



Parliamentary Procedure

“The object of Rules of Order is to assist an assembly to accomplish the work for which it was designed, in the best possible manner. To do this it is necessary to restrain the individual somewhat, as the right of individual in any community, to do what he pleases, is incompatible with the interests of the whole.”

-Henry Martin Robert

Public meetings in the City of Santa Clara – including City Council, Council subcommittees, and all City boards, commissions and committees – follow Robert’s Rules of Order to ensure that business is conducted in an orderly and democratic manner. Robert’s Rules of Order are accepted throughout the U.S. as the standard authority on parliamentary law and procedure. Copies of the complete text of Robert’s Rules of Order are available at the City Library and may be purchased at bookstores. Summaries can be found online.

The use of parliamentary procedure:

- Promotes cooperation and harmony so that people can work together more effectively to accomplish their goals;
- Guarantees each individual and equal right to propose motions, speak, ask questions and vote;
- Protects the rights of minority points of view and gives the minority the same consideration and respect as those in the majority;
- Encourages the full and free discussion of every motion presented;
- Ensures that the meeting is fair and conducted in good faith.

Who was Robert and why is he making the rules?

Robert’s Rules of Order are based on parliamentary procedure originally used in the British Parliament. Early colonists followed the British model in the first New England town meetings. When he was President, Thomas Jefferson published the first American book on parliamentary procedure in 1801 which served as the rules for Congress. In 1876, an engineer and general in the U.S. Army, Henry Martin Robert, modified these procedures to meet the needs of “ordinary society.” His version, Robert’s Rules of Order, has become the authoritative guide for governments, organizations, clubs and schools throughout the U.S.

Quorum

A quorum is the minimum number of members that must be present for a group to conduct business. For the Charter Review Committee of thirteen (13) members, this means that a minimum of seven (7) members be present for the Committee to take action.

Motions

A motion is the way that business is conducted by a group under parliamentary procedure. It is a proposal that an individual would like the group to consider and act upon.

Steps in making, discussing and voting on a motion:

1. The maker of the motion asks for recognition by the Chair.
2. After the individual is recognized, he or she will say "I move that we...."
3. The Chair will ask if there is a second. Another member of the group must second the motion in order for it to be discussed. A second is made by saying "I second the motion."
4. The Chair then restates the motion "It has been moved and seconded that...." And opens the floor to discussion.
5. The Chair will recognize members who wish to commend on the motion. Only one motion may be discussed at a time. It is important that all members of the group are clear on what the motion is and what its effect will be. Spirited discussion helps to answer questions and explore different interpretations and/or impacts of the motion.
6. At the end of the discussion period, the Chair will "call for the question" and ask how many members are in support of the motion, how many are opposed and if there are any abstentions. A majority vote is needed for the motion to pass. The motion may be noted as passing or failing by verbal "ayes" and "nays" of members, or by counting a show of hands.

Other common motions:

Amending a motion	"I move to amend the motion by...."
Delaying consideration	"I move to table the motion until....."
Closing debate	"I move the previous question...."
Requesting more study	"I move to refer this to _____ (staff or subcommittee) for further study....."
Objecting to procedure	"Point of order."