

Reference Guide to Robert's Rules of Order
Napa County Board of Supervisors
September 2024

Introduction

Subdivision I.A.8. of the Napa County Board of Supervisors Policies for Conducting Business states that meetings of the Board shall be conducted according to Robert's Rules of Order.

Robert's Rules of Order are a broad set of guidelines dating back to San Francisco in 1876 and most recently updated in September 2020. Widely known as parliamentary procedure, Robert's Rules were developed to ensure that meetings are fair, efficient, democratic, and orderly. In small bodies, Robert's Rules can have some flexibility, but observing its basic functions and procedures can help maintain meeting productivity and member decorum.

This document provides a brief overview of the core functions of Robert's Rules that govern meeting structure and operations.

As the Board strives to properly observe these Robert's Rules fundamentals, Supervisors, County Counsel, and relevant meeting participants should rely on this document as a basic reference guide.

Meeting Structure & Operations

General Structure

In Robert's Rules of Order, the designated Chairperson (for the Napa County Board of Supervisors, the Chair) presides over and facilitates each meeting of the body according to its agenda. The Chair's responsibilities include fairly recognizing members (assigning the floor), effectuating the agenda's order of business, managing motions and motion debate, keeping discussions on-track, modeling and insisting on courtesy and respect for members, among others.

With few exceptions, meeting participants must always first obtain the floor before offering comment.

Motions

A motion is a proposal that the members take action on or discuss an issue. Motions form many of the action items of meetings. For any discussion to move forward, motions must be raised, seconded, and voted on. In a vote, the majority rule (and sometimes two-thirds vote) dictates whether a motion has passed.

Motion Types

1. Main Motion: Introduces a new item or action.
 - a) Cannot be made when any other motion is on the floor.
 - b) Main mover waits to justify their motion until Chair opens debate, not in the motion's introduction.
2. Subsidiary Motion: Change or affect how to handle a main motion (vote on this before main motion).
3. Privileged Motion: Urgent or important matter unrelated to pending business, often associated with physical meeting comfort (e.g., room distractions, temperature control).
4. Incidental Motion: Questions of procedure concerning other motions (must consider before the other motion).
5. Motion to Table: Kills a motion. The motion can at any given time be "taken from the table" for the body's consideration.
6. Motion to Postpone: Delays a vote (can reopen debate on the main motion).

Motion Procedure and Conduct

Under Robert's Rules, motions and movers adhere to the following protocol:

1. Obtain the Floor: A member rises or raises a hand to signal the Chair. Chairperson recognizes the member by name.
 - a) A member seeking to obtain the floor must wait until the last speaker has finished.
2. Present Motion: Address Chairperson (e.g., "Mister Chairperson, Madame President," etc.) and present motion in the affirmative (i.e., "I move that/to..").
3. Second: Another member seconds the motion.
 - a) A member does **not** need to obtain the floor to second a motion.
 - b) The Chairperson may also call for a second.
 - c) If no second, the motion is lost.
 - d) Note: A "second" does not indicate a member's agreement with the motion; rather, a desire for the motion's content to be discussed by the full body.
4. Restate motion: The Chairperson restates the motion and opens the floor to debate.
5. Expand on Motion: Mover justifies motion. The mover is always allowed to speak first.
6. Debate: Members debate the motion, always seeking recognition to obtain the floor. Alternatively, the body can move straight to a vote.
 - a) Comments and debate are always directed to the Chairperson, not the other members or meeting participants unless authorized by the Chair.
 - b) Each member has the opportunity to comment on a motion before any member can comment for a second time.
 - c) Mover may speak again only after other speakers are finished, unless called upon by the chairperson.
 - d) Members can cede their comment or time to another member.
 - e) Debate is always confined to the merits of the motion.
 1. Focus on issues, not personalities.
 2. Practice decorum, respect, and politeness.
7. Vote: Once debate has closed (no other member claims the floor), the Chairperson puts the question to the membership (asks the body if it is ready to vote on the question), restates the motion, and directs the secretary to conduct the vote via roll call.
8. Announce the Vote: The Chairperson announces the result of the vote and any relevant instructions for next steps.

Requesting Points of Something

Members may have relevant procedural questions that arise out of meeting business. The following points may be used without obtaining the floor:

1. Point of Order: A member seeks to draw attention to a breach of rules, established practices and procedures, or improper decorum.
2. Point of Information / Inquiry: A member needs clarification or additional information.
3. Point of Privilege: A member may use point of personal privilege to address the physical comfort of the meeting setting, such as temperature, distractions, noise. Members may also use to address the accuracy of published reports or a member's conduct.

Rules For Procedural Requests

All procedural requests take precedence over any motion and may be made at any time. Additionally, procedural requests:

1. Are always considered in order when another has the floor *if they require immediate attention*.
2. Do not require a second.
3. Are not debatable, amendable, or voted on.
4. Must be directed to the Chair.

ROBERTS RULES CHEAT SHEET

To:	You say:	Interrupt Speaker	Second Needed	Debatable	Amendable	Vote Needed
Adjourn	"I move that we adjourn"	No	Yes	No	No	Majority
Recess	"I move that we recess until..."	No	Yes	No	Yes	Majority
Complain about noise, room temp., etc.	"Point of privilege"	Yes	No	No	No	Chair Decides
Suspend further consideration of something	"I move that we table it"	No	Yes	No	No	Majority
End debate	"I move the previous question"	No	Yes	No	No	2/3
Postpone consideration of something	"I move we postpone this matter until..."	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Majority
Amend a motion	"I move that this motion be amended by..."	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Majority
Introduce business (a primary motion)	"I move that..."	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Majority

The above listed motions and points are listed in established order of precedence. When any one of them is pending, you may not introduce another that is listed below, but you may introduce another that is listed above it.

To:	You say:	Interrupt Speaker	Second Needed	Debatable	Amendable	Vote Needed
Object to procedure or personal affront	"Point of order"	Yes	No	No	No	Chair decides
Request information	"Point of information"	Yes	No	No	No	None
Ask for vote by actual count to verify voice vote	"I call for a division of the house"	Must be done before new motion	No	No	No	None unless someone objects
Object to considering some undiplomatic or improper matter	"I object to consideration of this question"	Yes	No	No	No	2/3
Take up matter previously tabled	"I move we take from the table..."	Yes	Yes	No	No	Majority
Reconsider something already disposed of	"I move we now (or later) reconsider our action relative to..."	Yes	Yes	Only if original motion was debatable	No	Majority
Consider something out of its scheduled order	"I move we suspend the rules and consider..."	No	Yes	No	No	2/3
Vote on a ruling by the Chair	"I appeal the Chair's decision"	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Majority

The motions, points and proposals listed above have no established order of preference; any of them may be introduced at any time except when meeting is considering one of the top three matters listed from the first chart (Motion to Adjourn, Recess or Point of Privilege).