

Training & Executive Coaching on:

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- *Building Better Decision Making Teams*

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"Robert's Rules of Order - Demystified"

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The overall goals of shared decision-making are to achieve **good decisions**, to achieve them **together**, and to do so **at a comfortable pace** (not too fast, nor too slowly).

Substantively, a collective decision should be:

- Proactive (advancing the mission, vision and strategic plan).
- Balanced, fair and objective (balancing legitimate needs and interests).
- Informed (Taking into account professional expertise and member input).
- Realistic and affordable.
- Legal and enforceable.
- Smart and creative.

Process-wise, a decision-making process should be:

- Measured and gradual: Sufficient time is allocated to scrutinizing proposals.
- Efficient: The decision is reached within a reasonable amount of time.
- Inclusive and transparent: Members are engaged in the process as active partners. The community is kept informed (early, and not just after the fact), and – where required or prudent, is invited to comment or help shape the decision in some way. Inclusiveness tends to improve the quality of a decision, boost support for it, and reduce opposition to it.

Team Dysfunctions

A team dysfunction is a personal behavior or systemic condition that reduces a team’s ability to make quality decisions, together, and at a comfortable pace. Examples:

1. A rush
2. No preparation
3. Short tempers
4. Interruptions
5. Last minute agenda items
6. Motions made “on the fly”
7. Pre-meeting promises
8. A slow and long meeting
9. Late start & late arrivals
10. Threats and bullying
11. Laptops, blackberries and cell phones in meetings

PARLIAMENTARY PROCEDURE: PRINCIPLES

Parliamentary Procedure is the combination of rules and customs that govern the conduct of business meetings. Robert's Rules of Order Newly Revised is the most widely accepted book on rules of order.

Rules of order are intended to facilitate progress. They should include members in the decision making process, with each member having equal opportunities to participate in the discussion and influence the group's decisions.

The rules should help promote fairness, equality and common sense, and balance the need for efficiency (order and timeliness) with the need for democratic decision-making (a reasonable opportunity for all sides to debate the issue before a vote is taken).

The underlying principles are:

- * The majority rules, i.e.: The usual requirement for a motion to be adopted is a majority (more than half) of the votes cast in the affirmative.
A tie vote means that a motion is defeated.
Abstentions are counted as provided in the governing legislation and bylaws.
- * The minority should be given an opportunity to be heard.

UNANIMOUS/GENERAL CONSENT (Robert page 54)

Unanimous/General Consent is an informal method of taking a vote, used for routine and non-controversial decisions, to expedite progress and save time. For example:

- *"Is there any objection to changing the agenda to consider item 7 now? (Pause)? There being no objection, we will proceed now with item 7, and then return to item 3". **OR:** "There is an objection and we will take a show of hands. Those in favor of changing the agenda raise your hands. Thank you. Those opposed raise your hands, etc."*
- *"Is there any objection to extending the time for this discussion by 5 minutes? (Pause). There is no objection and the time for this discussion has been extended until 3:40 PM".*
- *"Is there any objection to amending the motion by adding the words 'including all taxes'? (Pause). There is no objection and the motion has been amended to read: _____".*
- *"Is there any further business to come before this meeting? (Pause) There being no further business, the meeting now stands adjourned."*

GOVERNING DOCUMENTS (Robert section 2)

The hierarchy of governing documents of an organized body is as follows:

Laws of the Land:

The laws of the land have the highest precedence and include: Federal and Provincial laws and Municipal Bylaws.

Bylaws:

The Bylaws covers the essential procedural aspects of meetings.

Rules of Order:

A book on rules of order, referred to in the Bylaws, would apply in all cases where the legislation and the Bylaws are silent. In this handout package, "Robert" means the latest edition of *Robert's Rules of Order Newly Revised*.

TYPES OF MEETINGS (Robert section 9)

Under parliamentary procedure, official business is conducted in duly called face-to-face meetings (except where the governing documents allow meetings by phone, videoconferencing, e-meetings, etc.), in which a quorum is present. Most groups have 4 types of meetings:

- Regular meeting
- Special meeting (to address urgent matters)
- Continued meeting (or "adjourned meeting")
- Closed session (or "in-camera" or "executive" session).

More on Closed Sessions

There should be transparency and ease of access to most documents, especially in a public body. Sometimes governing bodies keep too much information confidential and conduct too much business behind close doors.

Typically, confidentiality is intended to achieve one of two purposes:

- Protect the organization, its operations, economic interests, and delivery of its mandate from harm that could result from the release of certain information.
- Protect individuals or third parties when the release of certain information would be an unreasonable invasion of their personal privacy.

Typical topic areas for closed (in-camera) meetings include the security of the property of the organization, the disclosure of intimate, personal or financial details in respect to a person, the acquisition or disposition of property, decisions with respect to negotiations with employees, and litigation affecting the organization.

QUORUM (Robert section 40)

A quorum is the number of voting members who must be present to validly transact business. The quorum requirement is intended to protect the organization from the actions of a small and unrepresentative minority present at a meeting.

If a quorum is not present the members can adjourn, take a recess, take measures to obtain a quorum, or establish a continued (adjourned) meeting. Other votes taken in the absence of a quorum are invalid. A quorum must be present throughout the meeting, to provide ongoing protection for the absentees and the organization.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

Conflict of Interest (COI) guidelines are intended to protect the integrity of the decision making process. They exclude from discussions individuals whose ability to act objectively may be impaired by personal interest. COI guidelines would increase the likelihood that decisions will be objective, balanced and fair to all affected parties.

It should be noted that **holding a strong view** or being a member of a group or a region that may be affected by a decision **is not by itself a personal COI**.

A decision maker who believes she or he has a personal COI should proceed as follows

- Declare the COI immediately upon becoming aware of it.
- Leave the meeting when the issue is discussed, to avoid any possibility of influencing the votes of other members on the issue.
- Avoid influencing the decision in any way (at the meeting or outside the meeting).
- The minutes should indicate that the member declared a COI and was absent while the issue was discussed.

A member who is not sure whether he or she has a real or potential conflict of interest, should declare this concern. It may be wise to seek legal advice on this issue.

RULES OF FORMAL DEBATES (Robert sections 42, 43)

1. Members speak only after being recognized by the chair.
Recognition is on a *first-come-first-served* basis, except:
 - The maker of a motion has the right to speak first (not last, unless a bylaw provides for it).
 - Second time speakers must yield to first time speakers.
 - If possible, the Chair alternates between proponents and opponents of the motion.
2. Rules of decorum:
 - Members must remain courteous and avoid personal attacks.
 - Remarks must be confined to the pending motion (no digressions).
 - In formal meetings, remarks are directed *through the Chair*.
3. Limitations on the length and number of comments per member on each debatable proposal are as specified in the Bylaws. If the Bylaws are silent and Robert applies, each member can speak up to two times on each motion, each time up to 10 minutes.

CLOSING DEBATE (Robert section 16)

The decision to close debate on a motion is made by the members, and not unilaterally by the presiding officer nor by a member "calling the question".

One way to make the decision to close debate is informally, by unanimous consent. The Chair says: "Are the members ready for the vote?", then pauses, and if no one wishes to speak, says: "There being no further discussion, we will proceed to the vote. The main motion is that we _____" (see next page, step 5).

Another way of facilitating closure is by pre-approved time limits, e.g.: If the members agree to end the debate at 5 p.m., then at 5 p.m. the Chair will say: "It is now 5 PM, and, as agreed earlier, debate on the motion ends. We will proceed to the vote. The main motion reads as follows: _____. Those in favor, etc."

Yet another way of inducing closure is as follows: The Chair, noting repetition in the debate can induce closure by suggesting that: "The members speak only if they have something to add to the discussion", or "We've been hearing from the affirmative for a while. Is there anyone who wishes to speak against the motion, and - if not - in the interest of saving time - shall we proceed to the vote?".

If there is a disagreement on whether debate should be closed, a formal vote can be taken on whether debate will be closed. The Chair must clarify that the vote is on closing debate, and only then (if closure is successful) on the main motion.

HANDLING MAIN MOTIONS (Robert sections 4, 10)

A main motion is a proposal to take action or express a view. The 6 steps of handling it are:

Step	Language	Pertinent points
1. A member makes a motion	<i>“I move that ____” or “I move that that the following resolution be adopted: Resolved, That ____”.</i>	Make sure the motion is concise, complete and unambiguous. It is good practice to require motions to be submitted in writing.
2. Another member seconds the motion.	<i>“I second the motion” or “Second”</i>	Seconding does not mean endorsement of the motion, but only agreement that it should be discussed.
3. The Chair states the motion.	<i>“It is moved and seconded that ____ . Is there any discussion?”</i>	1. The Chair may rule the motion out of order (giving the reasons) or ensure clarity before stating the motion. 2. Ownership becomes collective from now on. Withdrawing or amending the motion requires the group’s permission.
4. Debate and amendment		
5. The Chair puts the motion to a vote.	<i>“There being no further debate, we will proceed to the vote. The motion is that _____. Those in favor of the motion raise your hands. Thank you. Those opposed raise your hands. Thank you.”</i>	Repeat the motion before taking the vote, for clarity. Except when the result is close, it is not necessary to count the votes.
6. The Chair announces the outcome.	<i>“The motion is adopted” or “The motion is defeated”</i>	

HANDLING AMENDMENTS (Robert section 12)

An amendment is a motion to change the wording of another motion before voting on it. The proposed amendment sets the main motion aside. If pursued formally, amending requires the same six steps as main motions do (see previous page).

Main Methods of amending:

1. By inserting or adding text.
2. By deleting text.
3. By replacing text.

Number of amendments:

A Primary Amendment changes the wording of the Main Motion.

A Secondary Amendment changes the wording of the Primary Amendment.

Under strict rules of order, only one Main Motion, one Primary Amendment and one Secondary Amendment may be pending at the same time, and a third level amendment is not allowed.

The amending process can be de-formalized, as long as the proposed changes are clearly articulated and the group's wishes are ascertained.

Number of votes:

If a Main Motion and two amendments are pending, 3 votes are needed:

- First, a vote on the Secondary Amendment;
- Second, a vote on the Primary Amendment;
- Third, a vote on the Main Motion (original or amended).

Making things less confusing:

1. State the amendment and its impact (clearly), e.g.:

*"It is moved and seconded to amend the motion by adding the words: `at a cost not exceeding \$1000'. If the amendment is passed, the motion will read: `____'. Discussion is now **only** on adding the words `at a cost not exceeding \$1000."*

2. Non-contentious amendments may be approved by unanimous consent:

"Is there any objection to inserting the words ____?"

3. The group may opt to suspend the rules, deal with one aspect of the proposal at a time, and then consolidate the consensus into one motion.

POINTS OF ORDER (Robert section 23)

A point of order is a statement by a member that a rule has been violated. The procedure for handling a point of order is as in the following example:

Member: *"I have a point of order"*.

Chair: *"What is your point of order?"*

Member: *"The amendment is not related to the main motion"*.

In response, the Chair makes a ruling or submits the point of order to a vote, e.g.:

Chair: *"The point of order is well taken. The amendment is not related and is out of order. We are now back to the main motion which reads: _____"*.

OR:

Chair: *"The point of order is not well taken. The amendment is in order."*

OR:

Chair: *"I will put the point of order to a vote. Those who believe that the amendment should be allowed please raise your hands. Thank you. Those who believe it should not be allowed please raise your hands. Thank you. The amendment is deemed to be (or not be) related to the main motion"*.

The first two options are subject to an appeal, but the third is not.

A phrase to consider from Robert (11th edition) page 250, lines 11-15:

"In ordinary meetings it is undesirable to raise points of order on minor irregularities of a purely technical character, if it is clear that no one's rights are being infringed upon and no real harm is done to the proper transaction of business".

Two tests to assess the significance of a procedural violation:

1. Are anyone's rights being infringed upon?
2. Is any real harm done to the proper transaction of business?

APPEALS (Robert section 24)

An appeal is a procedure that allows two members who disagree with the chair's ruling to submit it to a vote of the assembly.

Member: *"I appeal the decision of the Chair."*

Another member seconds the appeal (if seconding is required).

Chair: *"The ruling of the Chair has been appealed. The ruling was that _____."* The Chair allows limited debate on the appeal, i.e.: "Is the Chair's ruling correct?" and then proceeds to the vote:

"The question is: Shall the Chair's ruling be sustained? Those who believe that the Chair's ruling is correct please raise your hands. Thank you. Those who believe that the ruling is incorrect please raise your hands. Thank you. The Chair's ruling has been upheld (or reversed). Therefore, _____."

Note: A majority against the ruling is required to reverse it. The presiding officer is not required to vacate the Chair to take this vote.

FREQUENTLY USED SECONDARY MOTIONS

The motion	The use	Pertinent points
Point of Order (Section 23)	Point to a violation of a rule, policy, or bylaw.	The Chair makes a ruling: The point is well taken or not well taken. Or the Chair can invite the members to decide
Appeal (Sec. 24) (Majority in the negative needed to reverse a ruling)	Two members who disagree with the chair’s ruling can appeal it.	The Chair explains the ruling, opens it to debate, and puts it to a vote: “ <i>Shall the chair’s ruling be sustained?</i> ”
Postpone Indefinitely (S. 11)	A motion to decline to take a position on a pending main motion.	This motion “kills” the pending motion for this meeting (but the main motion is renewable at a later meeting).
Amend (S.12)	A motion to change the wording of another motion before voting on it.	See page 5 in this package.
Commit/Refer (Section 13)	A motion to send the pending motion to a committee or staff	Should include instructions to the committee, e.g.: What questions will be addressed? When will the committee report? What is the Mandate (advisory? Implementation powers?)
Postpone to a certain time (S. 14)	A motion to postpone the pending motion to a certain time.	Should specify the time to which the motion is to be postponed
Limit or Extend Debate (Sec. 15)	A motion to limit or extend debate on a motion, e.g.: “ <i>I move to extend debate by 5 minutes</i> ”. Or: “ <i>I move to end debate at 10:30</i> ”. This motion is not debatable.	2/3 vote or unanimous consent required.
Close Debate (or “Previous Question”) (Section 16)	A motion to close debate and vote immediately: “ <i>I move we close debate</i> ”.	When the motion is made, the Chair can check if there is general consent to closing debate. If not, she or he takes a vote on whether debate will be closed (2/3 vote).
Table (Section 17)	A motion to set a pending main motion aside to accommodate something else of immediate urgency.	Most times the motion to table is used incorrectly. The correct motions are usually to postpone to a certain time, refer or withdraw.
Suspend the rules (Section 25)	A motion to allow the assembly to waive a rule of order for a specific purpose. This motion cannot be used to suspend rules protecting fundamental rights (e.g.: minority and absentee rights).	This motion can be very helpful when the rules of order are proving too restrictive and wasteful and a more flexible approach is needed. For example: “ <i>I move to suspend the rules and allow more than one primary amendment at a time</i> ”. (2/3 vote required)
Withdraw (Section 33)	Before debate begins, a motion may be withdrawn by the mover. Once debate begins, only the assembly – by a majority vote or general consent – can withdraw it.	
Consider informally (Section 52)	A motion to allow informal consideration of a topic without a motion on the floor.	This motion helps when the premature introduction of a motion would be constraining and counter-productive.

PRESIDING OFFICER'S RIGHTS

Voting Rights (Robert pages 405, 488)

In a small Board or committee (no more than about a dozen members present) the Chair has the same voting rights as other members and may vote at the same they do.

In large voting assemblies (e.g.: general meetings of non-profit organizations), the Chair (if a voting member) may vote like others when the vote is by secret ballot. However, if the vote is not secret, the Chair protects his or her impartial position by usually abstaining. He or she may vote (but does not have to) if his or her vote would alter the result (e.g.: make or break a tie).

Debating Rights (Robert pages 394, 488)

In small assemblies, unless the Bylaws specifically require the Chairperson to vacate the Chair in order to debate a motion, he or she may debate a motion while in the Chair, but on the same basis as other members.

In large voting assemblies (e.g.: general meetings of non-profit organizations), the Chair avoids taking advocacy positions on motions. If a crucial point was omitted and the Chair wants to make it, she or he vacates the Chair (usually the Vice-Chair then takes over), and resumes the Chair once the motion has been decided.

RE-VISITING PREVIOUS DECISIONS

1. Adopted motions (Robert sections 35, 37)

An adopted motion can be re-visited, provided that it (or the parts that the members wish to change or cancel) was not acted upon.

At the same meeting: an adopted motion that was not acted upon can be brought back for consideration with the agreement of the members (by a majority vote). Robert's Rules require that a motion to reconsider be made by a member who voted on the prevailing side (i.e.: in favor of the motion). If the motion to reconsider is adopted, the motion to which it applies is re-opened for debate and a new vote.

At a future meeting: An adopted motion can be brought back at a future meeting (provided that it was not acted upon) via the motion to rescind or amend. Any member, regardless of how he or she voted originally, may make this motion.

2. Defeated motions (Robert sections 37, 38)

Same meeting: A defeated motion can be brought back for consideration at the same meeting if the members - by a majority vote - agree to do so. Under Robert's Rules, only a member who voted on the prevailing side (i.e.: against the motion) may make the motion to reconsider in this case.

Subsequent meeting: A defeated motion that is still applicable can be re-introduced at a subsequent meeting as new business (under the normal process for new business).

TEN KEY INGREDIENTS OF A SUCCESSFUL MEETING

A meeting is a gathering to discuss business and reach decisions jointly. The following ten ingredients characterize an effective meeting:

- **Clarity** of mandate, purpose, issues, and process.
- **Participation protocol and etiquette:** Only one person speaks at a time. Interruptions (verbal or non-verbal) are kept to the necessary minimum. A courteous, civilized and respectful tone is maintained. Discussions are focused on issues, not personalities.
- **Productivity and forward movement:** Discussion progresses along a pre-defined agenda, in an efficient and timely manner. For the sake of follow-up, good minutes are taken.
- **Flexibility and room for creative thinking:** Meeting structures (agendas and rules) are used in a flexible manner, to accommodate and promote creativity and open discussion rather than stifle them.
- **Quality:** Informed and in-depth discussions take place, leading to meaningful outcomes and thoughtful decisions.
- **Balance and inclusion:** All members are given an equal opportunity to participate. Dominated discussions are avoided.
- **Openness and Collaboration:** Listening takes place, and members work together towards a common goal; Members are open to changing their views based on the discussion; Debates are "personality-neutral": hard on the issues, soft on the people.
- **Shared responsibility:** Everyone (and not only the leader) takes responsibility for the success of the process; Finger pointing is minimized; Promises are kept and assigned tasks are completed.
- **Variety and a light Touch:** The meeting’s pace and activities are varied, to make it more engaging, interesting, and enticing to attend. A light touch is introduced when appropriate: "Take yourself lightly and your work seriously".
- **Logistical support:** Logistical details are managed proactively and professionally, to allow for an optimal use of time at the meeting.

DESIGNING AGENDAS

The agenda is usually drawn up by the Chair and the staff, with input from the group’s members. When designing an agenda for a meeting, consider these factors:

- **Purpose:** The agenda should be designed with the purpose of the meeting and the mandate of the group in mind.
- **Agenda items, reports:** A list of agenda items should be prepared. Most items should be pre-scheduled, with last minute items being the exception, not the norm. Reports should be circulated (and read) before the meeting, be “reader-friendly” and action-oriented. At the meeting, only the key points and proposed actions need to be discussed. Consider adding items of a strategic and proactive nature, to make the meeting more interesting and meaningful (some groups tie every agenda item to an element of their strategic plan).
- **Sequence:** The issues should be arranged into a logical sequence. Routine and non-controversial items are typically (but not always) scheduled early. Related items should be grouped together. It may be desirable to insert “lighter” items between “heavier” items.
- **Scope:** The number of items on the agenda should be reasonable, to help ensure that each of them can receive proper attention within the available time.
- **Time per issue:** Estimate how much time will be required for each main issue or category of business, and allocate time accordingly.
- **Time frame:** Consider a timed agenda, with opening and closing times, and interim milestones (including breaks). Plan to start on time and end on time (or early). Deviations from the agreed time should be negotiated, not dictated.

Here is an example of a timed agenda:

7 pm:	Call to order, Opening remarks	
	Approval of minutes	
	Reports, questions & discussion:	
	Finance	Jack Edwards
	Personnel	Edith Jones
8:00:	Unfinished business: New computer	Sam Ng
8:20:	Refreshment break	
8:30:	New Business:	
	Staff recognition program	Joan Smith
	Other new business	
8:50:	“Visionary/proactive” components	
9:20:	General feedback (meeting evaluation)	
9:30:	(or sooner): Adjournment	

MEETING CHAIR'S ROLES

An effective meeting chair directs the discussions in a fair and efficient manner. The chair's challenge is to create a balance whereby people are accommodated, time constraints are complied with, and issues are addressed. Specific roles include:

- **Setting the tone, guidelines and direction for the meeting**, with the group's support.
- **Deciding who speaks next**, usually on a "first-come-first-served" basis; going by the person who raises the hand first, and not by the person who raises the voice first.
- **Keeping the meeting on track**: reminding "digressing" members what item is being considered; repeating the proposal under discussion from time to time.
- **Keeping the meeting on time**: establishing time limits and a time frame, in consultation with the participants; watching progress versus time frame and reminding participants of time constraints; asking "long winded" members to be brief and to the point.
- **Creating balance**: asking outspoken members to give way to quieter individuals; inviting less assertive members or experts to comment; if needed, initiating a "round table" poll.
- **Listening, watching members**: responding to what people say, but also to the manner in which they say it (vocal and facial expression).
- **Ensuring clarity and encouraging listening**: listening for ambiguities, missed points, generalizations and misunderstandings, and ensuring that people are heard and understood.
- **Re-directing**: shifting the discussions from problems and complaints to solutions.
- **Summarizing and initiating closure**: briefly repeating key points (e.g.: main areas of agreement and main areas of differences); repeating task assignments and ensuring that any missing details are filled in, e.g.: "When would you be able to report back?" Leading to a vote or informal decision on an issue; e.g.: "Am I correct in hearing that the members want to _____?".
- **Varying the pace and the facilitation method**: suggesting a break, small group discussions, etc.

ADDRESSING DIFFICULT SITUATIONS IN MEETINGS

What should the Chair say or do in the following situations?

1. Domination by a few people
2. Rambling
3. Someone barges in and speaks without permission, when someone else is waiting in line
4. There is a loud and distracting side conversation
5. There are personal attacks on individual members
6. A presenter of a report is getting defensive when asked questions
7. A member digresses from the core topic on the agenda or the group's mandate
8. A member raises his/her hand to speak and keeps it up even when acknowledged
9. A member digresses from the agenda
10. Important decisions have been made, but have not been clearly articulated

PRESIDING OFFICER'S SCRIPT (EXAMPLE)

The July 5 meeting of the _____ will please come to order. Good afternoon everyone and welcome to this meeting. The notice of the meeting was sent on ____, meeting the notice requirement in our Bylaws. Our quorum is ____ members and we have ____ members present. Therefore this meeting is duly convened.

The agenda for the meeting was circulated and includes _____. We are scheduled to adjourn by 9:30 p.m. Are there any questions or concerns about the agenda? (PAUSE). If not, the agenda as circulated will stand (Alternatively, invite a motion to approve the agenda and facilitate a formal decision on it).

(If needed, state a few discussion guidelines, i.e.: speaking by raising hands - not voices, observing time limits, "second time" speakers waiting for "first time" speakers).

The first item of business is the Consent Agenda, which includes the following items: _____. Is there any item that requires separate consideration? (Pause) If not, is there a motion that all the motions listed under the Consent Agenda be adopted as a package? Thank you. Is there a second? Are you ready for the vote? Those in favor of this motion raise your hands. Thank you. Those opposed raise your hands. Thank you. All motions under the Consent Agenda have been adopted in a package.

(If items are taken out of the Consent Agenda, the remaining items on the Consent Agenda are voted on as a package, and then the separated items, or vice versa).

Next we have a report by _____. ("for information only" report)
Are there any questions on this report? (Pause, take questions)
Any further questions? If not, the report will be placed on file.

Next we have a report by _____. (report contains a motion)
(A member presents the report and makes a motion. Someone seconds)

It is moved and seconded that _____. Is there any discussion? (Discussion starts).
Is there any further discussion on the motion to _____? If not, we will vote on it.
The motion is _____. Those in favor (etc.)
(Continue in a similar fashion with other reports).

Next we have unfinished business. The first item is a motion on ____, which was postponed from the last meeting. The motion is: _____. (debate, vote).

Next we have new business (Handle scheduled and then unscheduled new business).

Is there any further new business? Announcements?

There being no further business, this meeting stands adjourned.

ADDRESSING FRUSTRATIONS DURING MEETINGS

If this occurs	You can say:
Digression	<p><i>“Point of order. Can we please get back to the agenda?” Or</i></p> <p><i>“Can we please focus on the core issue, which is _____?”</i></p>
Interruptions	<p><i>“Point of order. Can we have one person speaking at a time?” Or</i></p> <p><i>“Can we speak by raising hands?” Or</i></p> <p><i>“Can we please hear people out?”</i></p>
Last minute motion	<p><i>“I am not comfortable debating a new issue this late and without the benefit of professional analysis. I move that this motion be postponed until the next meeting.” Or:</i></p> <p><i>“Given that it’s late, I suggest that we discuss this motion informally now, and then refer it to the administration for professional analysis.”</i></p>
Personal criticism	<p><i>“Point of order. We should be focusing on issues, not people.”</i></p>
Rambling	<p><i>“Can we please keep our comments concise and to the point? I’m concerned that we may run out of time for significant issues later on.”</i></p>
Repetitive debate	<p><i>“I am not hearing any new information and I’m worried about our time. Are we ready to close debate and vote on this motion?” Or:</i></p> <p><i>“I move to close debate.” Or “I move the previous question.”</i></p>
Side conversations	<p><i>“Point of order. I’m having trouble concentrating when we have more than one conversation at the same time.”</i></p>
Unbalanced participation	<p><i>“Can we please speak by raising hands?” or</i></p> <p><i>“I am wondering if we could hear from members who have not spoken.”</i></p>
Unclear motion	<p><i>“Can we please have the motion repeated?” Or</i></p> <p><i>“I move to amend the motion by _____” (You may propose to replace, add, insert or delete text, to enhance clarity.)</i></p>
A decision is being rushed through.	<p><i>“I am not comfortable with the pace of this discussion. This is an important decision, and rushing it through may be risky. We need to slow down a bit.”</i></p>
You disagree with a ruling of the Chair.	<p><i>“I appeal the decision of the Chair.”</i></p> <p><i>The appeal is put to a vote: “Shall the Chair’s ruling be sustained?”</i></p> <p><i>A majority against the Chair’s ruling overrides it.</i></p>

COMMON MYTHS ABOUT PARLIAMENTARY PROCEDURE

THE MYTH	THE TRUTH
The mover of a motion owns it forever.	The maker of a motion stops owning it once debate on it begins. From then on, the group owns it, and the mover no longer has the right to unilaterally withdraw or amend the motion.
A person must support a motion in order to second it.	Seconding indicates that the person agrees that the motion should be discussed, and not that he or she supports it.
If a motion is moved and seconded, it is automatically open for debate.	A motion is open for debate only after the Chair states it and places it before the meeting. The Chair is entitled to refuse to allow a motion on the ground that it is out of order (in violation of a certain rule) or because it is confusing or poorly worded.
The Chair of a small Board never votes, except to break a tie.	The Chair of a small Board, if present, votes like other members.
The Chair of small Board never speaks in debate, unless he or she vacates the Chair.	This is only true if your Bylaws stipulate it. Robert’s Rules of Order allow the Chair to speak in debate, but on the same basis as everyone else.
If a member <i>calls the question</i> , debate automatically ends. <i>Calling the question</i> may interrupt a person who is speaking and gets priority over everything else.	The decision to close debate is made by the group, collectively, and not unilaterally by the Chair or one member. If a motion to close debate is made formally, it may not interrupt a person who is speaking and its mover has no special priority in the speakers’ lineup.
The mover may close debate by speaking on a motion for a second time.	No (unless your Bylaws say otherwise, which would be poor procedure).
The minutes must include everything that was said at the meeting.	Minutes are primarily a record of what was done by the group, not what was said.
A member may insist that his or her comments be entered in the minutes.	Minute takers should follow minute taking standards, as established by policy. They should not be subject to random demands by individual members.
There can be no debate until there is a motion on the floor.	An assembly may decide to have informal discussion (exploring the nature of a problem) before introducing a motion (a solution).