

## Roberts Rules – committees

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For Urban Forestry Commission – city of Cleveland

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**49. Committees Classified.** A Committee is a body of one or more persons appointed or elected by an assembly or society to consider, or investigate, or take action in regard to, certain matters or subjects, or to do all of these things. Committees may be divided into two distinct classes:

- (1) Boards of Managers or Directors, Boards of Trustees, Executive Committees, etc.
- (2) Ordinary Committees, Special or Standing, and Committee of the Whole and its substitutes.

These different kinds of committees are considered separately in the following five sections.

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**50. Boards of Managers or Directors, Boards of Trustees, Executive Committees, etc.** Committees of this class are essentially small deliberative assemblies, subordinate to the body that appoints them, with their duties and authority, and the number of their regular meetings and their quorums, defined by the parent body, or by its authority. Boards or Committees of this class are usually appointed by organizations that meet only annually or quarterly. With such an organization it is customary and necessary to delegate to a committee, usually known as the Board of Managers or Directors, all its authority, with slight limitations, to be exercised between its meetings. The by-laws of the Board are adopted by the parent body, or the Board may be authorized to adopt its own by-laws. It is usual to authorize the Board to appoint from its membership an Executive Committee of a specified number who shall have all the power of the Board between the meetings of the Board, just as the Board has all the power of the Society between the meetings of the Society, except that the subordinate body cannot modify any action taken by its superior. The Executive Committee should be small and the members should live near enough each other to be able to have frequent regular meetings, besides special meetings in emergencies. Where the organization is local, such as a society for sustaining an orphan asylum, the Board of Managers usually divides itself into committees having charge of different branches of the work during the intervals between the monthly or quarterly meetings of the Board, when these committees report on the work done. It is seldom that resolutions or other matters are referred to boards or committees of this class for them to report back to the society with recommendations. If papers are referred to them it is usually for their information and action. They are organized as any other deliberative assembly with a chairman and a secretary, whom they elect if they are not appointed by the society. Frequently the by-laws of the society make its president and its corresponding, or executive secretary, ex-officio, [51] president and secretary of the Board of Managers.

In large boards business is transacted the same as in the society meetings; but in small boards the same formality is not necessary or usual, the informality observed by committees being generally allowed. In a board meeting where there are not more than about a dozen present, for instance, it is not necessary to rise in order to make a motion, nor to wait for recognition by the chair before speaking or making a motion, nor for a motion to have a second; nor is there any limit to the number of speeches, nor does the chairman leave the chair when making a motion or discussing a question. The formalities necessary in order to transact business in a large assembly would hinder business in so small a body.

Boards are often constituted so that the term of office of, say, one-third of its members expires each year. After each annual meeting in such case, the board elects new officers and committees, the same as if the entire board had been re-elected. All unfinished business falls to the ground when the new board is elected.

It is customary for the by-laws to require an annual report from the Board of Managers, which usually gives a brief account of its doings for the year with recommendations for the future. After discussion, and amendment if necessary, the report is usually adopted by the society and published in its annual proceedings as the report of the board. In such a case, care should be taken in publishing it to inclose in brackets all that has been struck out, and to put in italics whatever has been inserted, and to insert a note to that effect at the beginning of the report, so that exactly what the board recommended can readily be seen. The minutes should read thus: "The Board of Managers

submitted its report which after discussion and amendment was adopted as follows, the words in brackets having been struck out and those underscored (in italics) having been inserted before the report was adopted." The society cannot alter the report of the board. It may decline to indorse it, or even to allow it to be printed, but it cannot make it appear that the board stated anything different from what it has reported. By the above plan is shown exactly what the board reported and what the society adopted, or endorsed.

**52. Committees, Special and Standing.** It is usual in deliberative assemblies, to have all preliminary work in the preparation of matter for their action done by means of committees. The committee may be either a "standing committee," appointed for a definite time, as a session or a year; or a "special [or select] committee," appointed for a special purpose; or a "committee of the whole" consisting of the entire assembly. [For method of appointing committees of the whole, see [55](#); other committees, see [Commit, 32](#).] Committees of the whole are not used much except in legislative bodies, and when the word committees is used in this Manual, unless specified to the contrary, standing or special committees are meant. Unless the assembly has appointed a chairman, either directly or through its presiding officer, the first named on a committee, and in his absence the next named member, becomes chairman, and so on and should act as such unless the committee by a majority of its number elects a chairman, which it has the right to do if the assembly has not appointed one, and which a standing committee usually does. The clerk should furnish him, or, in his absence, some other member of the committee, with notice of the appointment of the committee, the names of the members, the papers or matter referred to it, and such instructions as the assembly has decided upon. Upon the committee's request, all papers and books necessary for the proper performance of its duties should be turned over to it by the proper officers.

It is the duty of the chairman to call the committee together, but, if he is absent, or neglects or declines to call a meeting of the committee? it is the duty of the committee to meet on the call of any two of its members. In small special committees the chairman usually acts as secretary, but in large ones and in all standing committees, it is customary to elect a secretary, who keeps a brief memorandum of what is done, for the use of the committee. Members of the society have a right to appear at the committee meetings and present their views on the subject before it at such reasonable times as, upon request, the committee may appoint. But during the deliberations of the committee no one has a right to be present, except members of the committee.

The rules of the assembly, as far as possible, apply to the committee, but motions to close or limit debate are not allowed, and there is no limit to the number of times a member may speak, and unless the committee is very large, it is not necessary for any one to rise and address the chair before making a motion or speaking, nor does the chairman rise to put the question, nor does he leave the chair to speak or make motions, nor are motions seconded. These formalities are unnecessary because the committee is so small, but, unless agreed to by general consent, all questions must be put to vote. Instead of the chairman's abstaining from speaking on questions, he is, usually, the most active participant in the discussions and work of the committee. In order that the assembly may have the benefit of the matured judgment of the committee, a reconsideration of a vote must be allowed regardless of the time and of previous reconsideration, and it may be moved by any one who did not vote with the minority, even if he was absent when the previous vote was taken; but it shall require a two-thirds vote for its adoption unless every member who voted with the majority is either present or received ample notice of the meeting and that the reconsideration was to be moved. This prevents taking advantage of the absence of members to reverse action, and enables members who were absent to bring up the question of reconsideration.

The committee constitute a miniature assembly, being able to act only when a quorum (a majority of the members) is present. If a paper is referred to them, they must not write on it, but should write their amendments on a separate sheet. If the amendments are numerous it is better to write out a substitute and submit it. If a resolution is referred to a committee while a motion to postpone indefinitely is pending, only the resolution is referred to the committee, the motion to postpone indefinitely being ignored. If amendments are pending they go to the committee, who may recommend their adoption or rejection, or make no recommendation in regard to them. If the committee originate the paper, all amendments must be incorporated in it. When they originate it, usually one member has previously prepared a draft, which is read entirely through, and then read by paragraphs, the chairman pausing after each paragraph, and asking: "Are there any amendments proposed to this paragraph?" No vote is taken on the adoption of the separate paragraphs; but, after the whole paper has been read in this way, it is open to amendment generally, by striking out any paragraph, or by substituting or inserting new ones, or by substituting an entirely new paper for it. If there is a preamble it is considered last. When the entire paper has been amended to suit the committee, they should adopt it as their report, and direct the chairman or some other member to report it to the assembly. When committees are appointed to investigate, or to report upon, certain matters, the report should close with, or be

accompanied by, formal resolutions covering all recommendations, so that when their report is made no motion is necessary except to adopt the resolutions.

If the report is written in this form, "Your committee are of the opinion that Mr. A's bill should be paid," there might be some doubt as to the effect of the adoption of the recommendation or the report. The report should close with a recommendation that the following order be adopted: "Ordered, That the treasurer pay Mr. A's bill for \$10.15." If a report recommends that charges be preferred against Mr. B, it should close with recommending the adoption of resolutions, which should be written out, providing for holding an adjourned meeting, and for citing the member to appear at the adjourned meeting for trial on charges that must be specified. These should be prepared by the committee and submitted as a part of their report. The committee should never leave to others the responsibility of preparing resolutions to carry out their recommendations. They should consider this as one of their most important duties.

When the report has been adopted by the committee a clear copy is made, usually commencing in a style similar to this: "The committee to whom was referred (state the matter referred), beg leave to submit the following report ;" or, "Your committee appointed to (specify the object), respectfully report," etc. If the report is of much importance it should be signed by all the members concurring in the report; but when it is of little importance, or merely recommends amendments, etc., it may be signed by the chairman alone, his signature being followed by the word "Chairman." He should not, however, place "Chairman" after his signature except when he signs the report alone and by the authority of the committee. The report must always be in the third person though written and signed by only one. The signature may be preceded by the words, "Respectfully submitted," but it is not necessary. Usually the report is not dated or addressed, and sometimes it consists merely of a resolution, or a set of resolutions. In the latter case the chairman states he is instructed by the committee to submit and to move the adoption of the resolutions. The report of the majority is the report of the committee and should never be referred to as the majority report.

If the minority submit a report, (or more properly, their "views,") it may commence thus: "The undersigned, a minority of the committee appointed, etc., not agreeing with the majority, desire to express their views in the case." After the committee's report has been read and the motion to adopt has been made and the question stated, it is usual to allow the minority to present their views, but if any one objects to its reception the chair should put the question to vote on its being received. It requires a majority vote to receive it, the question being undebatable. When the minority report is read it is for information, and it cannot be acted upon except by a motion to substitute it for the report of the committee. Whether the views of the minority are read or not, any one can move to substitute the resolutions they recommend for those recommended by the committee. Where the minority cannot agree, each member may submit his views separately. In some cases a member agrees to the report with a single exception, in which case instead of submitting his views separately, after all have signed who agree to the report he may write that he agrees to the report except the part which he specifies, and then sign the statement.

The committee's report<sup>1</sup> can contain only that which has been agreed to by a majority vote at a meeting of which every member has been notified, or at an adjourned meeting thereof (a quorum, a majority of the members, being present), except where it is impracticable to have a meeting of the committee, when it may contain what is agreed to by every member. If a committee is appointed from different sections of the country with the expectation that its work will be done by correspondence, its report can contain only what is agreed to by a majority of the members.

A committee, except a committee of the whole, can appoint a sub-committee which, however, reports to the committee, and never to the assembly. This sub-committee must consist of members of the committee, except in cases where the committee is appointed to take action that requires the assistance of others, as to make arrangements for holding a bazaar. In such a case it is best to appoint the committee with power to appoint such subcommittees as are required; or, as is frequently done, to appoint the committee "with power," which means with power to take all the steps necessary to carry out its instructions. A committee has no power to punish its members for disorderly conduct, its recourse being to report the facts to the assembly. No allusion can be made in the assembly to what has occurred during the deliberations of the committee, unless it is by a report of the committee or by general consent. When a special committee is through with the business assigned it, a motion is made for the committee to "rise" (which is equivalent to the motion to adjourn without day), and that the chairman (or some member who is more familiar with the subject) make its report to the assembly. A special committee ceases to exist as soon as the assembly receives its report. When a committee adjourns without appointing a time for the next meeting, it is considered as having adjourned at the call of the chair, so that all the meetings of a special committee constitute one session. A meeting of a special committee may be called at any time by the chairman or by any two of

its members, every member being notified. When a committee adjourns to meet at another time, it is not necessary (though usually advisable) that absent members should be notified of the adjourned meeting.

A standing committee is either wholly, or partially, elected at each annual meeting in ordinary societies, and immediately thereafter it reorganizes by electing a chairman (unless he has been appointed by the assembly) and a secretary. Therefore, a standing committee must report at the annual meeting, or before, on everything referred to it during the year. The motion to rise is never used in standing committees or boards, nor is it used in other committees except when the committee is ready to report so that it will never meet again. A special committee is appointed for a specific purpose, and until the duty assigned it by the society is accomplished it continues to exist, unless sooner discharged, which requires a two-thirds vote if done without notice being given. The fact that an annual meeting has intervened does not discharge a special committee appointed by a society. But in an elected or appointed body, as a convention, special committees that have not reported cease to exist when the new officers assume their duties at the next annual meeting. When discharged, the chairman of the committee returns to the secretary all documents received from him.

While in small assemblies, especially in those where but little business is done, there is not much need of committees, in large assemblies, or in those doing a great deal of business, committees are of the utmost importance. When a committee is properly selected, in nine cases out of ten its action decides that of the assembly. A committee for *action* should be small, and consist only of those heartily in favor of the proposed action. If one not in sympathy with it is appointed, he should ask to be excused. A committee for deliberation or investigation, on the contrary, should be large, and represent all parties in the assembly, so that its opinion will carry with it as great weight as possible. The usefulness of the committee will be greatly impaired if any important faction of the assembly is unrepresented on the committee. The appointment of a committee is fully explained in [32](#).

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