

# Jurassic Parliament

Mastering meetings using Robert's Rules



# Running Effective School Board Meetings Using Robert's Rules of Order

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**Jurassic Parliament**

Utah School Board Association

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# Our Topics

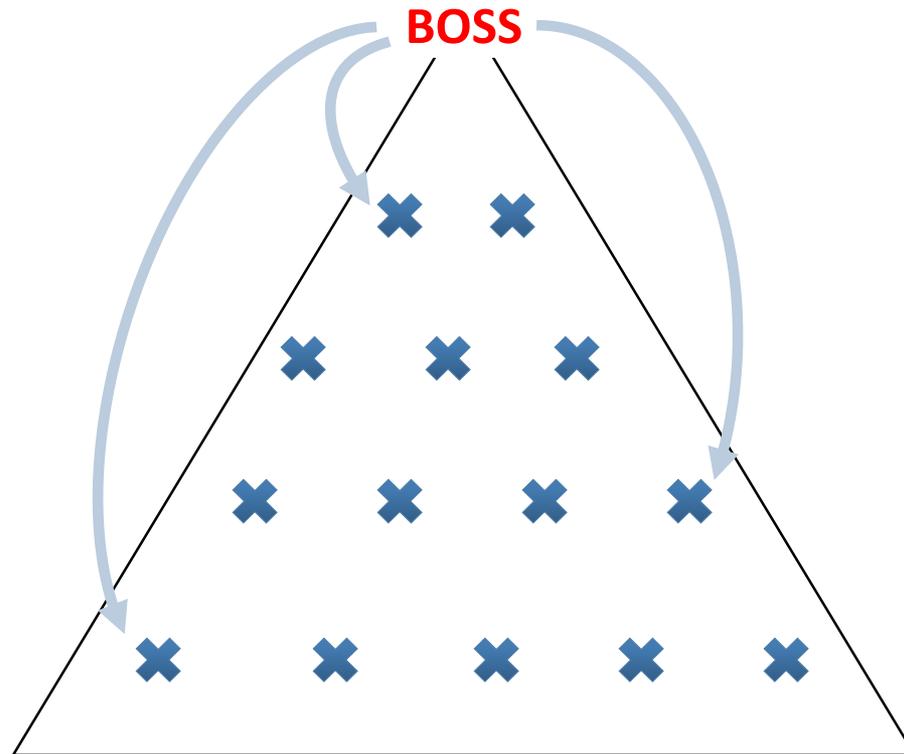
- I. Authority/role of presider and members
- II. Rules for discussion
- III. Motions and how they work
- IV. Round robin method
- V. “Appeal”
- VI. Six types of unacceptable remarks
- VII. The right way to control a school board meeting

# Workshop method

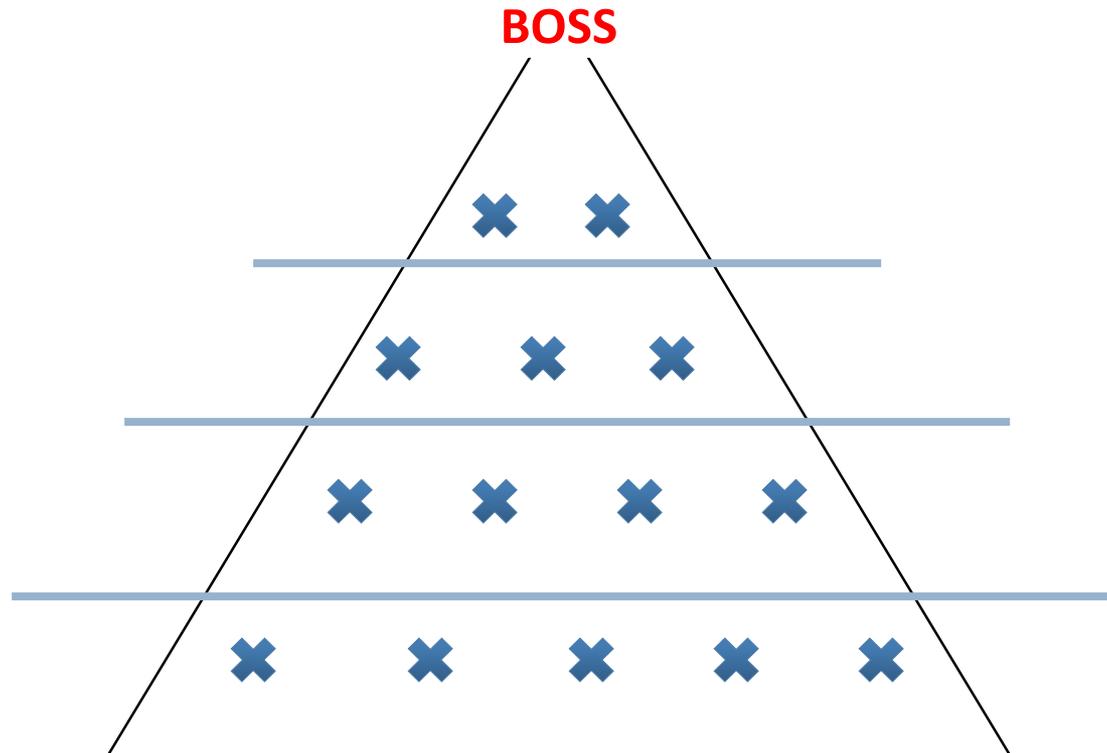
- We're going to have a board meeting.
- You are the directors.
- Everyone has “remarks” to make, printed on white paper.
- Please look at them and be prepared to speak up when your number is called.
- “Special instructions” are just for you – don't read them aloud.

# I. Authority/role of presider and members

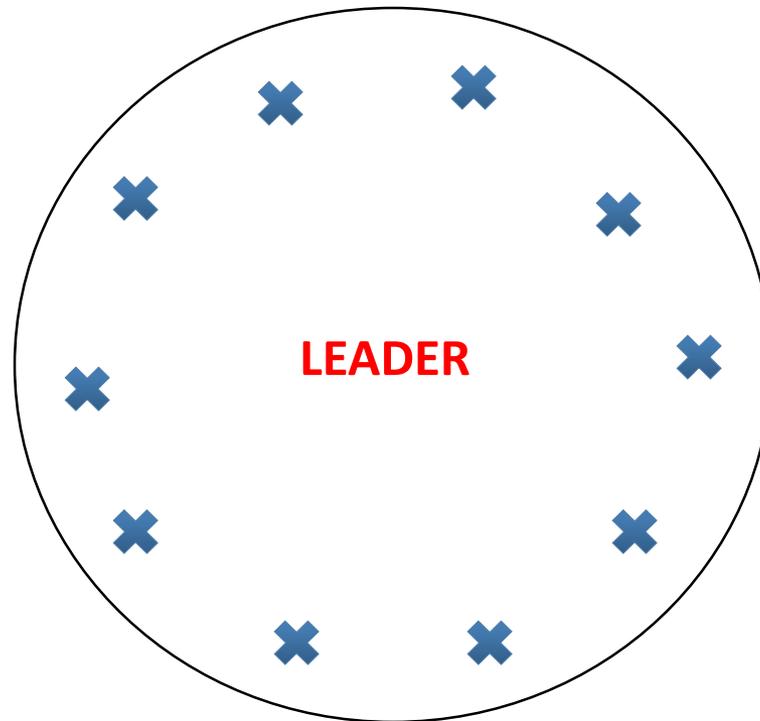
# Accountability Hierarchy



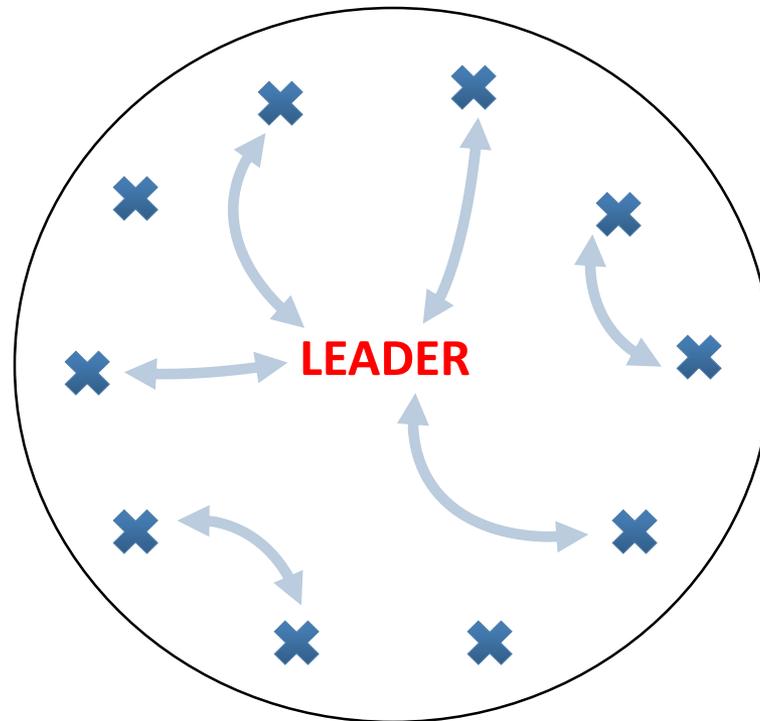
# Accountability Hierarchy



# Voluntary Association



# Voluntary Association



## Three Duties of Leader

- Manage or administer the association
- Lead the association
- Preside at the association's meetings

## Key Point

During meetings,  
the presider is the servant of the group,  
and the group is the final authority.

## Point of Order

- A motion claiming that a mistake has been made.
- According to Robert, can be made only by a member.
- We recommend authorizing staff to do this also (see our blog)
- May interrupt a speaker if necessary.
- Must be timely.

# Timeliness

- **Must be timely.**
- May be raised up until the next item of business is taken up.
- If you wait, it will be too late.
- There are a **very few exceptions**, but they are rare.

# Agenda

- Prepared by leadership, but within control of board.
- Should be adopted at the beginning of the meeting (by unanimous consent or majority vote).
- Once adopted, takes a two-thirds vote to change it later during the meeting.
- Should state outcomes and give approximate times.
- Do not need to include approval of agenda in minutes.

# Minutes

- We recommend “action” or “summary” minutes, not detailed minutes.
- Should record what is done, not what is said.
- For certain topics such as conflict of interest, main points made should be included.
- Do not include “he said, she said.” This is a waste of time and effort and makes minutes less useful.

## II. Rules for discussion

# Principle of Equality

- All members have equal rights, privileges and obligations.
- How is this right exercised?
- “No one may speak a second time until everyone who wishes to do so has spoken once.”
- The most neglected rule in all of Robert’s Rules of Order!

# Why don't we follow this rule?

- Boards tend to discuss their affairs in conversational mode.
- In conversations, dominant people tend to dominate,
- And agreeable people tend to let them.
- Must have a structure to make sure that everyone has an equal chance to speak.
- This is both fair and efficient.

## Key Point

Discussion in board meetings  
is NOT A CONVERSATION.

## HOW to do this?

- Members must seek recognition from the presider before speaking.
- Members must address their remarks to the presider, NOT TO EACH OTHER.
- If someone fails to do this, a point of order should be raised.
- Presider should keep track of who has spoken and who is requesting to speak.
- Alternately, may ask vice-chair to do so, or use round robin.

# III. Motions and how they work

# Main Motion

- A main motion “starts the action” of discussion and decision-making.
- A main motion may be made only when no other business is pending.
- It should be in writing if at all possible!
- Once it is made and seconded, chair must state it.
- Chair must state it again before the vote is taken.

# Default setting

A main motion

- Needs a second
- Can be debated
- Can be amended
- Takes a majority vote to pass.

## Majority vote

- Ordinarily, this means “a majority of votes cast.”
- More than half, or more than 50%.
- DO NOT SAY “50% plus one.” This is incorrect.

# Eight steps to process a motion

1. Member makes motion.
2. Another member seconds motion.
3. Presider states motion.
4. Members debate and/or amend motion.

# Eight steps to process a motion

5. Presider restates motion.
6. Members vote on motion.
7. Presider states results of vote, whether motion passes or fails, and what happens next.
8. Presider states next item of business.

# Amendments must be germane

- Amendments must be GERMANE to the main motion
- GERMANE = RELEVANT
- Remarks must be GERMANE to the subject under discussion
- Chair decides whether something is germane or not.
- Chair may also ask group to decide.

# Amendments

- Amendments are proposed in order to improve the motion.
- They may be made at any time during debate.
- The group votes on the amendment BEFORE voting on the main motion. This is in order to “perfect” the motion, to make it as good as it can be.
- Once the fate of the amendment has been decided, debate continues on the main motion.
- Don't forget to vote on the main motion “as amended.”

# Ways to amend

- Add or insert words.
- Strike out words.
- Strike out AND add or insert words.
- Substitute.

# Special rules for small boards

- Robert has special rules for small boards.
- In a small board, up to about 12 people, the presider may take part in discussion, make motions, and vote (if bylaws do not say otherwise).
- Nevertheless, presider must exercise restraint.

# Remarks must be germane

When remarks are not germane,  
try this useful sentence:

“Members will kindly keep their remarks  
to the topic under discussion.”

## Refer to Committee

- Motion sending main motion off to another group.
- Should specify WHICH group it's going to and WHEN it's coming back.
- Can be debated, can be amended, takes a majority vote to pass.

# “Friendly amendment”

- Often misused.
- Handle this the same as any other amendment.
- Ask, “Is there a second?” etc.
- DO NOT turn to maker and seconder to ask if they accept the amendment – this give them improper power.
- Once a motion has been stated by the chair, the maker and seconder have same rights as any other member.

# Request for Information

- This is a request for information that is timely and relevant to the debate.
- Presider can respond three ways:
  1. Respond yourself
  2. Ask someone else to respond
  3. Say, “We’ll get back to you later.”

# Call the question

- Motion requesting that we stop debate and vote.
- Needs a second.
- Cannot be debated.
- Takes a two-thirds vote to pass.
- If it passes, stop talking and vote immediately.

## Two-thirds vote

- Robert specifies this when members' rights are limited or extended.
- Should be taken so you can see the result.
- DO NOT take by voice.

# “Amend the amendment”

- A “primary amendment” applies to the main motion.
- A “secondary amendment” applies to the primary amendment.
- It CANNOT be amended.

## Review - Three tricky things

1. Vote on the amendment before you vote on the main motion.
2. You can have as many “primary amendments” as you like, as long as they cover different aspects of the motion.
3. A “secondary amendment” is as far as you can go.

# Precedence of motions

- Each motion has a number or rank.
- When a motion is pending (under consideration), motions with a higher rank may be made.
- Motions with a lower rank are out of order.
- The “main motion” has the LOWEST rank.
- There are 13 motions with ranks in all.
- The “flying dinosaurs,” point of order and request for information, do not have any rank.

## IV. Round robin method

## A great method – the “round robin”

- The chair goes around the table, asking each person in turn for their opinion. People may pass.
- Important to have a pencil in hand, to jot down points or questions for when your turn arrives.
- Chair must wait his turn also!
- This rule applies to questions and answers also, and to discussions with staff.
- Don't let any two people “hijack” the meeting.

## “Exploratory Round Robin”

- One further tweak – everyone agrees not to offer amendments or other motions during the first round.
- The first round becomes an information-gathering step.
- Staff notes comments or questions on a whiteboard.
- This prevents the discussion from being drawn off-track by proposed amendments or other motions.
- Gives the entire picture of the members' views.

# Discussion Sheet

+ (positives)	Δ (negatives)	? (questions)

## This solves two problems:

- Since amendments are considered before the main motion, sometimes the group ends up spending too much time on an amendment that is actually not that important.
- By moving an amendment, a member prevents others from speaking on the main motion, at least until the amendment is resolved.

## WHY should we use this method?

- Because the single most important factor in group decision-making is whether the individuals involved are thinking freely, and giving their true **INDEPENDENT** judgment. But oftentimes we fail to do this.
- You can have “group genius” instead of “group think” if you hear from **EVERYBODY** before moving into decision-making mode.

## Some people are too timid

- We are all subject to *doubt, deference, and the dread of being different*. It can be hard to speak up.
- In a healthy organization, members can express a differing opinion and still be welcome. Members know how to be clear about their views, while still staying connected to each other and the organization.

## Some people are too bold

- If you are willing to run for office and serve on a board or commission, you have to have a healthy and strong ego.
- Some people have egos that are over-developed.
- They insist on getting their own way, not realizing that the only way to achieve anything is to work together, because...
- As an individual member, how much power do you have?

**ZERO**  
**Nothing**  
**Nada**  
**Zip**  
**0**

## What is your authority?

All members of a governing board share in a joint and collective authority which exists and can be exercised only when the group is in session.

*The Standard Code of Parliamentary Procedure*

## Therefore...

Compromise is not a four-letter word!

Richard Haass: “Government is the institutionalization of compromise.”

## BUT

“Political life now is more about self-expression than it is about getting anything done....Elected officials are not rewarded for compromises; they're rewarded for defending the tribe.”

*Bill Bishop in Cityvision*

## Challenge for elected officials:

- To rise above this situation and look to the greater good.
- Our American strength lies in our ability to create “win-win” situations, and not to frame everything as a “win-lose” situation.

“The willingness to engage in honest debate and lose on issues you care deeply about reaffirms your commitment to common citizenship.”

*Cornell Clayton, Washington State University*

## At the end of discussion ask...

“Does anyone have any concerns that have not yet been expressed?”

# Rules for discussion

1. All members have an equal right to speak and make motions.
2. Non-members do not have the right to speak or make motions. However, the body may invite anyone it chooses to speak.
3. One subject is discussed at a time.
4. One person speaks at a time.

## Rules for discussion

5. No interrupting (except in certain special circumstances).
6. Courtesy and respect are required at all times.
7. No one may speak a second time until everyone who wishes to do so has spoken once.

# V. Appeal

# Appeal

- The most important motion in all of Robert's Rules – and the least known!
- Question being voted on is, “Shall the decision of the chair be upheld?”
- Takes a **NEGATIVE** vote for the appeal to win. A majority vote or a tie upholds the chair's decision.
- Chair must take care in explaining vote to members.

# Flow of Authority at a Meeting

The group adopts its rules and guidelines.



In attending, members accept the rules of the group.



During meetings, the presiding officer applies the rules for the benefit of the group.



All persons present at a meeting have an obligation to obey the **legitimate orders** of the presiding officer.



# Flow of Authority at a Meeting

Any member who disagrees with a ruling, decision or order by the presiding officer may **appeal the ruling**.

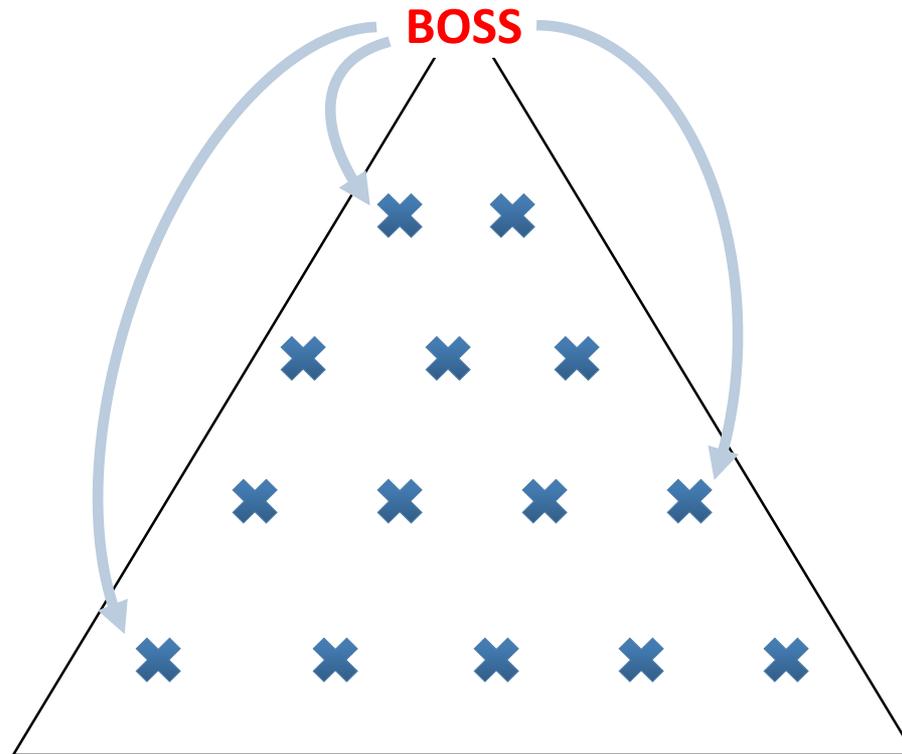


If another member seconds the appeal, the **group will decide by majority vote** whether the ruling, decision or order is legitimate.



The presiding officer **obeys the group's decision**.

# Accountability Hierarchy



# VI. Six types of unacceptable remarks

## Central paradox

- The presider is the most important person in the room, AND the least important person in the room.
- The presider must be strict on process – a “benevolent dictator.”
- The presider is not responsible for the decision that the group makes.
- The presider is the servant of the group, and the group is the final authority.

# Unanimous consent

- Form of voting – a type of “fast track.”
- Very efficient.
- Presider suggests something, and if you agree, REMAIN SILENT. Silence means consent.
- If you disagree, say “OBJECTION.”
- Presider then knows that everyone does not agree, and abandons the fast track to use the regular method.

# Unacceptable Remarks

1. Personal remarks
2. Discourteous remarks – insulting language, attacks
3. Inflammatory language
4. Referring to another member's motives (except for conflict of interest)
5. Criticizing past actions of the group (unless subject is under discussion, or about to propose a change)
6. Remarks that are not germane (relevant) to the discussion

## When in doubt...

- Ask the group!
- You don't have to have all the answers.
- Avoid “white coat syndrome.”
- The group is the final authority.

# It's OK to interrupt when someone is breaking an important rule

- A member may interrupt a speaker when necessary to make a “point of order.”
- Don't be too shy!
- The chair must rule on whether “the point is well taken” or “the point is not well taken.”
- Any two members can appeal the ruling of the chair.

# VII. The right way to control a school board meeting

# Chair **MUST** control discussion

- If someone speaks up without being recognized, **STOP THEM.**
- If someone speaks to another member instead of to the chair, **STOP THEM.**

# Chair **MUST** control discussion

- If someone speaks out of turn, **STOP THEM.**
- If someone make obnoxious remarks, **STOP THEM.**

# Chair **MUST** control discussion

- Stop them nicely, but stop them.
- Explain clearly.
- Move ahead briskly.
- Be polite and be firm.
- Keep calm!

## Chair MUST NOT:

- Dominate the discussion.
- Try to control the content of the debate.
- Get all emotional.
- Interrupt a speaker because he knows more than speaker about the subject.
- Throw a member out of the room.

## Key principles

- The presider must control the meeting.
- The presider is the servant of the group and the group is the final authority.
- Courtesy and respect are essential.

## What are the key rules?

- Members must seek recognition before speaking.
- No one may speak a second time until everyone who wishes to do so has spoken once.

## Informal discussion

- Sometimes there is benefit in the conversational style or “informal discussion.”
- This can work well in study sessions.
- However, DON'T make the conversational style your “default” style of discussion.

## **Thomas Jefferson said it best...**

An association of people who will not quarrel with one another is a thing which has never yet existed, from the greatest confederacy of nations down to a town meeting or a vestry.

## In conclusion...

- If you lose control, the meeting is a failure.
- Control the meeting in the service of the members.
- Remain the servant of the members.
- Keep an emotional connection with the members.
- When in doubt, ask the group! The group is the final authority.

# Our Topics

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- VII. The right way to control a school board meeting

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# Using The Exploratory Round Robin

1. Proposals and recommendations will be submitted in writing in advance of the meeting if feasible, so members can think about them and mentally prepare.
2. Before discussion begins, members may be invited to make a personal note of their thoughts and responses, as a preparation for discussion.
3. The members will make comments on the draft item under consideration, going around the circle to each member in turn. This is an information-gathering step. While members may make suggestions as to which changes should be required or how the item might be improved, no amendments will be voted on or actions taken during this round of discussion. No one may speak a second time until everyone who wishes to do so has spoken once.
4. Members may pass, and speak at the end of the round if desired.
5. Members are encouraged to participate with a pencil in hand, to be ready with questions or points when their turn comes.
6. The secretary will note comments on the whiteboard or by projection so that everyone may see them (see sample form).
7. The chair will provide his/her comments last. The chair will refrain from answering questions or commenting until his/her turn arrives.
8. After the first round of comments, the group will either hold another round robin or engage in open discussion, as the group chooses.
9. The chair will summarize comments and observations and may suggest the next step, OR a member may propose a motion, which could be:
  - a) To approve the item
  - b) To amend the item
  - c) To refer the item back to a committee or staff for further study, to report back at a given date
  - d) To postpone a decision on the item to the next meeting



10. The chair will ask whether there is unanimous consent by saying “is there any objection to approving this proposal?” If no one speaks up saying “objection,” silence means consent, and the proposal is approved. If there is objection, a vote may be taken, or another action as appropriate.
11. If members wish to disapprove an item or withhold approval, they will vote against the motion to approve it.

<b>+ (positives)</b>	<b>Δ (negatives)</b>	<b>? (questions)</b>

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