



Making a Motion

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Welcome to the inaugural League of Wisconsin Municipalities' column on parliamentary procedure and related matters for conducting local government meetings. It is our sincerest hope that the information we provide here will be informative and useful, but falls well short of putting you to sleep before you read the final sentence. We know. That will be a challenge. This column is about meeting procedures after all, not the goofiest public policy decision of the month. As always, we welcome your feedback as well as suggestions for future columns. This one is about making a motion.

Motions are an important vehicle for debating policy decisions, even for small- or medium-sized bodies like city councils, village boards, and their committees. However, it is important to note that a motion is not required for discussion of an issue.

Informal discussion of an issue even though there is no motion pending is procedurally permissible. However, an informal discussion is not the same as a free-for-all. Rather, discussion rules pertaining to recognition, time limits, decorum, and other procedures should be applied by the presiding officer to ensure a fair and full discussion by all members.

A more structured discussion and debate is commenced with a motion. To make a motion a member should state, "I move we..." and complete the motion with what is to be done, when, where, and how. The motion maker should not state their reasons for the motion when making it. The reasons for the

motion are offered and addressed during the discussion and debate on the motion.

Each motion must have a second to indicate that at least one other member is interested in discussion. A member wishing to second a motion should simply state, "I second" or "second." A debatable main motion fails if there is no second and any discussion on the motion is out of order. However, discussion of an un-seconded motion without an objection may reasonably be deemed a waiver of the second rule and provide the discussion and any subsequent protection from challenge.

Once made and seconded, a main motion is available for debate and discussion pursuant to the rules of the body. Forthcoming columns will address some of the key debate and discussion rules provided by Robert's Rules of Order and other sources.