

Effective Leadership and Parliamentary Procedure for District Advisory Bodies

Effective Leadership

- The chair or co-chairs must ensure that meetings are orderly
- Become familiar with basic parliamentary procedure, the advisory body's bylaws or charter, and the district's Guidelines for Citizens Communications and Visitors, and ensure that all of these are followed
- Establish an expectation for timeliness – consistently start and end meetings on time
- Monitor the amount of time given to each agenda item, or appoint a timekeeper
- Prior to discussion, inform members that the time given to them to speak may be limited to allow others an opportunity to speak
- If the time being spent on an item becomes overly long and you need to move on in the agenda, inform members that discussion will need to conclude and you will only be able to take a few more comments
- Do not allow discussion of items not posted on the meeting agenda
- If a member departs from the agenda, makes comments not related to the subject at hand, interrupts another speaker, or becomes abusive, rule the member out of order
- The presiding officer must treat ex officio members and staff members who may be present with the same expectations for order
- If there are co-chairs (which is often the case), assign one co-chair to preside over each item on the agenda – this prevents any confusion over which co-chair recognizes a member to speak or which co-chair may need to make other efforts to keep order – it also allows the non-presiding co-chair to more freely participate in the discussion without undermining the impartiality and objectivity a presiding co-chair should demonstrate
- The chair or co-chairs are certainly allowed to vote and take part in discussions, but as indicated in the above point, the person presiding should be primarily ensuring order and facilitating equal opportunities for members to speak, and should strive to demonstrate impartiality and objectivity – but this is not to say that the person presiding can never express an opinion, so long as that opinion is not presented with any impression of carrying more weight than any other member's opinion

Basic Parliamentary Procedure

- “Robert’s Rules of Order, Newly Revised” is the reference for parliamentary procedure, but this is a very large set of rules and only a few basic rules should be necessary for district advisory bodies
- The preferred method of decision-making for district advisory bodies is consensus approval – the presiding officer simply asks if anyone objects to approving something or moving forward with something – if there is no objection, then consensus is reached, but if any member objects, then a majority vote is necessary
- But before there is a vote, a member must make a motion, and the motion must be seconded by another member (this does not necessarily indicate agreement with the motion, only that the motion warrants consideration)
- After the motion is seconded, the presiding officer asks if there is any discussion – the presiding officer recognizes members who wish to speak
- If there is no discussion, or after discussion concludes, then the presiding officer will call for a vote
- If a member feels that discussion is going on too long or is not necessary, a motion may be made to “call the question,” or to end the discussion immediately and take a vote – for this particular motion, a 2/3 vote is required rather than a majority

- A member may move to amend a motion that is already on the floor – amendments may be in the form of changing the existing motion or making a substitute motion
- Once seconded, an amended motion is also subject to discussion and vote – voting is in inverse order, such that amended motions are voted on first, then the original motion
- A member may move to “table” discussion, to either consider the matter later in the meeting or at a later date (usually to move on to other items on the agenda)
- A member may move to “postpone indefinitely” the discussion, which means the matter cannot be reintroduced at that meeting, but may be taken up at a later date (this is often done in hopes of killing a motion)
- If a motion has several parts, a member may move to divide the motion to vote differently on the parts
- If a member feels that something is not germane to the matter at hand or that something is being done incorrectly, a “point of order” may be raised to be addressed by the presiding officer