

STURGIS PARLIMENTARY PROCEDURES



BACKGROUND

Montana conservation districts (CD) adopted the Sturgis Standard Code of Parliamentary Procedure (now titled The Standard Code of Parliamentary Procedure) in 1987 as a guide for conducting business. It was viewed as simpler, more practical, and easier to apply than Robert's Rules while still protecting fairness, majority rule, and minority rights.

Sturgis is framed for supervisors as "fairness and common sense," emphasizing clear principles over complex ritual so boards can conduct business efficiently and correctly without needing to master a very technical rulebook. Parliamentary procedure is easy to learn, because it is essentially comprised of equity and common sense.

Every member of the CD should take the time to understand how to use parliamentary procedure. The latest edition of the Standard Code of Parliamentary, Second Edition was published in 2023 and provides new motions and protocols pertaining to electronic meetings, discipline, and finance and audit. Visit: <https://aipstandardcode.com/>.

While Sturgis was adopted as the parliamentary authority used statewide, individual districts can adopt their own rules.

WHAT IS PARLIAMENTARY PROCEDURE?

- A code of ethics that guides how business is conducted.
- A set of rules and principles that courts rely on when deciding disputes about an organization's procedures.
- A system that ensures decisions reflect the will of the majority.
- A well-established, court-tested method for carrying out business.

IMPORTANT GUIDING PRINCIPLES

No Business Without a Quorum. Individual Supervisors do not have the power to act independently. They are a member of a governing body and therefore may not speak or act for the body unless given specific authority by the body. An individual doing so will be individually responsible for their own actions.

One thing at a time: This may be the most important thing to remember. By addressing one motion at a time, you will avoid confusion about the business taking place. Discussion should be limited to the pending motion on the floor.



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Courtesy for All: Everyone has their own opinion. A good chairman provides everyone with the same opportunity to express themselves freely and without interruption.

Majority rules: Practicing parliamentary procedure ensures that the will of the board will be accomplished.

Rights of minority are protected: Everyone has an equal chance and the freedom to be heard, propose motions, and vote.

Alice Sturgis considered principles more important than rules. She stressed the need to understand the "why" behind every procedure and believed that common sense should prevail over archaic ritual.

MOTION TYPES AND PRECEDENCE:

Under Sturgis, motions fall into four classifications, with privileged motions such as adjourn and recess ranked first, followed by subsidiary motions such as postpone temporarily (table), close debate, limit or extend debate, postpone to a certain time, refer to committee, and amend, and the main motion taken up and voted on last.

Motion type	Examples (exact terms vary)	Key points
Privileged	Adjourn; Recess; Question of privilege	Deal with comfort/rights of members, can interrupt pending business.
Subsidiary	Postpone Temporarily (Table); Close debate; Limit debate; Postpone to a certain time; Refer to committee; Amend	Modify or dispose of the main motion; some require a two-thirds vote (close or limit debate).
Main	"I move that we apply for a DNRC grant ..."	Brings substantive business before the board; acted on last, after higher-precedence motions.
Incidental	Appeal; Withdraw a motion; Read a paper, etc.	Arise out of other business; decided immediately; no fixed precedence among themselves.



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KEY STEPS IN A MOTION:

Recognition: Member raises a hand and waits to be recognized by the chair (or presiding officer).

Motion: Member says, "I move that..." (e.g., "I move that we buy a new no-till drill").

Second: Another member says, "Second," or "I second the motion," indicating interest in discussion (no recognition needed).

Debate: Chair (or presiding officer) restates the motion, and members debate it.

Vote: The chair calls for a vote.

Result: The motion passes or fails.

DID YOU KNOW?

- Under Sturgis, the Chair maintains the right to vote.
- A motion requires a majority vote to pass. Where a motion would limit the rights of members, a 2/3 vote is required.
- Associate members cannot vote.
- Board members who have a direct personal gain may not vote due to a conflict of interest. If result of vote is a tie, motion fails to pass.
- Seconding a Motion merely indicates that the member wishes the motion to be considered by the board; it is not necessarily an endorsement of the motion.

Disclaimer: This information is provided for general information purposes only and does not constitute legal advice. The information provided should not be used as a substitute for a legal opinion from your county attorney or otherwise retained and qualified legal counsel. If you need advice regarding a specific legal situation, contact your legal counsel.



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STURGIS PARLIMENTAREY PROCEDURE MOTION CHART

IF YOU WANT TO:	THEN YOU SAY:	Can your motion interrupt a speaker?	Does the motion need a 2nd?	Is the motion debatable?	Can the motion be amended?	What type of vote is required?
Adjourn the meeting	I move that we adjourn	No	Yes	No	No	Majority
Take a break	I move to recess for ___ minutes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Majority
Register a complaint	I rise to a question of privilege	Yes	No	No	No	None
Lay aside a motion temporarily	I move that the main motion be postponed temporarily	No	Yes	No	No	Varies
Close debate and vote immediately	I move to close debate	No	Yes	No	No	2/3
Limit or extend debate	I move to limit debate to ...	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	2/3
Postpone action to a certain time	I move to postpone the motion until ...	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Majority
Refer the matter to a committee	I move to refer the motion to ...	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Majority
Modify the wording of a motion	I move to amend the motion by	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Majority
Make a motion	I move that ...	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Majority

Incidental Motions: No order of precedence. Arise incidentally and are decided immediately.

IF YOU WANT TO:	THEN YOU SAY:	Can your motion interrupt a speaker?	Does the motion need a 2nd?	Is the motion debatable?	Can the motion be amended?	What type of vote is required?
Appeal a decision	I appeal from the decision of the chair	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Majority
Suspend the rules	I move to suspend the rule	No	Yes	No	No	2/3
Enforce the rules	Point of Order	Yes	No	No	No	None
Ask a Parliamentary question	Parliamentary inquiry	Yes	No	No	No	None
Divide a motion	I request that the motion be divided ...	No	No	No	No	None
Demand a recorded vote	I call for a division of the assembly	Yes	No	No	No	None

Restorative Main Motions: No order of precedence. Introduce only when nothing else is pending.

IF YOU WANT TO:	THEN YOU SAY:	Can your motion interrupt a speaker?	Does the motion need a 2nd?	Is the motion debatable?	Can the motion be amended?	What type of vote is required?
Amend a previous action	I move to amend the motion that was ...	No	Yes	Varies	Yes	Varies
Reconsider a motion	I move to reconsider ...	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Majority
Cancel a previous action	I move to rescind ...	No	Yes	Yes	No	Majority
Resume consideration (take the matter from the table)	I move to resume consideration of ...	No	Yes	No	No	Majority

excerpt from "Sturgis Standard Code of Parliamentary Procedure" by Alice Sturgis

To access this chart, visit:

https://dnrc.mt.gov/_docs/conservation/CDBureau/cd-resource-documents/Sturgis-Parliamentary-Procedure-Motions-Chart.pdf

