Council Rules of Procedure

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Benefits of adopting council meeting policies and rules of procedure

- Efficient meetings
- Providing an understandable process
- Controlling and allowing reasonable public input

IT IS IN YOUR POWER

Iowa Code Section 21.7 says this:
Nothing in this chapter shall prevent a governmental body from making and enforcing reasonable rules for the conduct of its meetings to assure those meetings are orderly, and free from interference or interruption by spectators.

Iowa Code Section 372.13(5) says this:
“The council shall determine its own rules . . . .”

✓ Cities are free to decide how to run their meetings
✓ Your city should adopt council rules of procedure

Before the Meeting

- Scheduling regular and special council meetings and work sessions
- Council meeting time, dates and location
- Special meetings: who can call and how
- Work sessions
  o Who can call a work session?
  o How are work sessions run?
  o Is citizen participation allowed?

The Agenda

- Who can place items on the agenda, and how
- Deadline for placing items on the agenda
- Emergencies
- When is the agenda made public
- When and where is the agenda posted
- When are agenda packets made available
• Who receives electronic copies of the agenda
• Dealing with media requests for the agenda

**Parliamentary Procedure**

• Rules should be simple enough for most people to understand
• Robert’s Rules are difficult to follow for the general public
• To the extent you need to have parliamentary procedure, consider making the process easy to understand and follow
• Many Iowa cities follow a simple process in conducting business, which can be covered easily in your own rules of procedure

**Order of Business**

• Pledge of allegiance, opening prayer or nothing?
• Call to order
• Consent agenda
  o Who decides if items are on the consent agenda
  o Process for removing items from consent agenda for discussion
    ▪ Council only or citizens too?
• Hearings
• Ordinances
• Resolutions
• Citizen requests to speak (or not)
• Old business, new business or unfinished business are not sufficiently specific to be proper agenda items

**Rules of Debate**

• Item announced by presiding officer
• Council members speak when recognized
• No interruptions, except to enforce the rules
• Limiting council remarks to a reasonable length
• Closing debate on an item
• Calling for a vote

**Citizen Participation**

• Only on specific agenda items or specific time for public comments
• Some cities have a process to allow citizens to place a matter on the agenda
• Name, address and topic, which must deal with city business
• Time limit on remarks
  o Mayor/Council may place a time limit on remarks by a group on the same topic
  o Mayor/Council may place time limit for individual remarks
• Remarks to be germane
Directed to the specific item being considered
No offensive, impertinent, disrespectful, profane, threatening, frivolous or irrelevant remarks allowed

Dealing With An Unruly Speaker

- Cities can limit meetings to discussion of specific agenda items
- Reasonable speaker restrictions can be imposed to preserve civility
- Speakers can be required to stay on topic and to be civil
- Speakers who refuse to comply can be asked to leave
- Criminal charges are a last resort, only for people who
  - Engage in egregious behavior
  - Refuse to stop
  - Refuse to leave the podium
  - Refuse to leave the meeting when requested by the Mayor
- Criminal charges are an available option if necessary
  - Trespass – city ordinance
  - Disorderly conduct – city ordinance
  - Willful disturbance – state law

Best Practices:

- Adopt a rule that defines how speakers conduct themselves
- Announce and explain the rule before each council meeting
- Enforce the rule

Miscellaneous

- Cell phones, laptops and tablets
- Motions to reconsider
- Consideration of items out of order
- Waiver of ordinance readings
- Electronic meetings
- Tie votes
- Closed sessions
- Conflict of interest
- Abstention from voting
- Suspension of rules
- Enforcement of rules
- Matters not covered by rules
- Amending the rules of procedure
- Re-adoptions of rules annually