



Getting to Good Meetings - Local Government Meeting Rules and the Chair's Role

Daniel Foth, JD, Local Government Specialist, Local Government Center, UW-Madison, Division of Extension

How do you define a good local government meeting (“good meeting”)? Informal surveys, conducted during my parliamentary procedure classes, indicate that a good meeting is one that allows the body to complete the business at hand effectively and efficiently. Attendees said a “good meeting” includes: staying on track with the agenda, allowing all body members the opportunity to participate, and members discussing matters civilly. In Wisconsin, council/board meetings involve the chair and the members of the body. The chair and body members each have their own set of responsibilities in enabling a “good meeting” to occur. This article will focus on council/board meeting rules and how these rules can help the chair get to a “good meeting.”

In cities, the mayor serves as chair for council meetings but votes only in the case of a tie; in villages, the president serves as the chair at village board meetings and has a vote as trustee. Wis. Stat. §§ 62.09(8)(b), 62.11(1), and 61.24. A “good meeting” requires that the chair understand her/his responsibilities and duties. The chair’s duties derive from Wisconsin law and the meeting rules (including parliamentary procedure) established by the city/village.

Both cities and villages may adopt their own parliamentary procedures or meeting rules. Wis. Stat. §§ 62.11(3)(e). What are these meeting rules? The simple answer is, whatever is agreed on by the alders/trustees. Some cities and villages develop their policies. Others use a standard source. There are three primary sources: *Roberts Rules of Order Newly Revised*, 11th Edition (RONR); *Sturgis Standard Code of Parliamentary Procedure* (a simplified version of RONR); and *Welty’s Book of Procedures for Meetings, Boards & Officers* (notes methods for managers to plan, organize, and conduct productive committee meetings). Finally, another source is *A Guide to Parliamentary Procedure for Local Governments in Wisconsin* by Larry Larmer (currently under revision) that merges Wisconsin law, RONR, and best practice procedures.

Recently the UW-Madison Extension Local Government Center (LGC) updated its survey of city/village meeting procedures. We surveyed the 150 most populated cities and villages to determine what they use for their meeting/parliamentary procedure rules. The survey indicated that 81 percent of those responding incorporate *Robert’s Rules of Order* (RONR) into their meeting procedures. Meeting rules frequently

address setting the agenda, meeting processes, conduct and etiquette. Rules also cover discussion, communication, motion clarity, and board or committee/ commission operation.

Under most parliamentary rules, including RONR (pp. 448-457), the chair has specific guidelines and meeting duties. These include: Calling the meeting to order, opening discussion, presiding, his/her right of participation (including making and seconding motions and voting, except for the mayor who only votes in case of a tie as noted above) and declaring the meeting adjourned (if the body completes the agenda or so votes).

The chair’s primary duty is to “preside over the meeting.” What does this mean? The meeting rules adopted by the council/board and RONR (pp. 448-457) guide the chair in administering the group’s deliberations. The chair announces issues, keeps members on track, recognizes members, restates motions for clarity, and seeks balance by alternately allowing both sides to speak to the subject. The chair should step down as chair if s/he desires to speak to the motion. The chair can resume her/his duties for the next agenda item.

The chair also seeks participation of all members who want to participate, closes debate (by vote or unanimous consent), puts motions and any amendments to a vote, asks for votes on each side, and announces the outcome. Also, the chair enforces the body's rules by reminding members to confine remarks to the merits (not the personalities), discussing the pending topic (not what happened at the last meeting), reminding members to direct comments to the chair (not to each

other), and responding to requests and ruling on points of order.

What are the practical methods a chair can use? What tools and tips are available to keep the meeting running effectively and efficiently? Next month this article will focus on some best practices and useful ways the chair can get to a "good meeting."

About the Author:

Daniel has worked with local, regional, state, and federal government and nonprofit entities for his entire 40+ year career in the areas of infrastructure, operation, and governance.

Share your meeting rule/parliamentary procedure suggestions or questions. Email Daniel at daniel.foth@wisc.edu

Legal Captions

Employees 355

Summarizes Department of Labor's Final Rule updating the earnings thresholds necessary to exempt executive, administrative, and professional employees from the Fair Labor Standards Act's (FLSA's) minimum wage and overtime pay requirements effective January 1, 2020.

Licensing and Regulation 402

Town's denial of permit sought by wireless infrastructure provider to construct a cell tower on private rural land based on Town's conclusion that proposed tower would be incompatible with neighboring land uses based on its impact on the uses and lifestyle for which the neighborhood was zoned and the economic impact on neighboring property values was reasonable and was not based solely on aesthetic concerns as prohibited by Wis. Stat. §66.0404. *Eco-Site, LLC v. Town of Cedarburg*, 2019 WI App 42, 388 Wis.2d 375, 933 N.W.2d 179.

Powers of Municipalities 937

Legal comment briefly summarizes legal authority supporting and constraining municipal intergovernmental cooperation agreements for the receipt or furnishing of municipal services or the joint exercise of authority or provision of services, and recommends minimum provisions that should be addressed in such an agreement.



Solving Railroad Issues for Municipalities
 Unmatched Experience, Uniquely Qualified
 Former Legal Counsel, Office of the Commissioner of Railroads

Attorney Douglas S. Wood
 608.228.9536
 Email: wiscrcconsulting@gmail.com
www.wisrailroadconsulting.com

5304 Schlater Road
 Monona, WI 53716



Water Tower Painting & Repair - Inspections
 Power Washing & Expansion Joints
 Ladder Safety Devices

LANE TANK CO., INC.
 PO Box 500
 Menomonie, WI 54751

Office: (715) 235-3110
 Cell: (715) 308-9665
 Fax: (715) 235-5385



**DESIGNING UTILITIES
 THAT FIT YOUR GROWING NEEDS**

ARCHITECTURE • PLANNING • SURVEY •
 ENVIRONMENTAL • ENGINEERING • GIS

meadhunt.com

1-888-364-7272

Crack Filling Service Corp.
Pioneers in crack routing and rubberized sealants

1-800-732-4379

Jeff Herring Jim Herring Scott Herring Greg Herring
 4033 Barlow Rd., Cross Plains, WI 53528