

# HANDOUT

## Robert's Rules 1

### Running Great Meetings

Association of Washington Cities

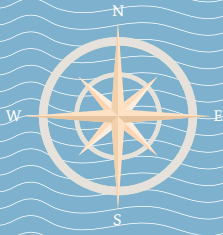
June 20, 2024

1. PowerPoint slides
2. Point of Order and Appeal
3. Rights and Responsibilities of the Member
4. Inappropriate Remarks on Local Government Councils
5. Can the mayor take part in discussion?
6. Cheat Sheet: Language tips for meeting management
7. Quick Guide for City Councils

Presented by

Ann G. Macfarlane


Professional Registered Parliamentarian



# League of NORTHWEST DINO CITIES



**Jurassic  
Parliament**

 Mastering meetings using Robert's Rules


---

## Robert's Rules 1 Running Great Meetings

Ann G. Macfarlane, Professional Registered Parliamentarian  
Jurassic Parliament

Association of Washington Cities  
Vancouver, Washington  
Thursday, June 20, 2024

1


 Mastering meetings using Robert's Rules

---

## Our topics

- I. Introduction
- II. Meeting discussion, Point of Order, Appeal
- III. How to do this?
- IV. Who's in charge?
- V. The right kind of control
- VI. Conclusion

2


 Mastering meetings using Robert's Rules

---

## I. Introduction Why are we here?

To energize you to run effective meetings  
to serve your community

3


 Mastering meetings using Robert's Rules

---

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

1. Apply the authority of the mayor and city council members correctly.
2. Follow best practices for discussion.
3. Respond to disorder or difficult people.
4. Make better decisions for your community.

4


 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

 Mastering meetings using Robert's Rules

---

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

6

## Principle of Equality

All members have equal rights, privileges and obligations.

7

7

## Key Point

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

8

8

## Fundamental guideline

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

9

9

## 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.

10

10

## 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.

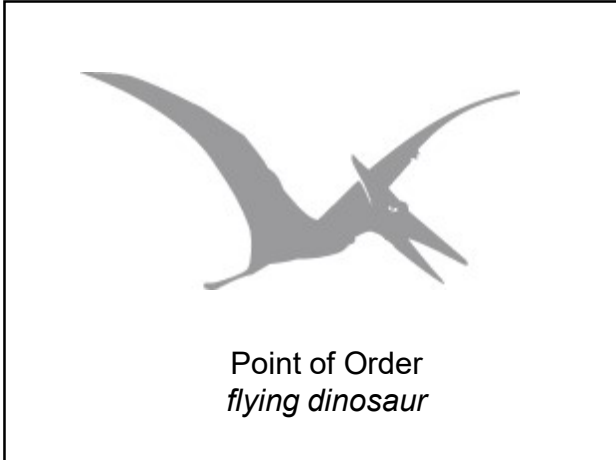
11

11

- Note that this guideline pertains to discussion on the substantive issues.
- The chair will speak more than others on procedural matters, because they have the role of facilitating the discussion during the meeting.

12

12



13

Jurassic Parliament Mastering meetings using Robert's Rules

## 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.

14

14

Jurassic Parliament Mastering meetings using Robert's Rules

## 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.

15

15

Jurassic Parliament Mastering meetings using Robert's Rules

## Process Point of Order

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

16

16

Jurassic Parliament Mastering meetings using Robert's Rules

## 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.

17

17

Jurassic Parliament Mastering meetings using Robert's Rules

## The chair must issue a ruling

- It is the chair's responsibility to say, "The point is well taken," or "The point is not well taken."
- Be alert as to whether the member who says "Point of Order" is actually using the motion correctly.
- The ruling goes into the minutes, as a precedent for the future. Use the passive voice! "A Point of Order was made that the word malarkey is insulting..."

18

18

## 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.”

19

19

## When should members make a Point of Order?

- Make a Point of Order if a rule has been broken.
- DO NOT make a Point of Order to bring something to the chair's attention, or because you think someone has made a factual mistake, or because you disagree with what they said.
- Speak about that when it is your turn to discuss.

20

20

## If someone is confused...

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

*What rule has been broken?*

21

21

## 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.

22

22

- 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.*

23

23

- 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.*

24

24

## 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.

25

25

## 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 his or her own behavior, which seems odd, but is the way the system works.

26

26

## No further discussion

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

27

27

## Appeal

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

28

28

## 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.

29

29

## 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.*

30

30

- 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.*

31

31

- 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 believe it is not an insult: *No!*

32

32

- Chair: *The ayes have it, the ruling of the chair is sustained, 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 RULING OF THE CHAIR SHOULD BE SUSTAINED.

33

33

### 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.

34

34

### 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.

35

35

### Don't get into arguments!

- If you are a member, you may not argue with the chair.
- If you are the chair, don't argue with a difficult member.
- Simply state your ruling, and then say *Does the member wish to appeal this ruling?*

36

36



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 local

37

### III. 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.
- Courtesy and respect are required.

38

38

### 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).

39

39

### 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.

40

40

### Rights and Responsibilities of the Member



Weldon L. Merritt, 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

41

### Fundamental guideline

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

42

42

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

## NO CROSS TALK BETWEEN MEMBERS!

43

43

**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.

44

44

**SPEAKING CHART**

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

45

45

**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!
- You can vary the order.
- This rule applies to questions and answers also, and to discussions with staff. Don't let any two people “hijack” the meeting.

46

46

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

## 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.

47

47

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

## No sidebars or texting

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

48

48

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

## Frustrating

- Structuring discussion in these ways can be frustrating.
- Councilmembers 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 council well.
- However...

49

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

## An occasional exception...

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

50

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

## Fundamental guideline

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

51

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

## 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

52

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

## 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.

53

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

## 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*

54

## 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.

55

55

## Important note

- Note that these are council rules.
- They **DO NOT APPLY** to the public when they are giving public comment.

56

56

## IV. Who's in charge?

57

57

## Note on role of chair

- Robert has different rules for small boards (up to about 12 people).
- In a small board, chair may make motions, second, discuss, and vote, unless law, regulations or bylaws say otherwise.
- We recommend chair exercise restraint by speaking and voting last, and refrain from making motions (this is a Jurassic Parliament suggestion).

58

58

## Language tip

*Would any member care to move that...*

59

59

## In Washington

- In Washington state, the mayor in a council-manager city has all the rights of membership.
- The mayor in a mayor-council city is not a member of the council, and may not make motions or second them.
- However, the mayor can and should take part in discussion—with restraint.

60

60

Can the mayor take part in discussion?



What is the role of the mayor in discussion at city council meetings? The answer to this question is a bit subtle.

61

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

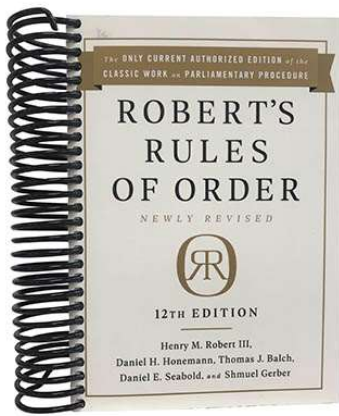
Abbreviated RONR

"Rules of Order Newly Revised"

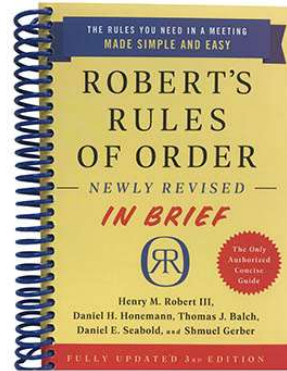
We recommend spiral-bound editions from National Association of Parliamentarians

Also available in Kindle on Amazon

62

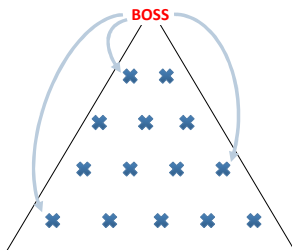


63



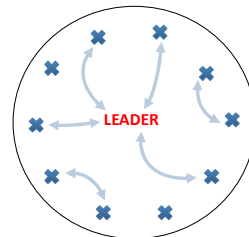
64

### Accountability Hierarchy



65

### Voluntary Association



66

### Key Point

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

67

67

### Key Point

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

68

68

### Fundamental guideline

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

69

69

### You have both types of structure

- The council forms a voluntary association.
- The mayor or city manager and staff form an accountability hierarchy.

70

70

### What is each person'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

71

71



LEGISLATION is the prerogative of the council. Mayor or city manager supports council, but does not decide.

72



ADMINISTRATION is the prerogative of the mayor or city manager. Council may not interfere.

73

## Councilmembers may not do the work of the city

- Elected officials care deeply about their city.
- Sometimes they have special knowledge and expertise.
- They may make suggestions, but they may not do the work of the city themselves.
- Why? They must not cross the line between legislation and administration.
- This is a legal requirement!

74

74

## Your duty as a councilmember

- **Debate and determine overall strategy, policy, and legislation for your city.**
- **Leave the details of operations to the mayor or city manager and staff.**

75

75

## Vigorous discussion

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

76

76

## 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.

77

77

## 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.

78

78

**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

79

**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.

80

**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).

81

**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:

82

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

## What is the alternative?

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

Elias Canetti, author and Nobel Prize winner

83

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

## V. The right kind of control

84



### 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.

85

85

### 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.

86

86

### 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.

87

87

### 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?
- They can make a Point of Order or Appeal.

88

88

**“Generous authority”**

89

89

### THE ART OF GATHERING

HOW WE MEET AND WHY IT MATTERS

PRIYA PARKER

90

## 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.

91

91

## 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...*

92

92

## 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*

93

93

## Language tip

- No sarcasm, no eye-rolling, no shoulder shrugging.
- Respect is essential, even when provoked.
- Your colleagues and the public will detect contempt instantly, and it will worsen the atmosphere.

94

94

## Emotion is more important than procedure

95

95

## A balancing act

- Radiate confidence.
- Speak clearly and definitely.
- At the same time, keep emotionally connected to the people present, insofar as possible.
- Your style should be firm, but not harsh.

96

96

**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>1. Member says, "Point of Order."</li> <li>2. Chair says, "State your point."</li> <li>3. Member explains issue.</li> <li>4. 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>1. Member says, "Point of information."</li> <li>2. Chair replies, "State your question."</li> </ol>

97

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

## VI. Conclusion

98

97

98

**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

99

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

100

99

100

**MASTERING COUNCIL MEETINGS**  
A GUIDEBOOK FOR ELECTED OFFICIALS AND LOCAL GOVERNMENTS

Ann G. Macfarlane, PRP, CAE  
and Andrew L. Estep, CAE

**Jurassic Parliament**

101

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

## Quick Guide for City Councils

©City of Tulsa, WA 2009. 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.

102

101

102


 Jurassic Parliament  
Mastering meetings using Robert's Rules

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

1. Apply the authority of the mayor and city council members correctly.
2. Follow best practices for discussion.
3. Respond to disorder or difficult people.
4. Make better decisions for your community.

103

103


 Jurassic Parliament  
Mastering meetings using Robert's Rules

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

Samuel Johnson, British author

104

104


 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

105

105

 Jurassic Parliament  
Mastering meetings using Robert's Rules

**Why are we here?**

To energize you to run effective meetings  
to serve your community

106

106

 Jurassic Parliament  
Mastering meetings using Robert's Rules

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

© Jurassic Parliament 2024. 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)

107

107

# 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 is acting like a “boss.” They are essential for every local government body, nonprofit board, and any group that functions on democratic principles. Learn how to use them to ensure that the group is the final authority.

In this discussion, whenever we say “member,” we mean a voting member of the governing body.

## ► What is a Point of Order?

Point of Order is a motion that requires the chair to abide by the organization’s rules or parliamentary rules, or to require another member to abide by the rules. If an error isn’t obvious, the member may have to briefly explain how the rules are being broken.

This motion is made by just one member and in most circumstances the motion must be made at the time of the rule violation. When this motion is made it immediately and temporarily stops business until the Point of Order is ruled on by the chair, who will either agree with the member and enforce the rules, or may disagree with the member. Once the chair rules that the Point of Order was “well taken” (correct) or “not well taken” (incorrect), the business that was interrupted then continues (unless the chair’s ruling is immediately appealed).

## ► How does a member raise a Point of Order?

The member who sees a rule violation and wants the rule enforced should call out, “Point of Order!” or stand up and say, “I rise to a Point of Order.” If necessary, you may interrupt a speaker, but don’t do this lightly!



▶ **What happens next with a Point of Order?**

The chair should say, “State your point.” The member then explains the problem. Finally, the chair gives a ruling.

- If the chair agrees with the Point of Order, the chair says, “The point is well taken” and enforces the rule.
- If the chair disagrees, the chair says, “The point is not well taken,” and moves on with the business at hand.

▶ **Can a member raise a Point of Order about the chair’s actions?**

Yes. Everyone in the meeting must follow the rules. If this happens, the chair issues a ruling on their own action.

▶ **Can a member of the public or the audience who is not a member of the body raise a Point of Order?**

No. Only a member of the body itself can raise a Point of Order.

▶ **Sample script for “Point of Order”**

Member: *Chair, I rise to a Point of Order.*

Chair: *State your point.*

Member: *My esteemed colleague has used the term “cream-faced loon” in referring to the mayor of Dinoville. Under Robert’s Rules of Order, insults are inappropriate.*

Chair: *The point is well taken, and members will refrain from using this term.*

▶ **What should members do when they disagree with a ruling by the chair?**

A member can appeal the chair’s ruling (which must be seconded). This tells the chair that two members are in disagreement with the chair’s interpretation and want the body to decide it for themselves. The motion must be made immediately. If other business intervenes, then it is too late to appeal the chair’s decision or ruling.

When the Appeal is made, it immediately and temporarily stops the pending business until a decision is reached on the Appeal. After a vote is taken on the Appeal by the members, the business that was interrupted then continues.

▶ **How is an Appeal conducted?**

A member stands and without waiting to be recognized, says: “I disagree with the ruling by the chair.” The chair must recognize an Appeal, even if worded simply as, “I don’t think that’s right - I disagree with you.” The formal wording is, “I appeal from the decision of the chair.” The chair then processes the motion, which may or may not be debatable.

Read more about how to process a Motion to Appeal, including a sample script, in this [this blog post](#), “Keep the chair in line using Appeal.”

Many thanks to Beverly Przybylski, PRP, for providing the original content of this paper. Any errors are, of course, the responsibility of Jurassic Parliament.

**Point of Order and Appeal are the heart of democracy**

© 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)

# Rights and Responsibilities of the Member



*Weldon L. Merritt, PRP, 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 Rules no member may be compelled to abstain on such a matter. Finally, as with all matters of parliamentary procedure, any right or responsibility established by RONR or any other parliamentary authority will yield to a contrary rule in the bylaws or in any applicable procedural statute.

All citations are from *Robert's Rules of Order Newly Revised*, 12th edition [RONR].

## **A MEMBER OF A DELIBERATIVE ASSEMBLY HAS THE RIGHT**

1. to attend meetings. [1:4]
2. to make motions. [1:4]
3. to speak in debate. [1:4]
4. to vote. [1:4]
5. to abstain from voting. [45:3]
6. to be given copies of the assembly's governing documents, including bylaws, special rules of order (if any), and standing rules. [2:13]
7. to unilaterally modify or withdraw a motion the member has made before it has been stated by the chair. [4:19]
8. to speak first in debate on a motion the member has made. [3:33(1)]
9. to insist on the enforcement of the rules of order, through the raising of a *Point of Order*. [23:1]
10. to require the assembly to adhere to its agenda, program, or order of business, by a *Call for the Orders of the Day*. [18:1]



11. to require a *Division of the Assembly* if the member doubts the result of a voice vote or a show of hands. [6:17(7)]
12. to change his or her vote up to the time the results are announced (except when the vote has been taken by ballot or another method providing secrecy). [45:8]
13. to demand a ballot vote on the question of guilt and on the imposition of a penalty in a disciplinary proceeding. [61:17]
14. to not have allegations against the member's good name made except by charges brought on reasonable ground. [63:5]
15. to have due process in any disciplinary proceedings. [63:5]
16. to require separate consideration of two or more unrelated questions offered in a single motion. [27:10-11]
17. to make a *Parliamentary Inquiry* or a *Request for Information* (also called *Point of Information*). [33:1]

#### **A MEMBER OF A DELIBERATIVE ASSEMBLY HAS THE RESPONSIBILITY**

18. to become familiar with the assembly's bylaws and procedural rules. [2:13]
19. to obtain the floor before making a motion or speaking in debate. [3:30]
20. to refrain from criticizing a ruling of the chair unless the member has appealed from the ruling. [24:2]
21. to refrain from debating a matter that is not pending. [43:4]
22. to confine remarks to the merits of the pending question. [43:20]
23. to refrain from attacking or questioning the motives of other members. [43:21]
24. to address all remarks to or through the chair. [43:22]
25. to refrain from referring to members by name. [43:23]
26. to refrain from speaking adversely on a prior action not pending. [43:24]
27. to refrain from speaking against the member's own motion. [43:25]
28. to read from reports, quotations, or other documents only with permission of the assembly. [43:26]
29. to be seated during any interruption by the chair. [43:27]
30. to refrain from disturbing the assembly. [43:28]
31. to refrain from explaining the member's vote during voting. [45:7]
32. to abstain from voting on a matter of direct personal interest. [45:4]

© Weldon L. Merritt 2020. All rights reserved.



# 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.
- They must speak to the issues, and not to personalities.
- They must stay on topic, and keep their remarks relevant to the item at issue.

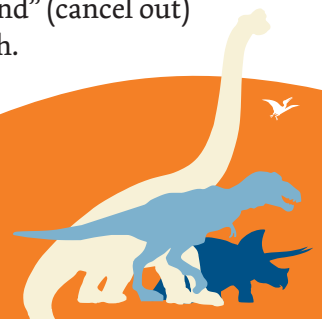
## ▶ Why are these remarks inappropriate?

A list of inappropriate remarks is given below. They are inappropriate because they are considered to be “not germane” (irrelevant) to discussion. We are offering parliamentary information here, and nothing in this paper constitutes legal advice. It is a fact, however, that courts have affirmed the right of councils and boards to define the frame of reference for their discussions, and to require elected members of the council or board to keep their remarks “germane” (relevant).

## ▶ List of inappropriate remarks that are not germane under Robert's Rules of Order

1. Personal remarks – remarks that pertain to an individual's appearance, background, ethnicity or other personal aspects, rather than their views on issues.
2. Insults, obscenity, vulgarity and personal attacks.
3. Inflammatory language – remarks that incite high emotions rather than addressing the issues.
4. Criticizing past actions of the group, with two exceptions:
  - a. If the group itself is discussing a past action, it is fine to criticize it.
  - b. If the council member intends to propose to “amend” (change) or to “rescind” (cancel out) the action at the end of his speech, they may criticize it during their speech.
5. Remarks that are not “germane” (relevant) to the discussion.

➡ over



► **Can members of the public make these inappropriate remarks?**

These restrictions apply to discussion by the members of the council or board themselves, and not to the public. When citizens or residents offer public comment, they have greater freedom than the elected officials. The council may set time limits for public comment, or require that public comment be limited to a subject under discussion by the council or board. However, any such restrictions must be “viewpoint neutral.” Under the First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution, councils may not discriminate in favor of one point of view over another.

► **Who decides that a remark is inappropriate?**

The chair of the meeting has the duty of enforcing the rules and should speak up and stop a council member who makes one of these remarks. If the chair neglects to do this, any council member can raise a Point of Order. When that happens, the chair makes a ruling as to whether the remark can be allowed in discussion.

Any two council members can challenge the chair’s ruling by appealing it. In that case, the council or board will decide, by majority vote, whether the remark can be made. There are no “parliamentary police”—the council itself interprets its own rules, based on its chosen parliamentary authority, and decides what remarks can be allowed in discussion, and what not. The council is the final authority—subject of course to any legal advice you receive from your attorney.

Note that Appeals pertaining to language and decorum may not be debated. It is just a straight up/down vote. Learn more about Point of Order and Appeal [in this blog post](#).

► **Where can I find the inappropriate remarks in Robert’s Rules of Order?**

You can find the rules about these remarks in *Robert’s Rules of Order Newly Revised, 11th edition*, the only current authorized version of Robert’s Rules, on pages xxxiv, 43, and 392-393.

*Thank you for your interest in running effective meetings using Robert’s Rules of Order. Visit our website, [www.jurassicparliament.com](http://www.jurassicparliament.com), for much more information on how to do this. Or contact us at [info@jurassicparliament.com](mailto:info@jurassicparliament.com) or 206-542-8422. We look forward to hearing from you!*

**inappropriate Remarks on Local Government Councils**

© Jurassic Parliament 2017. All rights reserved.

**TERMS OF USE**

This article is provided for personal use. The user may not modify, publish, license, create derivative works from, transfer or sell any information or services contained in this publication or obtained from our website, or use the content of our website for public or commercial purposes, including any text, images, audio or video, without the written permission of Jurassic Parliament. Jurassic Parliament reserves the right to update our website at any time without notice to you. If you would like to use or quote this material for any purpose other than expressly as authorized herein, contact the Jurassic Parliament office.

**DISCLAIMER**

This material is provided for general educational purposes. Jurassic Parliament makes no representation about the suitability of the information contained in the documents and related graphics published as part of these services for any purpose. All such documents and related graphics are provided “as is” without warranty of any kind. Jurassic Parliament hereby disclaims all warranties and conditions with regard to this information, including all warranties and conditions of merchantability, whether express, implied or statutory, fitness for a particular purpose, title and non-infringement. Nothing written here constitutes legal or business advice. Readers with specific questions are advised to seek an appropriate credentialed authority to address their issues.

---

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)

# Can the mayor take part in discussion?



What is the role of the mayor in discussion at city council meetings? The answer to this question is a bit subtle.

## **IN A LARGE COUNCIL, MAYOR DOES NOT TAKE PART IN DISCUSSION**

*Robert's Rules of Order* says that in a large group, the chair of the meeting does not take part in discussion. The chair serves as a facilitator, but does not actively express their views.

*The president...should, of all the members, have the least to say upon the substance of pending questions. Robert's Rules of Order Newly Revised, 12<sup>th</sup> ed., Section 47:19*

“Large group” is defined as more than about 12 people. So if, as in Chicago, the mayor chairs a city council of 50 aldermen, under Robert's Rules the mayor is not supposed to be taking part in discussion, and does not make or second motions.

Should the mayor of such a large council wish to take part, they may “pass the gavel” to the vice-chair and step down. Once having done this, the mayor remains as a member of the council until the item is processed. Read our article on [pass the gavel here](#).

Of course the mayor will speak during the meeting in order to announce the business items, recognize people, maintain order, and so on. However, this is different from commenting on the substance of items and participating in the discussion. For more detail, read about the [11 duties of the chair here](#).



---

### IN A COUNCIL-MANAGER CITY, THE MAYOR MAY TAKE PART IN DISCUSSION

If the city is structured on the “council-manager” pattern, where the mayor is one of the councilmembers, the mayor usually may take part in discussion. You will want to check your state law to confirm this point. Washington State law says:

*The chair of the council shall have the title of mayor and shall preside at meetings of the council. In addition to the powers conferred upon him or her as mayor, he or she shall continue to have all the rights, privileges, and immunities of a member of the council.* RCW 35A.13.030

### IN A MAYOR-COUNCIL CITY, THE SITUATION DEPENDS

If your city has a “strong mayor,” separately elected, who serves as the administrative head of the city and also chairs the council meetings, the situation will play out in different ways.

**LARGE COUNCIL** As discussed above, the mayor will not take part.

**SMALL COUNCIL** (up to about 12 people)

Our article, [Small board rules are different](#), describes the provisions in Robert’s Rules pertaining to small councils. The most important point is that in a small board or council, the chair may take part in discussion, make motions, and vote, unless law, regulations, or bylaws say otherwise. If you have adopted *Robert’s Rules of Order*, this permission extends to the chair of your meeting.

However, there is a further nuance, which is that technically speaking, in a mayor-council city, the mayor is not a member of the council.

**Option A** Some cities with small councils have established rules that require the mayor to refrain from speaking on the substance of issues, as in large councils:

*The presiding officer of the council may, at his discretion, call any member to take the chair, to allow the presiding officer to address the council, make a motion, or discuss any other matter at issue.* City of Enumclaw Washington

**Option B** In our experience, however, it is common for the mayor to have the right of participating in discussion, as long as the mayor does not dominate. The mayor has knowledge of details and the general situation that is relevant and important for the councilmembers to know.

This may be explicitly stated in council rules of procedure, or it may simply be a matter of custom. As readers know, unless the law says otherwise, the council is in charge of its own procedures. If your city allows the mayor to speak to issues, we recommend that in each round of discussion, the mayor speak last.

### THE MAYOR SHOULD PARTICIPATE IN DISCUSSION

Jurassic Parliament strongly recommends that councils give the mayor a role in discussion. I have seen situations where, due to bad feeling having developed between the mayor and the council, the council declined to allow the mayor to provide information or make comments. This did not end up well. The body needs the full perspective if it is to make good decisions.

In accepting elected office, councilmembers take on themselves the “duty of care” ([read article here](#)). This means that they are obliged to exercise due diligence, and to become as fully informed as they are able about the issues at hand. To refuse to listen means that the councilmembers are demonstrating negligence and bad faith.

Of course the other extreme also occurs. Sometimes mayors see themselves as the “boss” of the meeting. They may recognize people according to their whim and not according to the rules, interrupt members because they think they know more about the subject than the member, or refuse to allow councilmembers to address questions to the staff. This domineering behavior also does not end up well. Please see our article [When the chair is a bully or out of line](#) for ideas on how to deal with this problem.

Have you had experience with these issues? Share your stories with us [here](#)!

Additional relevant articles:

[When does the chair discuss and vote?](#)

[Do we have to obey the mayor?](#)

[Citizen’s Guide for Washington State](#)

#### **Can the mayor take part in discussion?**

© Jurassic Parliament 2022. All rights reserved.

#### **TERMS OF USE**

This article is provided for personal use. The user may not modify, publish, license, create derivative works from, transfer or sell any information or services contained in this publication or obtained from our website, or use the content of our website for public or commercial purposes, including any text, images, audio or video, without the written permission of Jurassic Parliament. Jurassic Parliament reserves the right to update our website at any time without notice to you. If you would like to use or quote this material for any purpose other than expressly as authorized herein, contact the Jurassic Parliament office.

#### **DISCLAIMER**

This material is provided for general educational purposes. Jurassic Parliament makes no representation about the suitability of the information contained in the documents and related graphics published as part of these services for any purpose. All such documents and related graphics are provided “as is” without warranty of any kind. Jurassic Parliament hereby disclaims all warranties and conditions with regard to this information, including all warranties and conditions of merchantability, whether express, implied or statutory, fitness for a particular purpose, title and non-infringement. Nothing written here constitutes legal or business advice. Readers with specific questions are advised to seek an appropriate credentialed authority to address their issues.

## 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>1. Member says, "Point of Order."</li> <li>2. Chair says, "State your point."</li> <li>3. Member explains issue.</li> <li>4. 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>1. Member says, "Point of Information."</li> <li>2. Chair replies, "State your question."</li> <li>3. Member states question.</li> <li>4. Chair can respond three ways: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Respond yourself.</li> <li>▶ Ask someone else to respond.</li> <li>▶ Say, "We'll get back to you later."</li> </ul> </li> </ol>
When "Point of Information" is misused to give information	<i>What information does the member need in order to decide how to vote?</i>
If someone is dominating the meeting	<i>No one may speak a second time until everyone who wishes to do so has spoken once. Does anyone else wish to speak on this topic?</i>
When comments are not germane (relevant)	<i>Members will kindly keep their remarks strictly to the topic under discussion.</i>
If people are whispering	<i>Members will kindly refrain from sidebar conversations.</i>
Adjourning the meeting	<i>There being no further business, this meeting is adjourned.</i>

- Strive to be firm, fair and friendly.
- Use the "third person" to keep things neutral and lessen conflict.
- Give up on the word *but*. Always say *and*.
- Say *kindly*, not *please*, which sounds like pleading.
- Say *very well* and move on.
- Beware of "negativity bias." No frowning, no sarcasm, no eye-rolling.
- Keep an emotional connection with the members by emphasizing what we have in common.





# Quick Guide for City Councils



© City of Tukwila, WA 2021. 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.

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.

### **Quick Guide for City Councils**

© Jurassic Parliament 2022. All rights reserved.

#### **TERMS OF USE**

This article is provided for personal use. The user may not modify, publish, license, create derivative works from, transfer or sell any information or services contained in this publication or obtained from our website, or use the content of our website for public or commercial purposes, including any text, images, audio or video, without the written permission of Jurassic Parliament. Jurassic Parliament reserves the right to update our website at any time without notice to you. If you would like to use or quote this material for any purpose other than expressly as authorized herein, contact the Jurassic Parliament office.

#### **DISCLAIMER**

This material is provided for general educational purposes. Jurassic Parliament makes no representation about the suitability of the information contained in the documents and related graphics published as part of these services for any purpose. All such documents and related graphics are provided "as is" without warranty of any kind. Jurassic Parliament hereby disclaims all warranties and conditions with regard to this information, including all warranties and conditions of merchantability, whether express, implied or statutory, fitness for a particular purpose, title and non-infringement. Nothing written here constitutes legal or business advice. Readers with specific questions are advised to seek an appropriate credentialed authority to address their issues.

---

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)