

## Handbook Highlight from the Montana Municipal Officials Handbook

### 2.401 Rules of Order

Unfortunately, the commonly encountered Robert's Rules of Order is as easy to read and understand as your computer's program language. Moreover, it seems that every commission member has her or his own view on the subject. Therefore, it makes some sense to extract from Robert's the essential and most commonly used Rules and to incorporate them into the commission's own agreed upon procedures that have been formally adopted by commission resolution. (A model policy for council procedures is attached at the end of this Section.) Fortunately, Robert's Rules has now been published in a much more user-friendly format and we strongly recommend that the traditional version be discarded and replaced with Robert's Rules of Order Newly Revised, 10th Edition.

It makes even more sense to practice the basic rules of council procedure scrupulously at every meeting and on every council action. By doing so, even on routine issues, the procedures will be well practiced and therefore second nature to the members when faced with a "hot issue" and a "heated audience". Here it seems worth emphasizing that deviation from established commission procedures could flaw the final decision. It is precisely when that decision concerns a costly and contentious issue that some dissatisfied party will seek a flaw in the council's decision and virtually any procedural flaw will do nicely. In short, it is seldom a good idea to depart from established policy without a compelling reason to do so.

With commission rules of procedure in place and in practice, the work set forth on the agenda should proceed smoothly, at least most of the time. But, as emphasized above, the agenda itself is an important procedural matter.