

# 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

## 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

2

# I. Introduction

3

3

# Why are we here?

To energize you to run effective meetings  
to serve your community

4

4

## 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.

5

5

## 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.

6

6

## Workshop method

- We are in the League of Northwest Dino Cities.
- This is not entirely realistic – it is a fantasy – but there is some overlap with real life!
- We use broad strokes to convey the big picture.
- We are observing a meeting of the Dinopolis City Council.

7

7



8

## City of Dinopolis Regular Council Meeting

*Motto: We do our best for all our residents,  
whether we like them or not!*

9

9



10

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

11

11

## Principle of Equality

All members have equal rights,  
privileges and obligations.

12

12

## Key Point

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

13

13

## Fundamental guideline

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

14

14

## Fundamental guideline

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

15

15

## 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.

16

16



## 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.

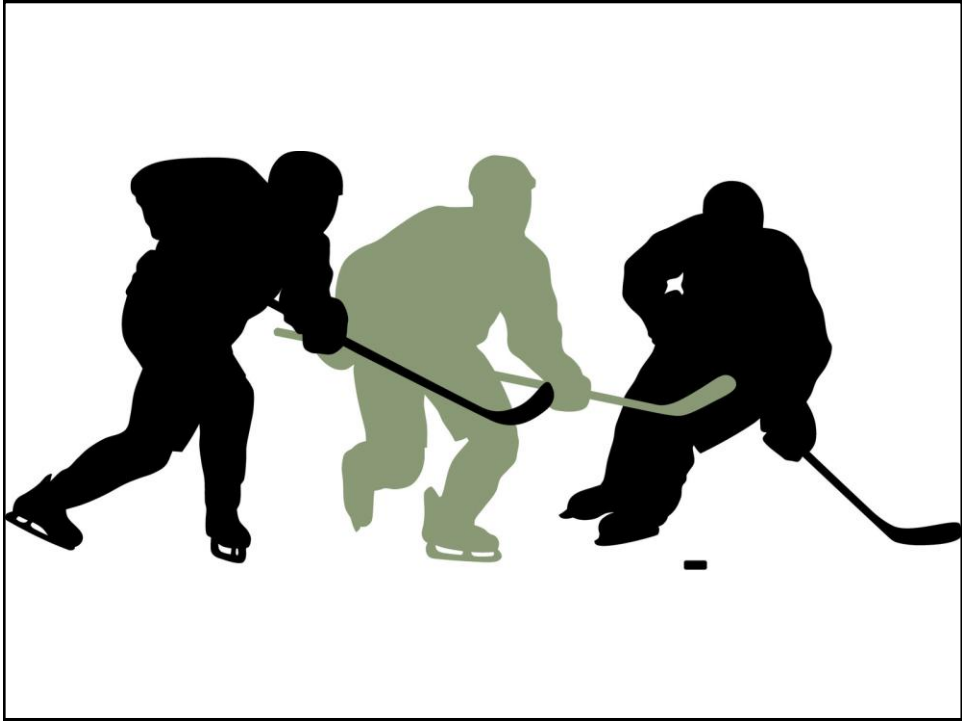
17

17

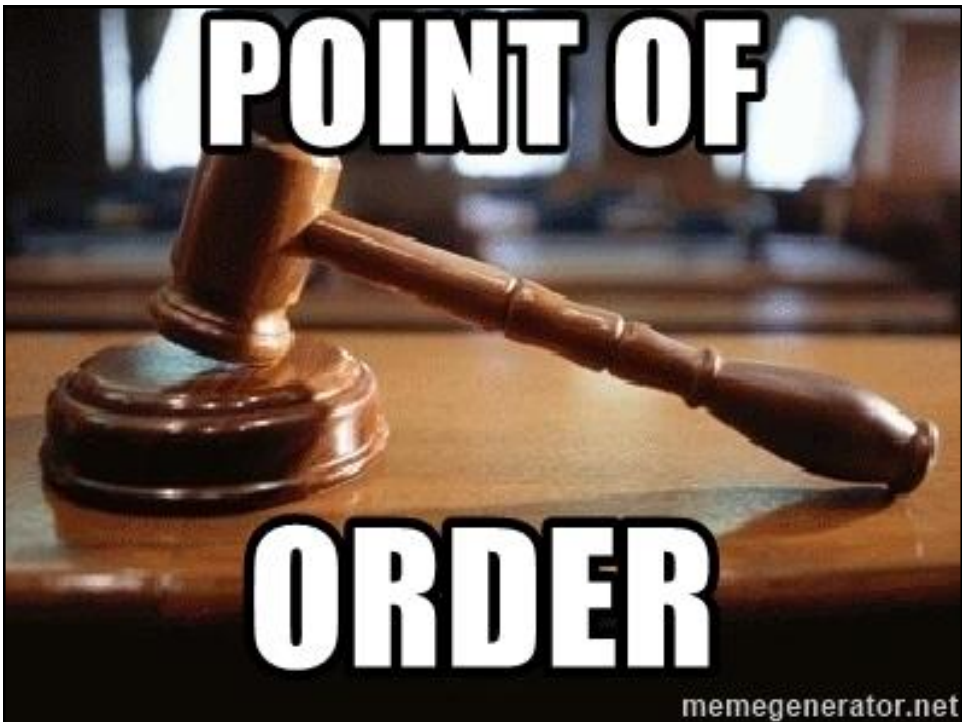
- Note that this guideline pertains to discussion on the substantive issues.
- The chair will speak more than others on procedural matters, because they have the role of facilitating the discussion during the meeting.

18

18



19



20



Point of Order  
*flying dinosaur*

21

## 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.

22

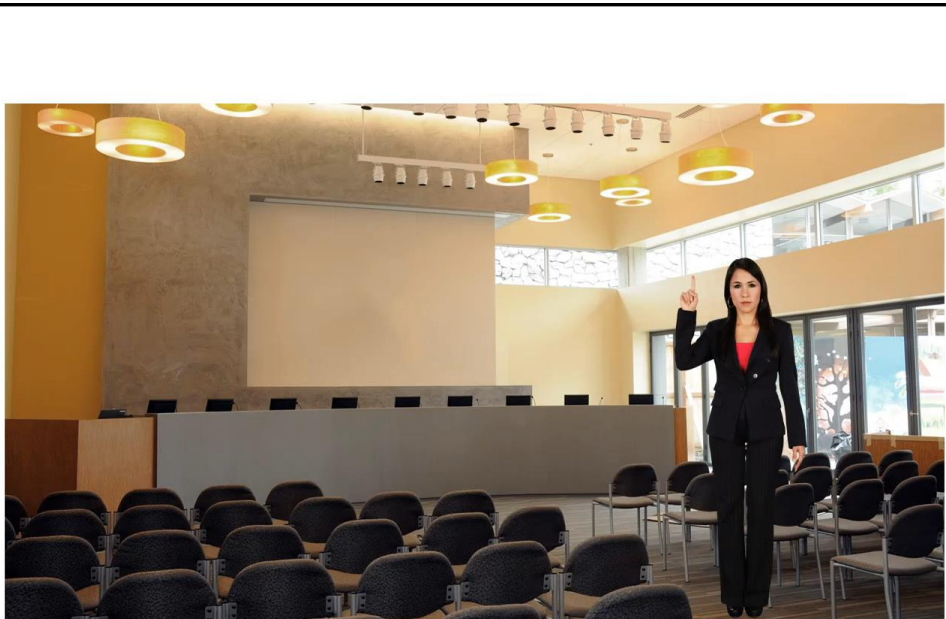
22

## 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.

23

23



24

24

## 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.*

25

25

## 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.

26

26

## 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..."

27

27

## 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."

28

28

## 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.

29

29

## 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?*

30

30

## 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.

31

31

- 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.*

32

32



- 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.*

33

33

## 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.

34

34

## 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.

35

35

## No further discussion


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

36

36



37

 Mastering meetings using Robert's Rules

---

## Appeal

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

38

38

## 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.

39

39

## 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.*

40

40

- 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.*

41

41

- 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!*

42

42

- 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.

43

43

## 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.

44

44

## 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.

45

45

## 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?*

46

46

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

47

### 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.

48

48



## 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).

49

49

## 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.

50

50

## Rights and Responsibilities of the Member



*Weldon L. Merritt, FRP, CFP, 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

51

## Fundamental guideline

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

52

52

## NO CROSS TALK BETWEEN MEMBERS!

53

53

## 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.

54

54

### SPEAKING CHART

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

55

## 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.

56

56

## 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.

57

57

## 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.

58

58

## 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...

59

59

## 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.

60

60

## Fundamental guideline

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

61

61

## 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

62

62

## 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.

63



64



## 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*

65

65

## 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.

66

66

## Important note

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

67

67

## IV. Who's in charge?

68

68

## 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).

69

69

## Language tip

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

70

70

## 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.

71

71

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.

72

72

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

Abbreviated RONR

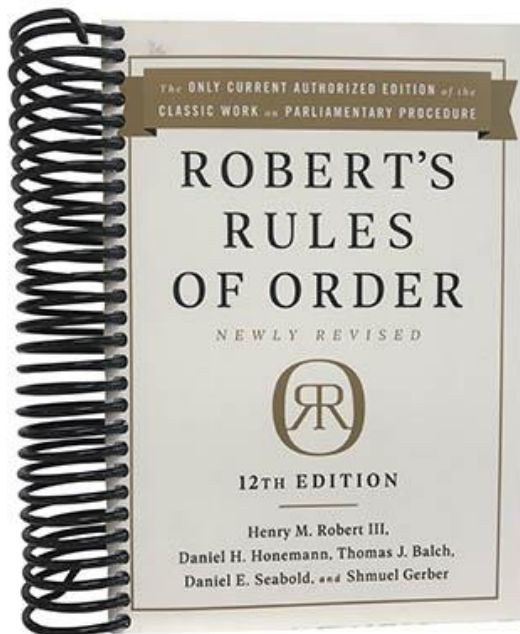
“Rules of Order Newly Revised”

We recommend spiral-bound editions from  
National Association of Parliamentarians

Also available in Kindle on Amazon

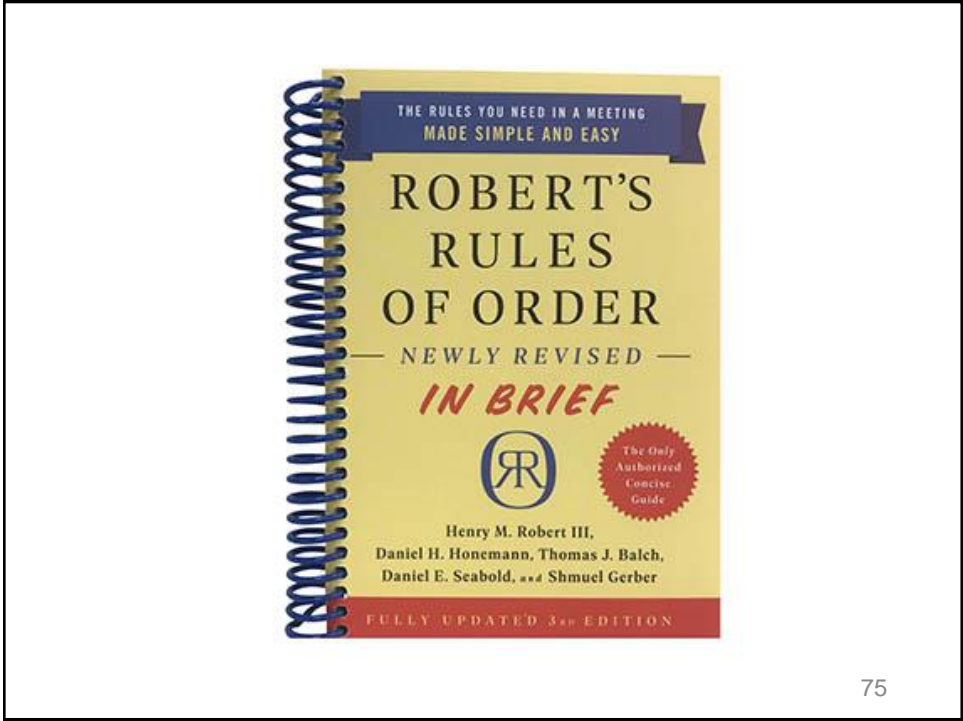
73

73



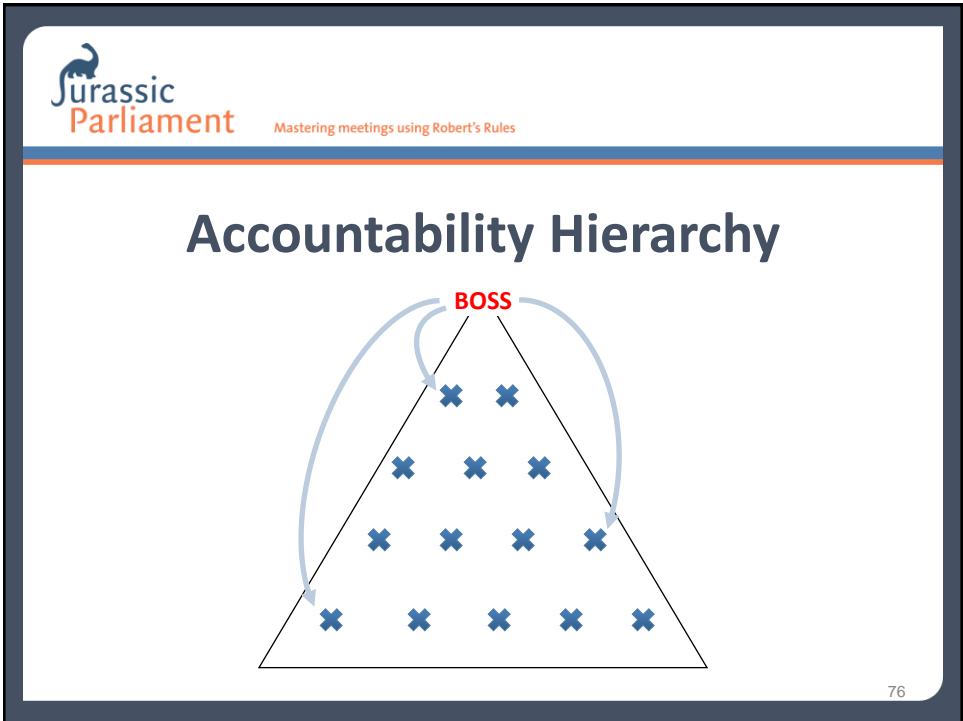
74

74



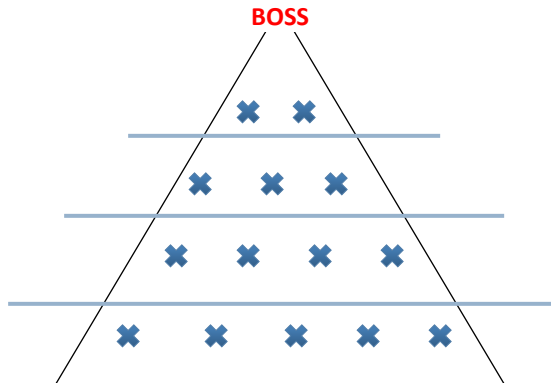
75

75



76

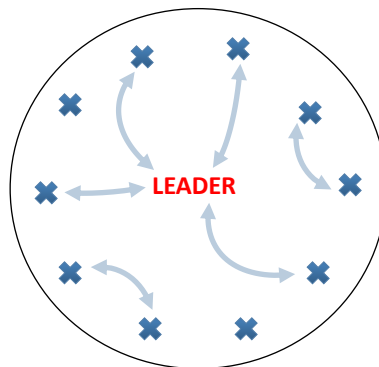
## Accountability Hierarchy



77

77

## Voluntary Association



78

78

## Key Point

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

79

79

## Key Point

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

80

80



## Fundamental guideline

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

81

81

## Fundamental guideline

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

82

82

## You have both types of structure

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

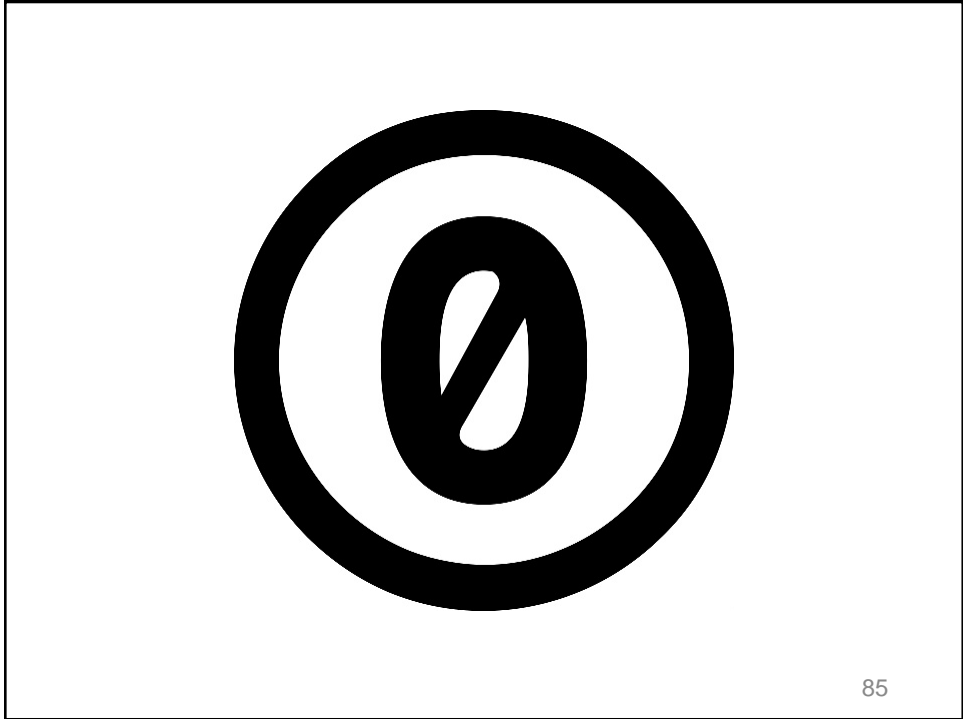
83

83

## What is each person's individual authority?


84

84



85

85

 Jurassic Parliament  
Mastering meetings using Robert's Rules

**ZERO**  
**Nothing**  
**Nada**  
**Zip**  
**0**

86

86

*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

87

87

**What is your individual power?**

88

88



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

89



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

90

## 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!

91

91

## 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.

92

92

## 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.

93

93

## 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.

94

94

## 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.

95

95



96



*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

97

97

## 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.

98

98

## 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).

99

99

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:

100

## What is the alternative?

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

Elias Canetti, author and Nobel Prize winner

101

101

## V. The right kind of control

102

102

## 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.

103

103

## 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.

104

104

## 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.

105

105

## 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.

106

106

## HOW to control?

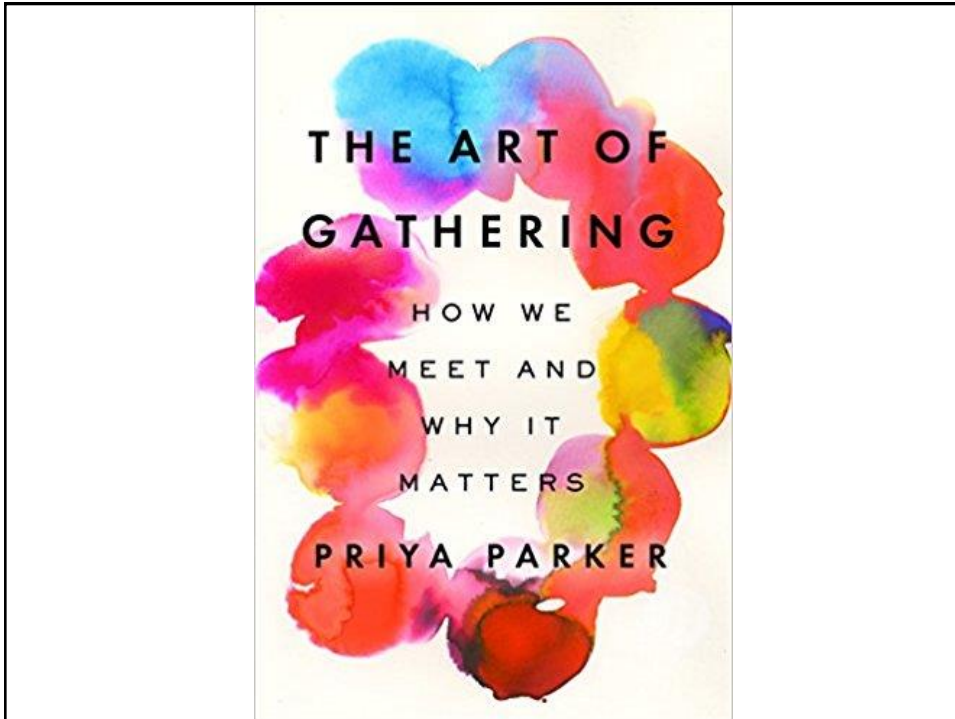
107

107


## “Generous authority”

108

108



109

 **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.

110

110



111

 **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...*

112

112



## 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*

113

113

## 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.

114

114

## Emotion is more important than procedure

115

115

## 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.

116

116

# 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>

117

117

# VI. Conclusion

118

118

## 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

119

119

## 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.”

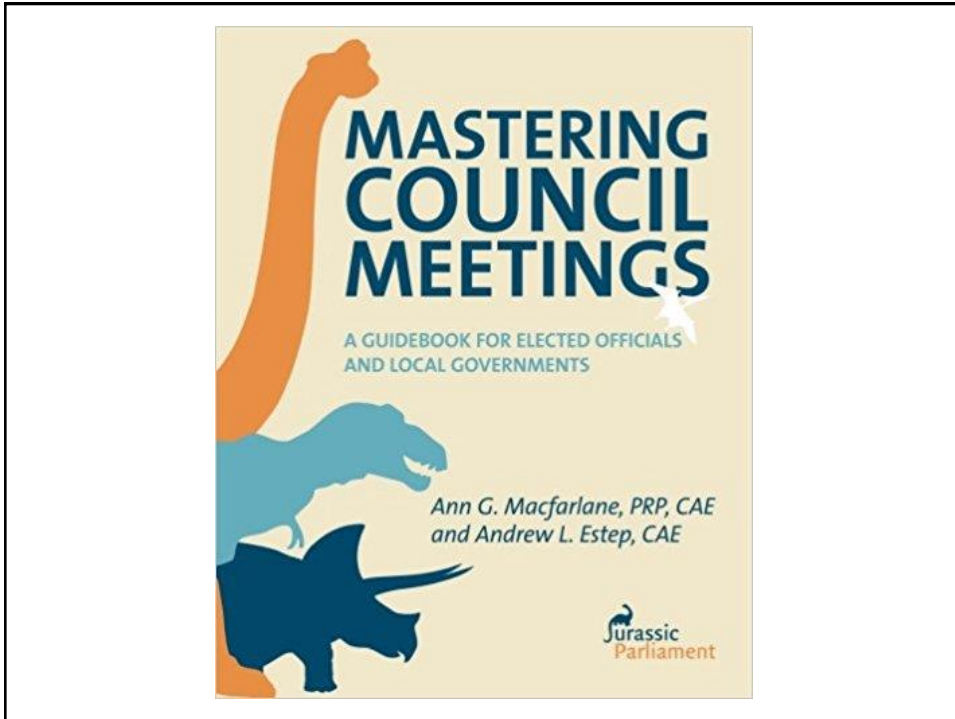
[www.jurassicparliament.com](http://www.jurassicparliament.com)

[ann@jurassicparliament.com](mailto:ann@jurassicparliament.com)

206-542-8422

120

120



121

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

---

## 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.

122

## 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.

123

123

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

Samuel Johnson, British author

124

124

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

Tami Tanoue, Colorado Intergovernmental  
Risk Sharing Agency

125

125

**Why are we here?**

To energize you to run effective meetings  
to serve your community

126

126

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)