

Who's Robert And Why Does He Get to Make All The Rules - Part II

Last time I wrote about the difficulty of properly abiding by Roberts Rules of Order, probably in any meeting, but certainly in condominium association meetings. In response to the column, I received a number of comments, ranging from mild perplexity, to some help from a reader in Washington State. (Who knew Seacoast Online had such a transcontinental range? Very impressive.) Most had a concern that there is a place for Roberts Rules of Order, which is true, but not so much in condominium associations.

Keep in mind Roberts Rules of Order were created and are more appropriately used for such matters where formalities are necessary, such as town meetings and corporate board meetings. Their formality is the antithesis of what condominium boards of directors strive for, i.e. friendly neighborhood meetings.

No one is accustomed to them; reading them doesn't make one an expert; and few people understand them. Their use is not infrequently filled with mistakes. And mistakes put association in the precarious position of opening themselves to challenges about whether was a board or the owners did was legally correct but improperly adopted ... and that's just what the member of the fellowship of the miserable who lives in your condominium association waits and looks for, a mistake. Because, once used improperly used or not used at all, then someone can claim they don't have to pay the increase in condominium fees or abide by anything its board of directors says since a board member was elected improperly.

Alas, we have to deal with them nonetheless. So, if you must, a chart of common motions, and how to handle them is posted on my website (Seacoast Online just couldn't quite find a way to keep it intact for this column, so we just couldn't place it here. Sorry.) And remember, perhaps the most important motion, to prevent people from successfully challenging actions, and to keep condo association meetings friendly, as they should be, would be to follow the language of the Condominium Act and move to amend the Bylaws to make sure RROO is discretionary and not mandatory.

As noted in the last column, the Condominium Act notes a condominium association has to use RROO unless the Bylaws state otherwise. So, why not allow them to be used in the discretion of the Board of Directors? Pass an amendment that says something like, "In the discretion of the Board, Roberts Rules of Order shall govern the conduct of all or any portion of meetings of the Association when not in conflict with the Declaration, these Bylaws or the Condominium Act." This way, if there is a runaway train at your meeting, the Board of Directors can invoke RROO, limit debate, force a vote, take RROO off the table, and move along in an informal, friendly way.

You don't have to, of course, but if you don't, you open yourself to challenges to nearly everything you do.

When you do choose to keep meetings informal, a few things to remember would include:

- Create an Agenda and stick to it. This creates structure and predictability, letting owners know what is on the docket and helps them decide whether to attend.
- Insist on good manners. No shouting, personal attacks or interruptions, and only one person can speak at a time. (The Secretary will thank you for this last one.) If people cannot have good manners, ask them to leave. You can do that.
- Make sure no Owner gets to speak a second time until all other Owners who wish to speak on the topic have done so. Just common courtesy. Some like/require the spotlight and attention. Have them choose a different venue. That's not what board meetings and association meetings are for.
- Go over the Rules at the beginning of the meeting. It's fair warning to all.

And that is your parliamentary lesson for this year.

You Want To:	You Say:	Interrupt?	2nd?	Debate?	Amend?	Vote?
Close Meeting	I move to adjourn	No	Yes	No	No	Majority
Take a Break	I move to recess for	No	Yes	No	Yes	Majority
Register Complaint	I rise to a question of privilege	Yes	No	No	No	None
Force to Follow Agenda	I call for the orders of the day	Yes	No	No	No	None
Lay Aside Temporarily	I move to lay the question on the table	No	Yes	No	No	Majority
Close Debate	I move the previous question	No	Yes	No	No	2/3
Limit or Extend Debate	I move the debate be limited to ...	No	Yes	No	YeS	2/3
Postpone to a certain time	I move to postpone the motion to ...	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Majority
Refer to Committee	I move to refer the motion to ...	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Majority
Modify wording of motion	I move to amend the motion by ...	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Majority
Kill main motion	I move that the motion be postponed indefinitely	No	Yes	Yes	No	Majority
Consider a suspended matter	I move to take from the table ...	Yes	Yes	No	No	Majority
Bring Business before the Owners	I move the (or "to)	No	Yes	Yes	Ye	Majority
Complain about hearing, comfort, etc.	Point of privilege	Yes	No	No	No	Chair
Verify recent voice vote by actual count (prior to the next motion only)	I call for division	Yes	No	No	No	Majority
Request Information	Point of inquiry ...	Yes	No	No	No	N/A
Prevent consideration of a matter	I object to considering this question	Yes	No	No	No	2/3
Reconsider a previous motion	I move to reconsider	Yes	Yes	No	No	2/3