

Madore, David

From: Madore, David
Sent: Thursday, August 06, 2015 12:33 PM
To: McCauley, Mark
Subject: Action Minutes - corrections for July 21 and 22 meetings

Mark,

Re: Action Minutes

MRSC, Roberts Rules, JurassicParliament.com and many jurisdictions recommend action minutes that simply record what is done at a meeting, not what is said. I propose that we do the same.

The point that you made during our last BOCC meeting and the extended discussion that followed demonstrate why action minutes would greatly simplify the time and work involved. The reason to approve minutes should not be to get a return on the investment of the hours of staff time it took to prepare them. Rather, the reason ought to simply and concisely publish the essential actions taken in a meeting.

One side point, standard practice is for minutes to only include motions that are seconded. The name of the person that seconds the motion should not be recorded. A second simply establishes the fact that the body wants to consider the motion and that the body then owns the motion (not the individual who made the motion). Motions that are not seconded or that are withdrawn are not completed actions and therefore are not normally recorded.

If a meeting is re-opened on the same day, as it was on July 21, minutes can reflect that continued meeting. But a meeting that happened on different day, such as the July 22 special meeting, should have its own minutes.

MSRC and JurassicParliament.com provide excellent guidelines and best practices for preparing action minutes.

Please prepare the action minutes for the July 21 and 22 meetings.

Thank you,

David

Action minutes serve the city best

Ann
Macfarlane

If your council, commission or committee takes detailed minutes of your meetings, we recommend switching to action minutes. Action minutes record what is done at a meeting and not what is said. At Jurassic Parliament, we believe that action minutes serve the city best.

It is natural for elected officials and representatives appointed to public bodies to savor and enjoy reading a record of what they said at meetings. As servants of the public who take their duties seriously, they speak with care and appreciate knowing that what they say has been heard. We believe, however, that the time and effort required to prepare detailed minutes that record specific remarks far exceed the value to the organization and the public. (Quasi-judicial hearings, of course, are another case entirely.)

When a body wants its remarks "on the record," the scribe or clerk has to spend hours, and yet more hours, transcribing those remarks, reviewing them, editing them, and preparing them for publication. Those are costly hours, hours that in our current tough economic climate could be better spent on other duties.

Once the minutes are prepared, the members of the body have to invest time and energy in turn reviewing the draft minutes. Corrections or changes often have to be made, requiring yet more work. Sometimes there are differences of opinion about whether the content was correctly noted or not. Sometimes people are offended by the way their remarks were written down. All corrections have to be voted on formally by the body. The result can be a big drawdown of time and emotional energy for modest return.

Finally, detailed minutes make it a challenge to locate key items and decisions within the pages and pages of text. The record is far less functional when it includes remarks as well as actions. The argument is sometimes made that detailed minutes are important for legislative history. A group with this goal in mind should include recitals and findings about its intentions within the body of the legislation. Legislation speaks for itself.

Robert's Rules of Order offers a simple guideline: minutes should record what is done, not what is said. The minutes should include decisions made, postponements, referrals to committee. They may also include a note that discussion was held, if the group wants to have it clear that they did their due diligence on a given issue. By keeping the minutes to this core of essential facts, energy and effort can be devoted to the larger issues that face all our civic bodies today.

Many of our Washington cities already operate this way, particularly those who record their meetings on audiotape or video, so that anyone concerned can easily hear or see exactly how the discussion went. The website of the city of Issaquah offers fine samples of action minutes. We suggest that action minutes help a city council or public body keep focused on its future goals rather than on the record of its past. The savings in time and energy that accrue from a switch to action minutes are well worth the small sacrifice to individual amour propre.



This article was originally published by MRSC, a nonprofit dedicated to local government success in Washington. Visit www.mrsc.org for a wealth of valuable information and resources on local government.



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