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## **2.30.080 Conduct of debate and discussion; general parliamentary authority.**

- A. *Obtaining the floor.* The mayor or any assembly member, when desiring to speak at an assembly meeting, shall respectfully address the chair as "Chair," and shall refrain from speaking until recognized.
- B. *Order of recognition.* Debate on any question before the assembly may be initiated by any member, but the moving party shall be given first opportunity to do so. When two or more members request recognition at the same time, the chair shall determine which one shall speak first. The chair may call on members in the order in which they indicated their desire to speak, or may attempt to alternate between those favoring and opposing a motion. No one is entitled to the floor a second time in debate on the same motion on the same day as long as any other member who has not spoken on this motion desires the floor.
- C. *Order and decorum; rulings of the chair.* The chair shall be charged with the responsibility of maintaining order and decorum at all times. The chair shall make such rulings as deemed necessary concerning points of order or concerning spectators.
- D. *Overruling a chair's ruling.* Any assembly member may challenge a ruling of the chair by motion to overrule the ruling of the chair. The chair's ruling shall stand unless the motion to overrule receives a second and is passed by a majority vote of the assembly.
- E. *Member comments; chair's participation in debate.* Every member, while speaking, shall confine the member's comments to the subject under debate, and shall not refer to any other member except in a respectful manner. Members shall generally speak while seated. If the chair of the assembly wishes to speak in debate, the chair shall temporarily relinquish control of the meeting to the vice chair or, in the absence of the vice chair, to any other member present. At the conclusion of the chair's remarks, the chair shall resume control of the meeting.
- F. *Total time for debate.* Total debate on any question before the assembly shall not be permitted to exceed one hour unless such time is extended by a majority vote of the assembly.
- G. *Amendments and preambles.* When an ordinance or resolution contains a preamble consisting of one or more statements beginning "whereas," the preamble may be amended before or after amendment of the resolving or ordaining clauses has been completed.
- H. *Previous question.* Debate on any pending motion may be ended by motion to call the previous question. A member may make the motion by stating, "I call the question." A motion to call the question on a main motion to adopt a resolution or ordinance with a preamble applies to debate and amendment of a preamble, unless otherwise stated by the member making the motion.
- I. *General adoption of Robert's Rules.* In all matters not covered by this chapter, Robert's Rules of Order, Newly Revised, shall govern.
- J. *Minor deviations.* Minor deviations from the rules and procedures contained in this chapter and incorporated by the adoption of Robert's Rules of Order, Newly Revised, shall not be a basis for invalidating any otherwise valid assembly action.
- K. *Non-member participation in debate.* The rules may be suspended to allow a person other than an assembly member or the mayor to speak in debate, except that:
  - 1. *Counsel.* The municipal attorney and assembly counsel may give an opinion, either written or oral, on legal questions; and
  - 2. *Municipal staff.* Municipal employees may obtain the floor to respond to a question from an assembly member. As a courtesy to the mayor, when the mayor exercises the mayor's right under the Charter to participate in an assembly meeting to the same extent as an assembly member (except that the mayor

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may not vote), the mayor also may call upon a municipal employee to make comments on the mayor's behalf.

(AO No. 13-75; AO No. 78-49; AO No. 91-178(S); AO No. 2017-53, § 14, 4-11-17; AO No. 2019-84, § 1, 7-9-19; Ord. No. 2019-97, § 1, 8-20-19; AO No. 2021-117, § 1, 1-19-22)

## Robert's Rules - Decorum in Debate

43:19 The following practices and customs observed by speakers and other members in an assembly assist the carrying on of debate in a smooth and orderly manner. Paragraphs 3:9–13 under the head Pattern of Formality should be read in connection with this subject.

43:20 Confining Remarks to the Merits of the Pending Question. In debate a member's remarks must be germane to the question before the assembly—that is, his statements must have bearing on whether the immediately pending motion should be adopted (see also Principles Governing the Debatability of Motions, 43:35–40).

43:21 Refraining from Attacking a Member's Motives. When a question is pending, a member can condemn the nature or likely consequences of the proposed measure in strong terms, but he must avoid personalities, and under no circumstances can he attack or question the motives of another member. The measure, not the member, is the subject of debate. If a member disagrees with a statement by another in regard to an event that both witnessed, he cannot state in debate that the other's statement “is false.” But he might say, “I believe there is strong evidence that the member is mistaken.” The moment the chair hears such words as “fraud,” “liar,” or “lie” used about a member in debate, he must act immediately and decisively to correct the matter and prevent its repetition (see 61).

43:22 Addressing All Remarks Through the Chair. Members of an assembly cannot address one another directly, but must address all remarks through the chair. If, while a member is speaking in debate, another member wishes to address a question to him—which the person speaking can permit or not as he chooses, but which is taken out of his time if he does—the member desiring to ask the question rises and addresses the chair, proceeding as explained under Request for Information (33:6–10).

43:23 Avoiding the Use of Members' Names. As much as possible, the use of names of members should be avoided in debate. It is better to describe a member in some other way, as by saying, “the member who spoke last,” or, “the delegate from Mason County.” The officers of the society should always be referred to by their official titles. There is no need, however, to refer to oneself in debate in the third person as by the use of such expressions as “this member.” A member's debate is expected and intended to be partial, and the first person is quite acceptable.

43:24 Refraining from Speaking Adversely on a Prior Action Not Pending. In debate, a member cannot reflect adversely on any prior act of the society that is not then pending, unless a motion to reconsider, rescind, or amend it is pending, or unless he intends to conclude his remarks by making or giving notice of one of these motions.

43:25 Refraining from Speaking Against One's Own Motion. In debate, the maker of a motion, while he can vote against it, is not allowed to speak against his own motion. He need not speak at all, but if he does he is obliged to take a favorable position. If he changes his mind while the motion he made is pending, he can, in effect, advise the assembly of this by asking permission to withdraw the motion (33:11–18).

43:26 Reading from Reports, Quotations, etc., Only Without Objection or With Permission. If any member objects, a member has no right to read from—or to have the secretary read from—any paper or book as part of his speech, without permission of the assembly. Members are usually permitted to read short, pertinent, printed extracts in debate, however, so long as they do not abuse the privilege (see also 33:20–21).

43:27 Being Seated During an Interruption by the Chair. If at any time the presiding officer rises to make a ruling, give information, or otherwise speak within his privilege, any member who is speaking should be seated (or should step back slightly if he is standing at a microphone some distance from a seat) until the presiding officer has finished. At that time the member can resume his speech, unless he is denied the right as a disciplinary measure. (Questions of discipline arising from disorderly debate by members are treated in 61.)

43:28 Refraining from Disturbing the Assembly. During debate, during remarks by the presiding officer to the assembly, and during voting, no member should be permitted to disturb the assembly by whispering, walking across the floor, or in any other way. The key words here are disturb the assembly. This rule does not mean, therefore, that members can never whisper, or walk from one place to another in the hall during the deliberations of the assembly. At large meetings it would be impossible to enforce such a rule. However, the presiding officer should watch that such activity does not disturb the meeting or hamper the transaction of business.

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The chapter ends at 43:40