1010

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.

The first paragraph of the minutes should contain:

1. the kind of meeting (regular, special, adjourned regular, or adjourned special)
2. the name of the governing body
3. the date, time and location of the meeting
4. the fact that the mayor and recorder were present, or, in their absence, the names of the people who substituted for them
5. whether the minutes from the previous meeting were read and approved - as read, or as corrected - and the date of that meeting if it was anything other than a regular meeting.

Record each motion as a separate paragraph.

The last paragraph should state the time of adjournment.

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

Minutes should be signed by the recorder.

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

Reference Number: MTAS-1011

The recorder's duties under RONR are to:

1. Keep a record of the minutes
2. Keep on file all committee reports
3. Keep the official membership roll and call role where it is required
4. Make the minutes available
5. Furnish the governing body with documents necessary for them to do their jobs
6. Furnish delegates with credentials (not applicable to small governing bodies)
7. Sign all certified copies of acts of the governing body
8. Maintain minute books and have the current minute book on hand at each meeting
9. Send notice of the next meeting to the elected officials
10. Prepare the agenda (order of business) for each meeting for the use of the mayor
11. Call a meeting to order in the absence of the mayor and vice mayor and manage the election of a mayor pro tem for that meeting.

The Mayor's Duties

Reference Number: MTAS-1012

Mayoral duties regarding meetings, according to RONR are to:

1. Open the meeting at the appointed time and call the meeting to order and declare if a quorum is present or not
2. Announce the order of business (agenda)
3. Recognize elected officials who are entitled to the floor
4. State and put to vote all questions on motions that legitimately come before the governing body; and to announce the result of each vote
5. Protect the governing body from obviously dilatory motions by refusing to recognize them
6. Enforce the rules of debate, order, and decorum
7. Expedite business in every way compatible with the rights of members
8. Decide all questions of order
9. Respond to inquiries of elected officials regarding parliamentary procedure
10. Sign minutes, ordinances and resolutions
11. Declare the meeting adjourned

In addition, the mayor should have at each meeting a copy of the municipality's charter, a copy of its parliamentary authority, a list of all committees and their members, and an agenda (order of business).

Final Form of Minutes

Reference Number: MTAS-1013

The final 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

Reference Number: MTAS-1014

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