

This resource includes answers to the questions that were asked during the August 4, 2022 webinar on Robert's Rules of Order. Each answer includes language directly from the noted sections of the rules. Please contact Sue Ceglowski ([sceglowski@vtvsba.org](mailto:sceglowski@vtvsba.org)) with any follow-up questions.

**1. Q: Can you list the motions that require 2/3 vote?**

**A:** There are 27 motions that require a 2/3 vote. They are listed in a table at the end of Robert's Rules of Order: t48-t49.

**2. Q: Are there any restrictions on a chair using Robert's Rules of Order for Small Boards?**

**A:** The Board (rather than only the Chair) must make the decision to use Robert's Rules of Order for Small Boards. According to 49:21 of Robert's Rules, the Rules of Order for Small Boards are different in the following respects:

- (1) Members may raise a hand instead of standing when seeking to obtain the floor and may remain seated while making motions or speaking.
- (2) Motions need not be seconded.
- (3) There is no limit to the number of times a member can speak to a debatable question. Appeals, however, are debatable under the regular rules – that is, each member (except the chair) can speak only once in debate on them, while the chair may speak twice.
- (4) Informal discussion of a subject is permitted while no motion is pending.
- (5) When a proposal is perfectly clear to all present, a vote can be taken without a motion's having been introduced. Unless agreed to by unanimous consent, however, all proposed actions must be approved by vote under the same rules as in larger meetings, except that a vote can be taken initially by a show of hands, which is often a better method in small meetings.
- (6) The chair need not rise while putting questions to a vote.
- (7) If the chair is a member, they may, without leaving the chair, speak in informal discussions and debate, and vote on all questions. Informal discussion may be initiated by the chair which, in effect, enables the chair to submit their own proposals without formally making a motion as described in 4:4-8 (although the chair has the right to make a motion if they wish).

**3. Q: Can a board delegate special authority to allow a chair to participate in debate?**

**A:** 49:21 provides that if the board is using Robert's Rules of Order for Small Boards, the chair is allowed to participate in debate without leaving the chair. If the board is using Robert's Rules of Order (not small board rules), 43:29 provides that the impartiality required of a chair precludes them from exercising the right to debate. On certain occasions – which should be extremely rare – the chair may believe that a crucial factor relating to a question has been overlooked and that their obligation as a member to call attention to the point outweighs their duty to preside. To participate in debate, the presiding officer must relinquish the chair to the next highest ranking officer. The presiding officer who relinquished the chair may not return to the chair until the pending main question has been disposed of, since they have shown themselves to be partisan as far as that particular matter is concerned.

**4. Q: When someone abstains from the vote, does that change the majority sum for the outcome of the vote?**

**A:** Yes. 4:35 To abstain means not to vote at all and a member who makes no response if “abstentions” are called for abstains just as much as one who responds to that effect (see also 45:3). 44:1 The basic requirement for approval of an action, except where a rule provides otherwise, is majority vote. The word majority means more than half. The term majority vote means more than half of the votes cast by persons entitled to vote, excluding the abstentions. For example (assuming there are no voters having fractions of a vote): if 19 votes are cast, a majority is 10, if 20 votes are cast, a majority is 11.

**5. Q: If the board member does not prevail in a vote, can the board member continue to raise the same concern at subsequent meetings?**

**A:** 38:1 If a motion is made and disposed of without being adopted, and is later allowed to come before the assembly after being made again by any member in essentially the same connection, the motion is said to be renewed. Renewal of motions is limited by the basic principle that an assembly cannot be asked to decide the same, or substantially the same, question twice during one session – except through a motion to reconsider a vote (37) or a motion to rescind an action (35) or in connection with amending something already adopted (see also 6:25). A previously considered motion may become a substantially different question through a significant change in the wording or because of a difference in the time or circumstances in which it is proposed, and such a motion may thus be in order when it could not otherwise be renewed.

**6. Q: Are there situations where VT State Law overrules Robert's?**

**A:** The Open Meeting Law (1 VSA Section 312(d)(3)(A) requires “any addition or deletion from the agenda must be made as the first act of business at the meeting.”

**7. Q: How would dilatory motions best be handled or dismissed?**

**A:** 39:3 A main motion that is frivolous or absurd or that contains no reasonable proposition is dilatory and cannot be introduced. 39:4 Whenever the chair becomes convinced that one or more members are repeatedly using parliamentary forms for dilatory purposes, the chair should either not recognize the member or the chair should rule that such motions are not in order – but the chair should never adopt such a course merely to speed up business and the chair should never permit their personal feelings to affect their judgment in such cases. If the chair only suspects that a motion is not made in good faith, they should give the maker of the motion the benefit of the doubt.

**8. Q: Does the chair give up their ability to be active in the decision making?**

**A:** 4:31 Except in committees and small boards, the chair does not enter into discussion on the merits of pending questions (unless, in rare instances they leave the chair until the pending business has been disposed of, as described in 43:29-30).

**9. Q: It would stand to reason that a chair should not introduce a topic, even if it's on the agenda. Is that true?**

**A:** 47:7 It is the duty of the presiding officer (chair) to announce in proper sequence the business that comes before the board in accordance with the agenda. This announcement introduces the topic.

**10. Q: In Robert's Rules for Small Boards does the board chair have the ability to vote and speak without any restrictions?**

**A:** 49:21 Under Robert's Rules for Small Boards, the chair may, without leaving the chair, speak in informal discussions and debate, and vote on all questions. Informal discussion may be initiated by the chair which, in effect, enables the chair to submit their own proposals without formally making a motion as described in 4:4-8 (although the chair has the right to make a motion if they wish).

**11. Q: Some boards quote a management theory that says the chair has "special authority". Other than running the meeting and express authority granted by the board to delegate a limited action, is this true?**

**A:** 47:7 Robert's Rules speak of the chair's authority in terms of duties which are:

- (1) To open the meeting at the appointed time by taking the chair and calling the meeting to order (3:15) having ascertained that a quorum is present (3:3-4; 40).
- (2) To announce in proper sequence the business that comes before the board in accordance with the agenda.
- (3) To recognize members who are entitled to the floor (3:30-35; 42).
- (4) To state and put to vote all questions that legitimately come before the board as motions or that otherwise arise in the course of proceedings (except questions that relate to the presiding officer themselves in the manner noted below) and to announce the result of each vote; or if a motion that is not in order is made, to rule that it is not in order (although this may be avoided if the chair can suggest an alternative that is in order which the maker agrees to offer instead (see 4:16-18).
- (5) To protect the assembly from obviously dilatory motions by refusing to recognize them.
- (6) To enforce the rules relating to debate and those relating to order and decorum (3:9-13; 4:27-32; 43).
- (7) To expedite business in every way compatible with the rights of members.
- (8) To decide all questions of order (23) subject to appeal (24) – unless, when in doubt, the presiding officer prefers initially to submit such question to the assembly for decision.
- (9) To respond to inquiries of members relating to parliamentary procedure (33:3-5) or factual information (33:6-10) bearing on the business of the board.
- (10) To authenticate by their signature, when necessary, all acts, orders and proceedings of the board.
- (11) To declare the meeting adjourned when the board so votes or – where applicable – at the time prescribed in the program, or at any time in the event of a sudden emergency affecting the safety of those present (8, 21).

**12. Q: If a topic is up for discussion, is it inappropriate for the chair to provide background information?**

**A:** 43:31 Debate in a deliberative assembly is permitted only when it is germane to a debatable motion that has been stated by the chair as the immediately pending question. However as explained in 4, the making of a motion of any kind may be prefaced, when necessary, by a few words of explanation, which must not become a speech, or a member can first request information, or briefly indicate the substance of a desired proposal and ask for the chair's assistance in wording an appropriate motion.

**13. Q: Is there an electronic format for Roberts rules? Something like VT statutes annotated?**

**A:** Yes. The 12th edition (which is the most current) has been published as an e-book as well as in the traditional print format. Rapid search ability and hyperlinked cross-references are particularly useful features of the e-book.

**14. Q: What are the parameters for qualifying as a small board?**

**A:** 49:21 Not more than 12 members on the board.

**15. Q: What does the chair need to do if a meeting becomes out of order?**

**A:** 61:10 covers slight breaches of order by members in a meeting and provides that the chair points out the fault and advises the member to avoid it.

61:11 covers calling a member to order and provides that the chair can clearly state the breach involved and put the question to the assembly "Shall the member be allowed to continue speaking?" This question is undebatable.

61:12-18 covers more extreme circumstances with members who are out of order.

61:19-21 covers situations where disorder is created by non-members. See VSBA's [Suggested Meeting Management Language for Board Chairs](#) for specific language to use in extreme emergencies and language to use in less extreme situations.

**16. Q: Can the chair end a debate or restrict time spent to debate a topic and put something to vote? Is there an action board members can take if they still feel discussion needs to be had?**

**A:** 4:32 The chair cannot close debate so long as any member who has not exhausted their right to debate desires the floor, except by order of the assembly, which requires a 2/3 vote (15, 16, 43).

4:34 When debate appears to have closed, the chair may ask "Are you ready for the question?" or "Is there any further debate?" If no one rises to claim the floor, the chair proceeds to put the question to a vote after once more making clear the exact question the assembly is called upon to decide.

6:5 Modifications of the normal limits of debate are proposed by means of the motion to *Limit or Extend Limits of Debate*.

**17. Q: Does Robert's Rules permit boards to adopt/allocate times per debate if it's agreed to at a previous meeting or earlier in that meeting?**

**A:** The agenda could include suggested time frames for the board's consideration of items on the agenda. During the meeting, the board can exercise control over debate as follows. 15:1 The subsidiary motion to *Limit or Extend Limits of Debate* is one of two motions by means of which an assembly can exercise special control over debate on a pending question or on a series of pending questions. The motion to *Limit or Extend Limits of Debate* can *limit* debate by

- (1) reducing the number or length of speeches permitted, without including specific provisions for closing debate or
- (2) requiring that, at a certain later hour or after debate for a specified amount of time, debate shall be closed.

It can *extend the limits* of debate by allowing more and longer speeches than under the regular rules (see 43:8-13). It cannot impose an immediate closing of debate, which requires a different motion – the *Previous Question*.

**18. Q: What if the offending board member appeals the chair's decision to the board?**

**A:** 24:1 By electing a chair, the board delegates to that person the authority and duty to make necessary rulings on questions of parliamentary law. But any two members have the right to appeal the chair's decision on a question. By one member making (or "taking") the appeal and another seconding it, the question is taken from the chair and vested in the board for the final decision.

24:2 Members have no right to criticize a ruling of the chair unless they appeal from the chair's decision.

24:3-7 provide more information on appeals.

24:8 If an appeal is to be made, it must be made at the time of the chair's ruling. If any debate or business has intervened, it is too late to appeal.

24:9-13 provide forms and examples for appeals.

**19. Q: Robert's Rules for Small Boards do not have to be seconded?**

**A:** 49:21 Motions need not be seconded when using Robert's Rules of Order for Small Boards.

**20. Q: What rules are different for hybrid or virtual meetings? For example, is it a requirement that all votes must be polled?**

**A:** The question refers to a requirement in the Open Meeting Law that applies to participation in electronic meetings and requires any vote that is not unanimous to be taken by roll call.

1 VSA Section 312(a) (2) Participation in meetings through electronic or other means.

(A) As long as the requirements of this subchapter are met, one or more of the members of a public body may attend a regular, special, or emergency meeting by electronic or other means without being physically present at a designated meeting location.

(B) If one or more members attend a meeting by electronic or other means, such members may fully participate in discussing the business of the public body and voting to take an action, but any vote of the public body that is not unanimous shall be taken by roll call.

**21. Q: When the chair states the motion made by a member can they paraphrase or change the wording?**

**A:** 4:18 If a motion is offered in a wording that is not clear or that requires smoothing before it can be recorded in the minutes, it is the duty of the chair to see that the motion is put into suitable form – preserving content to the satisfaction of the mover – *before* the question is stated. The chair must never admit a motion that the secretary would have to paraphrase for the record. Until the chair states the question, the maker has the right to modify the question as they please or to withdraw it entirely.

**22. Q: What a member abstains from the vote, does that change the way you count votes?**

**A:** 44:1 As explained above, the term majority vote means more than half of the votes cast by persons entitled to vote, *excluding the abstentions*.

**23. Q: Is it appropriate to “call the question” or should it be phrased to “move the question”?**

**A:** 16:6 A motion such as “I call for [or “call”] the question,” “I demand the previous question,” or “I move to close [or “end”] debate,” or “I move we vote now” is simply a motion for the *Previous Question* made in nonstandard form.

16:7 Regardless of the wording of a motion or “call” seeking to close debate, it always requires a second and a 2/3 vote taken separately from and before the vote(s) on the motion to which it is applied, to shut off debate against the will of even one member who wishes to speak and has not exhausted his right to debate (see 4:32, 43:8-13).

**24. Q: Can you list the motions that need 2/3 of the vote to pass?**

**A:** There are 27 motions that require a 2/3 vote. They are listed in a table at the end of Robert’s Rules of Order: t48-t49.

**25. Q: What is the difference between abstaining and recusing?**

**A:** 45:4 covers abstaining from voting on a question. It says no member should vote on a question in which they have a direct personal or pecuniary interest. For example, if a motion proposes that the board enter into a contract with a commercial firm of which a board member is an officer and from which contract the board member would derive personal pecuniary profit, that member should abstain from voting on the motion (this is also called recusing oneself).

**26. Q: Can there be any discussion on the floor without a motion?**

**A:** 43:1 *Debate* is an essential element in the making of rational decisions of consequence. The term applies to discussions on the merits of a pending question – that is, whether the proposal under consideration should, or should not, be agreed to. Debatability is a characteristic of all main motions and of certain other motions.

43:4 Until a matter has been brought before the assembly in the form of a motion proposing a specific action, it cannot be debated.

**27. Q: What is the difference between Lay on the Table and postpone?**

**A:** 17:1 The motion to *Lay on the Table* allows the board to lay the pending question aside temporarily when something else of immediate urgency has arisen or when something else needs to be addressed before consideration of the pending question is resumed, in such a way that: (1) there is *no set time* for taking the matter up again; (2) but (until the expiration of time limits explained in 17:8) its consideration *can be resumed at the will of the majority* and in preference to any new questions that may then be competing with it for consideration. This motion is commonly misused – in place of a motion to *Postpone Indefinitely* (11), a motion to *Postpone to a Certain Time* (14), or other motions. Particularly in such misuses, it is also known as a motion “to table.”

34:1 The object of the motion to *Take from the Table* is to make pending again before the board a motion or series of adhering motions that previously had been laid on the table (see 17).

11:1 *Postpone Indefinitely* is a motion that the board decline to take a position on the main question. Its adoption eliminates the main motion and avoids a direct vote on the question. It is useful in disposing of a badly chosen main motion that cannot be either adopted or expressly rejected without possibly undesirable consequences.

14:1 The subsidiary motion to *Postpone to a Certain Time* (or *Postpone Definitely*, or *Postpone*) is the motion by which action on a pending question can be put off, within limits, to a definite session, day, meeting or hour, or until after a certain event. This motion can be moved regardless of how much debate there has been on the motion it proposes to postpone. A question may be postponed either so that it may be considered at a more convenient time, or because debate has shown reasons for holding off a decision until later. This motion should not be confused with *Postpone Indefinitely* which, as explained earlier (11) does not actually postpone the pending question but eliminates it.

**28. Q: In the event that a board member is missing information to be informed to vote, is there an action or appeal that can be taken if it's brought to vote without appropriate information in hand?**

**A:** 33:6-10 A *Request for Information* (also called a *Point of Information*) is a request directed at the chair, or through the chair to another officer or member, for information relevant to the business at hand but not related to parliamentary procedure.

33:7 It is treated like a parliamentary inquiry as follows:

- *Member A:* Chairperson, I have a request for information [Or, “A point of information, please.”]
- *Chair:* The member will state their question.
- *Member A:* Will the convention delegates report at this meeting? OR This motion calls for a large expenditure. Will the Treasurer state the present balance?

33:10 An inquiry of this kind may also be for the purpose of reminding a speaker of a point to be made in argument, or it may be intended to rebut the speaker's position; but it must always be put in the form of a question.

**29. Q: Can someone in the public call a Point of Order?**

**A:** No, a member of the public cannot call a Point of Order. 23:1 When a member thinks that the rules of the board are being violated, they can make a *Point of Order* (or “raise a question of order,” as it is sometimes expressed), thereby calling upon the chair for a ruling and an enforcement of the regular rules.

**30. Q: Can a motion to rescind be made by a new board member who did not vote on an approved motion?**

**A:** 35:3 In contrast to the case of the motion to *Reconsider*, a motion to *Rescind* can be moved by any member, regardless of how (or if) they voted on the previous motion. 35:6 covers circumstances under which motions to *Rescind* or to *Amend Something Previously Adopted* are not in order.