

Guidelines for Meeting Minutes in Local Government



Meeting minutes recording the actions taken by your council or board are a fundamental part of the meeting process. These are our guidelines for local government meeting minutes. They refer to ordinary business and work or study meetings of councils, boards and committees. Public hearings are governed by different rules.

▶ WHAT KIND OF MINUTES?

1. Minutes should record what is done, not what is said. We recommend action minutes for local government.
2. Summary minutes include a summary of the key points of discussion, without attribution to individual speakers.
3. We recommend that boards and councils do not keep detailed minutes of discussion (“he said, she said”). These are generally a waste of time, effort and resources.
4. Study sessions and committee meeting minutes may include more administrative detail.

▶ WHAT TO INCLUDE IN MINUTES

5. Minutes should include each main motion and its disposition (passed, failed, referred to committee, postponed, etc.). Minor procedural motions such as approving the agenda or calling the question do not need to be included.
6. Include all points of order, appeals, and their result. This becomes precedent for the future.
7. If the body wants to give reasons for its actions, use a resolution with “whereas” clauses.

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► **DON'T INCLUDE IN MINUTES**

8. If a motion does not receive a second, Jurassic Parliament recommends that it not be included in the minutes. However, the Robert's Rules Association says that it should be included.
9. According to Robert, do not record the name of the seconder in the minutes. However, if a higher authority requires this, include it.
10. Keep track of amendments, but do not include each individual amendment in the minutes. Instead, include the final text of the motion. "After discussion and amendment, the following motion was approved..."
11. Withdrawn motions are not normally included in the minutes.
12. Putting something "on the record" is a privilege of the body. Personal opinions do not belong in the minutes. However, the body may vote to include anything it chooses in its record.
13. In our view minutes should not record detailed public comment. It is sufficient to say that "public comment was given."
14. Members should not be allowed to provide new material after the meeting to be included in the minutes.
15. Minutes cannot be altered to include something that didn't actually happen.

► **VOTING IN MEETING MINUTES**

16. Voice votes, if allowed in your state, may be recorded in the minutes as "the motion passed" or "the motion failed." Roll call votes and counted votes must be recorded in full detail.
17. When voting details are included, it should be immediately clear how each member voted. Do not write, for example, "the motion passed with members X and Y voting against."

► **REPORTS IN MEETING MINUTES**

18. Written reports can be received for filing separately. They do not need to be part of the minutes.
19. It is burdensome and inefficient for staff to be expected to write down summaries of oral reports. If a body wishes to include reports of committees or other bodies in its minutes, the committee should be requested to provide the summary.
20. Minutes should include the specifics of any election held and the full text of any policy adopted. Lengthy ordinances may be recorded separately.

► **PROCESSING AND APPROVING THE MINUTES**

21. It is no longer considered necessary to include the words "respectfully submitted" above the clerk/secretary's signature.
22. Draft minutes will be included in the agenda packet that is sent to the board and posted for the public. They should be clearly marked "draft." Wait until minutes are approved to post them to the website.
23. A person does not have to have been present at a meeting in participate in approving the minutes of that meeting.
24. The only proper way to object to the approval of the clerk/secretary's draft of the meeting minutes is to propose a correction.
25. Minutes are not approved at a special meeting. Rather, they are held over until the next regular meeting.
26. Minutes of executive session, if any are kept, are approved and maintained separately from minutes of regular session.
27. Once minutes are approved, the clerk/secretary must prepare a copy without the word "draft", include the date of approval, and sign or initial the approved minutes for the record.

▶ **RECORDINGS OF THE MEETING**

28. Unless state law says otherwise, the written minutes as approved by the body are the official record of the meeting. Audio and video recordings are not the official record.
29. It can be helpful to include time stamps from the recording in the minutes, so people wishing to observe what was said during discussion of a specific item do not have to review the recording from the beginning.

▶ **CHANGING THE MINUTES**

30. Approved minutes can be changed at any time using the motion “to amend something previously adopted.” The changes are noted on the minutes being changed, with signature. According to Robert’s Rules, details of the changes are not included in the minutes of the meeting at which the changes are made.

If questions arise about meeting minutes, consult your attorney. State law and regulations and your specific bylaws or rules of procedure have higher standing than Robert’s Rules of order, other parliamentary authorities, or these guidelines.

More information:

- *Robert’s Rules of Order Newly Revised, 11th edition, pp. 468-480*
- www.jurassicparliament.com/category/meeting-minutes/
- www.robertsrules.com

Do you have feedback on these guidelines for us? We are always eager to improve our publications. Visit our website at www.jurassicparliament.com/category/meeting-minutes/ for much more information on minutes, and contact us at info@jurassicparliament.com or 206-542-8422 with your suggestions. We look forward to hearing from you!

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