

Essential Guidelines for City Councils



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Follow these essential guidelines of parliamentary procedure 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.

The chair runs the meeting in the service of the council. He is not the “boss” but serves as a facilitator, helping the council to hold free and fair discussion and make good decisions.

Ordinarily a councilmember must make a motion before any discussion begins. If there is no second, the motion is not taken up.

If a member makes a motion to amend the main motion, it is discussed and voted on before the main motion. After amending a motion, a vote must be taken on the main motion as amended.

After discussion, the chair calls for the vote and announces the result. The motion passes when a majority of those voting vote in favor, unless state law or your rules of procedure require a higher vote. This is different from the requirement for a quorum.

If someone “calls the question,” the chair must take a vote on whether to vote now or continue discussion. It takes a 2/3 vote to cut off discussion.

➔ *over*



► DISCUSSION

All members have equal rights, privileges and obligations. This means that discussion is not a conversation, but follows some important rules:

- The chair recognizes speakers in turn.
- No one may speak a second time until everyone who wishes to do so has spoken once.
- Interrupting is not allowed.

Councilmembers must be courteous and respectful. They may not make inappropriate remarks such as personal remarks, insulting language, or comments that are irrelevant.

If a councilmember breaks the rules, the chair may correct him, or another councilmember may raise a point of order. The chair rules as to whether the point is correct, or not. A councilmember who disagrees with a ruling of the chair may appeal it. If another member seconds the appeal, the council decides.

The minority must be provided equal opportunity to debate, even if their views are unpopular. However, the decision of the majority voting at a meeting is the decision of the council as a whole.

► PUBLIC INPUT

Public hearings and other quasi-judicial proceedings must be run according to the requirements of state law.

Public comment sessions offer an opportunity for members of the public to inform the council of their views. We recommend not entering into back-and-forth exchanges. Community forums, one-on-one discussion, feedback forms on the website, surveys etc. are better channels for an exchange of views.

Under the First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution, the public is not bound by the same rules of decorum and courtesy as the councilmembers.

The public should not engage in clapping, booing, hissing or other disruptive actions, since they intimidate speakers, may suppress free speech, and impede the work of the council.

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