



# The Roll Call Vote

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In our last column, I briefly discussed different voting requirements and explained how to conduct a voice vote (the most commonly used method of voting) under Robert's Rules of Order (RONR). However, there are several other methods of voting under RONR. This month's column will discuss the roll call vote.

With a roll call vote, each member's vote is ascertained and recorded. In some instances, a roll call vote is statutorily required – e.g., Wis. Stat. § 70.47(8)(g) which requires Board of Review determinations of assessment objections to be determined by roll call vote. In other instances, a roll call vote can simply be used to provide additional transparency and accountability to constituents regarding how their representatives voted on a particular issue.

For representative bodies, Robert's suggests that, absent a legal or constitutional requirement specifying otherwise, a representative body should adopt a rule specifying a minority number of governmental body members that may call for a roll call vote. RONR 45:45. Wisconsin Stat. § 62.11(3)(d) provides that a roll call vote may be required by any common council member. Moreover, Wisconsin's open

meetings law provides that any member of a governmental body may require that a vote be taken at any meeting in such a manner that the vote of each member is ascertained and recorded. Wis. Stat. § 19.88(2). Thus, any single body member can require a roll call vote in Wisconsin. Under Robert's, a committee of the whole may not order a roll call vote. RONR 45:46.

To take a roll call vote, the chair may put the question in a manner similar to the following: *“Those that are in favor of adopting the motion to purchase a new truck for the public works department will, as their names are called, answer aye [or “yes,” or “yea”]; those opposed will answer “no” [or “nay”]. The Clerk (or the secretary, depending on the body) will call the roll.”* RONR 45:47. When conducting a roll call vote, members' names should be called in alphabetical order, with the chair's name called last (assuming they are entitled to vote on the matter). RONR 45:48. Robert's also provides that the chair only votes in the event their vote will “matter.” RONR 45:48. However, it is important to remember that Robert's is not tailored to Wisconsin law, which provides that a village president has a vote as a trustee, and a city mayor votes only in event of a tie.

Robert's provides that the member responds with “yea” or “nay.” To abstain, a member may say “present” or “abstain.” If a member is not ready to vote when called upon, he or she may also say “pass” and request to be called on to vote again after the roll call is complete. Debate may not be resumed once the first person has answered to the roll call vote. RONR 45:48. The clerk (or secretary) repeats each name and answer as they are given and records the same. RONR 45:48.

A member may change their vote once the roll call is complete, so long as the vote's result has not been announced. RONR 45:50. The clerk, or secretary, provides the chair with the total yeas, nays, and abstentions, and the chair announces them and declares the vote's result. RONR 45:51. The vote's result should, as always, be included in the minutes and should include the details of each member's vote.

Stay tuned for a discussion of several other methods of voting in the next column.

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