

Robert's Rules of Order: comments

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Section 4.12B of the Chartered Clubs Guidelines and Rules (the CCG&R) specifies that clubs, such as our Computer Club (the “Club”) are required to follow Robert’s Rules of Order for the conduct of business at all general membership and Club board meetings. The latest edition published in 2020 is the 12th, newly revised edition of Robert’s Rules of Order (“RONR”). It should be noted that RONR allows for flexibility in following specified protocols, particularly for cases such as our Club which, in many instances, may act with more flexibility than a parliamentary body or the board of a publicly traded corporation.

What is our Club?

RONR calls our Club a deliberative assembly and, absent the use of “flexibility” as to the formal protocols of RONR, we are expected to follow what is prescribed. It is beyond the scope of this brief piece to summarize rules of conduct for every conceivable case that might arise. That said, we offer some of the protocols.

Motions

To qualify for board consideration, a motion must typically be made and seconded. The seconder seconds to allow for discussion but does not have to support the motion when a vote is taken. The presiding officer (our President who acts as Chairman) states/repeats the motion then entertains discussion. After all discussion has reasonably been completed the Chairman puts the motion to a vote by calling for the question. While a board may vote in any number of ways, such as by secret ballot or polling all who are present, our Club follows the acceptable practice of calling for a show of hands, with the Chairman (or anyone designated by him) counting the raised hands in favor, against and abstentions. He then announces the result of the vote and whether the motion has passed by the requisite majority. Our Club conducts business if a quorum is present (simple majority of directors) and rules by majority vote. Note that common practice is for the Chairman to vote only if his vote will make a difference, such as to make or break a tie.

Amendments to Motions

The most efficient way to introduce an amendment is, at the beginning of discussion on a motion. A board member asks the maker of the motion if he or she is prepared to entertain an amendment to the motion before the discussion. If the maker says yes, and the seconder concurs, the motion as amended may now be considered.

Note that a motion, amended or not, must not violate the CCG&R, the Club by-laws or RONR. If it does, the Chairman must intervene and rule to this effect. He may also declare a motion improper if it presents essentially the same question as one already decided. Equally, if the Chairman senses that a board member is abusing the process of orderly meeting conduct, he should intervene and rule. Regarding amendments, the Chairman must rule if the amendment is not germane to the main motion. Rulings by the Chairman in all these cases may be appealed.

Points of Order and of Privilege

If a board member believes he or she has noticed the Chairman may not be following the RONR, attention is called to this by raising a Point of Order. This is in the nature of a motion, which needs no second and is not debatable. The Chairman must rule on the Point and this takes precedence over all business at hand. If someone does not like the ruling, an appeal may be made; discussion will follow and a vote taken. Questions of privilege, on the other hand, relate to privileges of the board as a whole (heating, noise or other disturbance in the meeting room) or they may be personal, such as a member commenting that he or she was incorrectly shown as present at a meeting whose minutes have been approved.

Nomenclature

RONR recognizes a recess (temporary break) in the proceedings, ordered by the Chairman with a time certain to reconvene. At the end of the meeting, anyone may make a motion to adjourn or terminate. This must be seconded. It is equally permissible for the Chairman to ask if there is any further business and absent a response, he will adjourn, officially ending and terminating the meeting.

Discipline

Our Club, in following what is specified in the CCG&Rs and our by-laws, complies with the procedure contemplated by RONR.