TOWN OF WHEATLAND
PLANNING OFFICE

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Training Overview: Robert's Rules of Order

Purpose of Robert's Rules of Order

Robert's Rules of Order is a widely used guide for conducting meetings and making decisions as a group. It ensures structure, fairness, and efficiency, enabling all members to contribute effectively. By following these rules, the Planning and Zoning Commission can maintain orderly discussions and make well-informed decisions.

Key Concepts

1. Quorum Requirements

- A quorum is the minimum number of members required to conduct business.
- For the Planning and Zoning Commission, a quorum is **4 members**.
- Without a quorum, no official actions can be taken.

2. Types of Motions

- **Main Motion:** Introduces new business for discussion and decision.
    - Example: "I move that we approve the Special Use Permit for [property]."
- **Amendment:** Proposes a change to the main motion.
    - Example: "I move to amend the motion by adding the condition that landscaping be maintained."
- **Substitute Motion:** Replaces the main motion with a new one.
    - Example: "I move to substitute the motion with a request to defer the decision."
- **Tabling:** Defers discussion or decision to a later time.
    - Example: "I move to table this discussion until the next meeting."
- **Calling the Question:** Ends debate and moves directly to a vote.
    - Example: "I call the question."

3. Voting Procedures

- **Majority Rule:** A motion passes with a majority of votes cast.
- **Abstentions:**

- o Abstentions do not count as "no" votes.
  - o Example: If 2 members vote "yes," 1 votes "no," and 2 abstain, the motion passes with a 2-1 majority.
- **Tie Votes:** A tie vote means the motion fails unless the Chair can cast a tie-breaking vote.

4. Debate Guidelines

- **Recognition:** Members should wait for their turn to speak.
- **Relevance:** Debate must remain focused on the motion being discussed.
- **Time Limits:** The Chair may set time limits for debate to ensure productivity.
- **Avoid Personal Attacks:** Maintain a respectful tone and avoid criticizing individuals.

Advanced Rules and Procedures

5. Handling Amendments

- **Primary Amendments:** Modify the main motion.
- **Secondary Amendments:** Modify a primary amendment. Only one secondary amendment is allowed at a time.
- **Voting on Amendments:** Vote on amendments before returning to the main motion.

6. Postponement Options

- **Postpone to a Certain Time:** Defers discussion to a specific future meeting.
  - o Example: "I move to postpone this motion to the next regular meeting."
- **Postpone Indefinitely:** Effectively kills the motion without a direct vote.
  - o Example: "I move to postpone this motion indefinitely."

7. Points of Order and Appeals

- **Point of Order:** Raised by a member to question a procedural error.
  - o Example: "Point of order! The motion requires a second before debate can begin."
- **Appeal:** A challenge to the Chair's decision. The group votes to uphold or overturn the decision.
  - o Example: "I appeal the decision of the Chair."

8. Reconsideration and Rescission

- **Reconsideration:** Allows a motion to be brought back for discussion if new information arises.
  - o Example: "I move to reconsider the vote on [motion]."
- **Rescission:** Cancels a previously adopted motion.
  - o Example: "I move to rescind the motion to approve the budget."

Additional Guidelines for Effective Meetings

9. Public Participation Guidelines

- **Time Limits for Comments:** Each participant may speak for a set duration (e.g., 3 minutes).

- **Orderly Participation:** Public comments should be directed to the group, avoiding personal remarks or interruptions.
- **Handling Disruptions:** The Chair may issue warnings or ask disruptive participants to leave if necessary.

10. Ethical Responsibilities of Commission Members

- **Conflict of Interest:** Members must declare conflicts and abstain from related discussions and votes.
- **Transparency:** Adhere to open meeting laws and ensure decisions are made in public forums.
- **Impartiality:** Decisions must be based on evidence and regulations, avoiding personal biases.

11. Zoning-Specific Considerations

- **Key Definitions:**
  - **Variance:** Permission to deviate from zoning regulations.
  - **Conditional Use:** Approval for uses not typically allowed in a zoning district but beneficial to the community.
  - **Nonconforming Use:** A use that existed before current zoning laws were enacted.
- **Application Review Process:**
  - Verify compliance with zoning codes.
  - Assess impacts on infrastructure and community.
- **Decision Criteria:**
  - Consider factors like parking, traffic, utilities, and neighborhood compatibility.

12. Emergency Procedures

- **Loss of Quorum:** If a quorum is lost during a meeting, all official business must stop.
- **Adjournment:** The meeting may be adjourned and rescheduled if necessary.
- **Handling Unexpected Disruptions:** Follow safety protocols and notify members and the public of any changes.

13. Example Meeting Agenda

1. Call to Order
2. Roll Call
3. Pledge of Allegiance
4. Public Comments
5. Old Business
6. New Business
7. Approval of Minutes
8. General Discussion
9. Adjournment

Cheat Sheet: Robert's Rules of Order

Quick Reference for Common Motions and Procedures

Motions

1. **Main Motion:** Introduce new business.
   o "I move that we [state action]."
2. **Amendment:** Modify an existing motion.
   o "I move to amend the motion by [describe change]."
3. **Substitute Motion:** Replace the main motion.
   o "I move to substitute the motion with [new action]."
4. **Table the Motion:** Delay discussion or action.
   o "I move to table this item until [time]."
5. **Call the Question:** End debate and move to a vote.
   o "I call the question."

Voting

- Motions pass by a majority of votes cast.
- Abstentions are neutral and do not count as votes.
- Tie votes result in failure unless the Chair breaks the tie.

Points of Order

- Raise a point of order to correct procedural errors.
- Appeal decisions of the Chair if needed.

Reconsideration

- Bring back a motion if new information is available.
- Rescind a motion if circumstances change.

Meeting Conduct

- Keep all comments relevant to the topic.
- Respect time limits and avoid personal attacks.