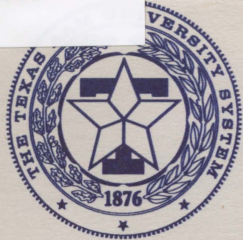


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# Texas Agricultural Extension Service

The Texas A&M University System



## Effective Meetings for County Officials: Using Parliamentary Procedure and Other Practices

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# Effective Meetings for County Officials: Using Parliamentary Procedure and Other Practices

John A. Gilmartin, Richard O. Avery and Eric S. Cartrite\*

As leaders and decision makers in local government, county officials spend a substantial amount of time in meetings. Such meetings can range from serving on community service committees to participation in Commissioners Court.

When conducted properly, meetings serve an important function by allowing two or more persons to exchange and evaluate information and ideas in an effort to solve a problem. Meetings can provide a better understanding of a problem or can result in the development of a program of action relative to a problem.

However, meetings can become a burden and actually hinder progress if not conducted properly. Surveys indicate that some managers, especially County Commissioners Court members serving in urban counties, spend up to 80

percent of their time in meetings. An even more alarming statistic is the number of people who find meetings to be unproductive. Alec Machenzie, a recognized authority on time management, has found that three-fourths of his seminar participants believe that half their time spent in meetings is wasted.

How, then, can we ensure that meetings are a productive use of one's time?

To be most effective, you should familiarize yourself with some basic procedures and rules necessary for conducting an effective meeting, whether it be a large formal assembly, a small informal committee meeting or one of the most important meetings in the courthouse—County Commissioners Court.

## Plan Each Meeting Well

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Good planning and preparation for each meeting will increase satisfaction of participants and also provide opportunities for capitalizing on their talents and special interests. Well planned meetings increase overall effectiveness of the county, build good public relations, develop leadership and eliminate a needless waste of time, money and energy.

Successful meetings require time and effort on the part of whoever is responsible for a meeting, be it the president, chairperson or presiding officer. Planning should establish the purpose of the meeting, identify needs, assign responsibilities and handle the many details that require attention.

### Select the Best Possible Meeting Place

1. If your organization meets regularly, find the best possible meeting place. Check with local hotels, restaurants and other establishments that host meetings. Avoid places where outside noises are distracting.

2. Select a place with adequate parking that is easily accessible to members. If the meeting is attended by out-of-town participants, try to select a central location and ensure that transportation to the meeting place is available for those who travel by air.
3. The selection of a good meeting room is important. Choose a room of suitable size with good acoustics, good lighting (but with darkening capabilities), adequate heating and cooling and, if possible, one with a built-in public address system.
4. Have easy access to restrooms and drinking fountains.
5. If refreshments are to be served, select a place that offers good food and good service at an agreed-upon price.
6. Arrange the room according to the needs of the meeting. Small meetings, consisting of 10 or fewer people, can be conducted around a single table. Make sure that participants are not cramped for space and that adequate tables are available for writing. The person conducting the meeting should be seated at one end of the table in full view of the other participants. Large meetings could require a separate head

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table for the chairperson or presiding officer. The participants can be seated in a semicircle or in rows facing the head table. For large meetings, a standing microphone should be centrally located in the audience so participants can hear the questions and comments raised from the floor.

7. Before the meeting, determine what special equipment is needed for the program and have it set up and checked out.
8. If possible, seat the audience with their backs to the entrance. Windows with distracting views should be covered.

### Provide an Agenda

The old saying “time is money” certainly applies to meetings. A group of educational administrators in a large school system determined the cost of a typical meeting. They were shocked to find out that, with a full staff present, the cost was \$50 per minute.

To make a meeting effective, efficient and productive, a meeting agenda is critical. A well planned agenda provides organization and promotes efficiency. An agenda is essentially an organized list of matters to be taken up at a meeting.

Planning the agenda is a shared responsibility, but the presiding officer or chairperson has more than a “share” of the responsibility. The presiding officer, along with the other officers or executive committee members, develops the agenda for each meeting. Minutes of the previous meeting, a list of items that officers and members want to discuss, plus the accepted order of business become the agenda’s framework. The order and time for each item to be included also need to be considered.

The presiding officer or chairperson should send out copies of the agenda prior to the meeting. This allows

everyone an opportunity to review the agenda, gather their thoughts and be more constructive during the meeting. This also gives participants an opportunity to determine if other business should be included on the agenda.

The most successful meetings are organized to fit the group. Usually, issues that require imagination, innovativeness and creativity should be placed early (or first) on the agenda. Issues such as new projects, redefining objectives and resolving existing problems require clear heads and fast thinking. It is better to cover these issues early in the meeting while the group is alert. Other early agenda items, which might be called “uniting items,” would be issues that are fairly noncontroversial, can be agreed upon quickly with little debate or dissension and that set the stage for a productive meeting.

More controversial issues could be placed at the end of the agenda to give participants time to organize their views and prepare for possible “heated” discussion. The presiding officer or chairperson should be prepared to deal with such a discussion and keep the group’s emotions under control. Diplomacy on the part of the chairperson and participants cannot be overemphasized. The chairperson or presiding officer is responsible for ensuring that no single individual dominates the discussion and that each person participating in the meeting is given an opportunity to express his or her views. Also, the chairperson can help ease tension by speaking in a calm voice.

One of the most important factors in conducting a meeting is staying on schedule. Therefore, the agenda should have a starting and ending time. If many issues are to be covered in a short time, it may be beneficial to assign a certain length of time to each topic. By putting an ending time on the agenda, the group will be reluctant to prolong matters that can be taken care of quickly. This, combined with putting the most important and controversial issues last, will encourage the group to be conscious of time and stay on schedule.

## Using Effective Parliamentary Procedure

When the group is fairly large (30 people or more) and the agenda calls for discussing and making decisions, it may be expedient to adopt certain rules of procedure. In these more formal situations, parliamentary procedure often is used. With a smaller group, it is usually desirable to be more informal, even when definite decisions are to be made. Although it is sometimes necessary to vote in order to settle a particular issue, consensus is often achieved through mutual understanding and agreement. The chairperson must decide upon the proper degree of formality to employ in a particular situation, keeping in mind that it

may be undesirable to become too formal, just as it may be unwise to become too informal.

Parliamentary procedure enables people to reach conclusions and to plan work in a short time and without confusion. It should be applied to determine the will of the majority and to also protect the rights and privileges of the minority. To achieve these purposes, consider these principles of parliamentary procedure:

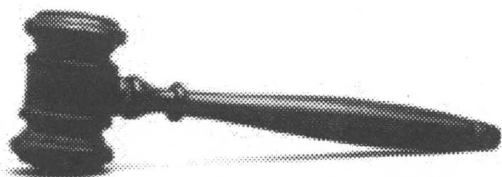
- Only one subject may claim the attention of the group at one time.



- Each proposition presented for consideration is due full and free debate.
- Every member has rights equal to every other member.
- The majority's will must be carried out, and the minority's rights preserved.
- The personality and desires of each member should be merged into the larger organizational unit.

## Order of Business

The order of business to be conducted during a meeting can vary from one organization to the next and may be specified in the bylaws or standing rules of a particular organization. The order of business helps the presiding officer provide structure to the meeting and is used to develop the agenda.



The following procedure is one used most often by various organizations and associations.

### 1. Call to Order

The chairperson raps the table and says, *"The meeting will please come to order."*

### 2. Roll Call

The chairperson says, *"The secretary will call the roll."* The secretary calls roll and reports whether or not a quorum is present. Sometimes it is appropriate to take the roll silently and report to the chairperson that a quorum is present.

### 3. Reading and Approval of Minutes

Unless there is an invocation, roll call or other means of opening the meeting, reading minutes of the previous meeting is the first item of business. If several sets of minutes are to be approved, they are handled in chronological order.

Every organizational meeting has a secretary or clerk who keeps minutes that should exactly record decisions or results of discussion. After the minutes have been read and approved, they become the official record of transactions.

The chairperson says, *"The secretary or clerk will read the minutes of the last meeting."* The secretary reads the minutes. When minutes have been read, they are corrected, if necessary, and approved.

The chairperson says, *"You have heard the reading of the minutes. Are there any corrections?"* (pause) If there are no corrections the chairperson says, *"The minutes are approved as read."* If the minutes are corrected, the chairperson will state, *"The minutes are approved as corrected."*

With the consent of the membership, the chairperson may decide to dispense with the reading of the minutes if time is limited.

## 4. Reports of the Officers

Depending upon the type of meeting being held, officers may not be a part of the group and these reports could be deleted. If the reports are to be given the chairperson will say, *"We shall now hear the reports from the officers. First, the president's report."*

**a. President's Report** – This report deals with administrative matters and general policy such as time and place of the next meeting, type of program and other information of importance to the group. Most often, the president of an organization or association will be the person presiding. At the conclusion of the president's report, the chairperson says, *"Are there any questions about the president's report?"* (pause) *"If not, the report stands as read."*

The chairperson then turns to the vice president and says, *"Does the vice president wish to make a report?"*

**b. Vice President's Report** – This officer very seldom gives a report; however, if he or she does, the chairperson should acknowledge the report with the statement, *"Are there any questions regarding the vice president's report?"* (pause) *"If not, the report stands as read."*

The chairperson then says, *"We will now hear the treasurer's report."*

**c. Treasurer's Report** – The treasurer of an organization holds the funds delivered to him or her, and with proper authorization, disburses the money on demand. The treasurer must be prepared to give a formal report on receipts and disbursements at intervals fixed in the bylaws and at any other times set by the organization's vote or custom. After reports are presented, they are usually referred to an audit committee that examines and certifies their correctness by signing a statement at the bottom of the report. After the treasurer gives the report, the chairperson responds by saying, *"Are there any questions?"* (pause) *"If not, the report will be received as read and filed with the secretary to be audited at a later date."*

The chairperson turns to the secretary and says, ***“We will now hear the secretary’s report.”***

**d. Secretary’s Report** – This report does not refer to the minutes. It includes a summary of any important letters that have been sent or received and statistics about the growth of or changes in membership. At the conclusion of the secretary’s report the chairperson asks, ***“Are there any questions about the secretary’s report?”*** (pause) ***“If not, it will stand as read.”***

## **5. Committee Reports**

Reports are given first by permanent standing committees. Members of these committees are elected or selected to serve for a certain period of time, usually 1 year. Examples of such committees are membership, auditing of accounts, legislation, public relations, etc. Reports also can be heard from select or special committees that are formed temporarily to perform specific tasks such as research.

If a committee has a report, its chairperson should notify the president or presiding officer to place the report on the agenda. Generally, committee reports need not be adopted (accepted) unless definite action is required. If a report contains a recommendation, the reporting member should move for its adoption. Otherwise, the report is filed.

The procedure for calling reports is the same for both standing and special committees. The chairperson says, ***“Committee reports are now in order. First, we will hear from the \_\_\_\_\_ Committee.”*** After the report has been given, the chairperson responds by saying, ***“Thank you. Are there any questions about this report?”*** (pause) ***“If not, the report will be received as read.”*** If something in the report must be approved, the person giving the report can make a motion that it be adopted. Anyone except the chairperson and the maker of the motion can second it. The motion is then opened for discussion and put to a vote. More information on making motions will be covered later in this publication.

## **6. Unfinished Business**

“Unfinished business” is any business that was pending but not disposed of at a previous meeting. A matter is old business if at a previous meeting, instead of being defeated or approved, it was laid on the table, postponed, or left pending because of a motion to adjourn. However, renewing a matter that was settled before is new business, even though the subject is old.

The chairperson opens discussion of unfinished business by saying, ***“Unfinished business is now in order. The first item is that of \_\_\_\_\_.”*** The chairperson takes up each item as listed on the agenda. After completion of all unfinished business, the chairperson moves on to new business by saying, ***“That completes the unfinished business; the chair will now receive any new business.”***

## **7. New Business**

Members may introduce new items of business. If a member wishes to bring up an item settled in a previous meeting, it should be done at this time. Correspondence that requires action should be brought up as new business.

## **8. Adjournment**

If there is no further business, the chairperson will receive a motion to adjourn. The chairperson simply states, ***“Do I hear a motion to adjourn?”*** A member can make the motion by saying, ***“I move that we adjourn.”*** The motion is seconded by another member and voted on but is not discussed. After the vote the chairperson responds with, ***“The motion carried and the meeting is adjourned.”***

# Motions

The primary responsibility of any business meeting is to make decisions. Any member may propose that some action be taken. Such a proposal is referred to in parliamentary procedure as a motion. There are four classes of motions.

## **1. Main Motions**

A main motion is any motion that brings an item of business before the assembly. It requires action of the assembly. Only one main motion can be pending (i.e., undecided or awaiting decision) at any one time. Any person who tries to make a main motion before disposing of a pending main motion is out of order.

## **2. Subsidiary Motions**

These motions are for the purpose of modifying or disposing of the main motion under consideration. Examples of subsidiary motions are to postpone a main motion indefinitely or refer it to a committee.

## **3. Privileged Motions**

These have no direct connection with the main motion that is before the assembly but are of such urgent importance that they are entitled to immediate consideration. A privileged motion could pertain to the disorderly conduct of someone in the meeting or to call for a recess.

#### 4. *Incidental Motions*

These are miscellaneous motions that arise incidentally out of the business during the assembly. Incidental motions can be used to appeal a chairperson's decision that has been made in error or to divide a main motion into several parts for convenience of discussion and voting.

Making a motion is the equivalent of saying, "I propose that . . ." or, "I think we should do . . ." It is assumed that you are in favor of the motion you make so you are not allowed to speak against it. However, because discussion may change your mind, you can vote against it.

The procedure for making a motion is to obtain the floor by rising (not necessary in an informal meeting) and addressing the chair by saying, "*Madam,*" or "*Mr. President,*" or "*Chairperson.*" After you have been recognized by the chair, you can make the motion by saying, "*I move that the county should \_\_\_\_\_.*" All ordinary motions must be seconded, to prove that at least two people want the subject discussed. The person seconding the motion does not have to be recognized first by the chair. In a small group you do not rise or address the chair, but simply say, "*I second the motion.*" In large meetings it is proper to rise and say, "*Mr. Chairman, I second the motion.*"

If there is no second, the chairperson may say, "*Is there a second?*" If no one thinks the subject should be discussed and there is no second, the chairperson says, "*The motion is lost for want of a second.*"

When a motion is seconded, the chairperson repeats the motion clearly so everyone will understand exactly what is proposed and then opens it up for discussion by simply saying, "*Is there any discussion?*" When all members who wish to do so have spoken or when the chairperson thinks that all sides of the question have been discussed, he or she may say, "*The question is on the motion that the county \_\_\_\_\_.*" Both affirmative and negative votes must be taken. The chairperson says, "*All in favor of the motion say aye; those opposed say no.*" The chairperson then announces the results. "*The ayes have it and the motion is carried.*" or "*The noes have it and the motion is lost.*"

### Minutes

Perhaps the most glaring waste of time after a meeting is the failure to prepare concise minutes recording the actions taken. Although often viewed as a time consuming requirement, well-written minutes disseminated soon after the meeting prevent misunderstandings and save time in follow-up.

The form of minutes can vary with different organizations and associations. However, minutes are a formal summary of the proceedings. They should answer five basic questions: Who, What, When, Where and Why.



Minutes, regardless of the organization to which they apply, should contain the following:

- Kind of meeting—regular, special, etc.
- Name of organization
- Date and place of meeting
- Presiding officer and secretary or clerk's names or substitutes as deputy clerk
- Whether minutes of the previous meeting were read and approved (distributed or mailed)
- All reports and action taken
- All main motions carried or lost (omit those withdrawn)
- All other motions carried that contain information needed at a future meeting
- Adjournment
- Signature/attestation of person taking the minutes
- Statement of Approval (following the minutes) (signed by at least a majority of the court)

Minutes are a record of motions introduced, reports made, actions taken and votes cast. Every motion and the name of its proposer should be recorded, whether it passed or failed. A withdrawn motion need not be recorded. It is not necessary to record the name of the person seconding a motion unless this is a custom of the organization. A record of the discussion need not be made.

When a vote is taken, the number voting on each side is recorded.

Complete written reports of officers and committees generally are not included in minutes. They are summarized or attached in full to the minutes. When they are attached, a statement is made that a copy is attached. Oral reports are summarized.



Minutes should not contain personal opinions, interpretations or secretary's or clerk's comments. Such phrases as "an outstanding speech" or "a brilliant report" are out of place. Also, members of the group should be referred to by their titles, if any, or by their surnames.

The secretary's or clerk's minutes provide a true record of group discussions. They are usually checked for accuracy by being submitted for approval to the group that took the action. The traditional method is to begin a meeting with the reading of minutes of the previous meeting. Occasionally, a member will note an error and suggest a correction. If the secretary or clerk accepts the change, no further action is necessary. If the secretary or clerk disagrees, the group decides by vote how the record shall read. After the minutes have been approved, the secretary or clerk writes the word "approved" with the date, and signs or initials the minutes. The chairperson or presiding officer may also countersign the minutes.

Some people question the custom of reading minutes at the beginning of a meeting. Because of the apparent lack of interest in minutes, many wonder if this practice should be retained. The reading of minutes serves the double purpose of verifying accuracy and of reminding the group of any unfinished business. For these reasons, the secretary or clerk should mail copies of the minutes to participants if the group elects not to read the minutes.

If it is not necessary to read the minutes, a motion can be made to "dispense with the reading." This motion must be seconded and requires a majority vote.

If the chairperson knows in advance that some urgent business must be attended to before the reading of the minutes, he or she can postpone the reading by saying, "***If there is no objection, the minutes will not be read at this time.***" If no objection is made the chairperson says, "***Hearing no objection, the minutes will not be read.***" The reading of the minutes is then postponed until later in the meeting when no business is pending.

## Resolutions

A resolution is a formally written motion. The resolution is used by organizations as a means of taking a formal stand or position on a matter. It may define an important policy within the scope of the organization's aims and objectives or in relation to policies of other groups with similar objectives.

Most organizations have a policy on how resolutions are to be handled. The resolution carries a certain formality that requires more thought and careful investigation than is likely to occur if submitted directly to the voting body. Therefore, policies of most organizations such as county government associations require that resolutions be

submitted through a Resolutions Committee. This committee can:

- Help those who propose resolutions to draft them in proper form and terminology.
- Prevent resolutions from coming before the assembly if they conflict with the organization's policies and objectives.
- See that at least one voting member has signed the resolution and is prepared to give information before presenting it for action.

Two forms of resolutions are commonly used—the short form and the long form. A short form resolution is a single paragraph beginning with the word "Resolved." For example:

Resolved, that the County Judges and Commissioners Association of Texas supports legislation that will allow the adoption of ordinance-making authority for counties on a local option basis.

A short form resolution usually is presented to the assembly by the chairperson of the Resolutions Committee in this manner: "***Here is a resolution and I move that it be adopted.***" The chairperson reads the resolution and it is then acted on as if it were an ordinary motion.

If there is a preamble, each clause, written as a separate paragraph, begins with the word "Whereas" followed by a comma, and the next word should begin with a capital letter. The preamble, regardless of how many paragraphs it has, should never contain a period. Each of its paragraphs should close with a semicolon, followed, in the case of the next to the last paragraph, by the word "and" (which is optional for the preceding paragraphs also). The last paragraph of the preamble should close with a semicolon, after which a connecting expression such as "therefore" or "therefore, be it" or "now, therefore, be it" is sometimes added. When one of these phrases is included, no punctuation should follow it, and it should always be placed at the end of the preamble paragraph, never at the beginning of the resolving paragraph, thus:

WHEREAS, The . . . [text of the preamble]; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, That . . . [stating the action to be taken].

Here is an example of a resolution using the long form:

WHEREAS, The Institute of County Government was created in 1969 by the 61st Texas Legislature to be a part of the Texas Agricultural Extension Service of The Texas A&M University System; and

WHEREAS, The Institute of County Government was created to be a source of objective, dependable and directly attainable information that may be utilized by county officials in conducting the business of county government and for local, area, and statewide short courses, seminars and conferences; and

WHEREAS, The Institute of County Government has had a permeating influence since its creation in most every movement constructive to the growth and development of county government in Texas; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, That the West Texas County Judges' and Commissioners' Association commend the V. G. Young Institute of County Government of the Texas Agricultural Extension Service on its 30th anniversary and recognize the many county officials who have learned from and worked to make the program a success; and also be it further

RESOLVED, That official copies of this resolution be prepared for the administration of the Texas Agricultural Extension Service, The Texas A&M

University System and the V. G. Young Institute of County Government as a token of the appreciation of this organization for the exceptional service of this program for Texas county officials and all Texans.

DULY PASSED this 19th Day of March, 1999.

The chairperson of the resolutions committee presents the resolution to the body of the association by reading it aloud and following with the statement, "***I move this resolution be adopted,***" or words to that effect. Then someone will usually second the motion. Time is allowed for any discussion, and the resolution is voted on by the association.

The chairperson can use a more detailed approach in getting a resolution adopted by having the body of the association vote on each resolving clause. The example above has two resolving clauses; therefore, two separate votes would be taken. Then the prologue is handled in the same manner, clause by clause, starting with the first prologue clause.

Once a resolution has been adopted it is signed by the chairperson of the resolutions committee.

## Commissioners Court Meetings

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One of the most important meetings in the courthouse is Commissioners Court. Section 81.005 of the Texas Local Government Code provides: "At the last regular term of each fiscal year of the County, the Commissioners Court by order shall designate a day of the week on which the court shall convene in a regular term each month during the next fiscal year." If the completion of the Court's business does not require a monthly term, the court need not hold more than one term a quarter. A regular term may continue for 1 week but may be adjourned earlier if the court's business is completed. The meeting of the Commissioners Court shall be held at the county seat at the courthouse or auxiliary courthouse, courthouse annex or another building that houses county administration offices or county or district courts located inside the city limits of the county seat with certain permissible exceptions as set out in Section 81.005 of the Local Government Code. Special meetings may be called by the county judge or three of the county commissioners and may continue until business is completed. An emergency meeting can be called if there is an imminent threat to public health and safety or an unforeseeable situation that requires immediate attention.

### Preparing the Agenda

An outline of county business to be discussed during a Commissioners Court meeting should be prepared by the County Judge. The County Clerk in some counties may assist the judge with this responsibility. It is also a good policy to get input of other members of the Commissioners Court in organizing the agenda.

### Posting Notice

The Open Meetings Act, Chapter 551 of the Texas Government Code, provides that meetings of governmental bodies must be open to the public. Section 551.002 of the Act states: "Every regular, special or called meeting of a governmental body shall be open to the public, except as provided by this chapter." The definitions in Section 551.001 state the term "meeting" includes a session of a governmental body.

Prior to a session of the Commissioners Court, the County Clerk should prepare a public notice detailing the date, time, place and subject matter to be discussed. The

notice is to be posted at least 72 hours preceding the scheduled time of the meeting. The notice can be posted in the courthouse and may also be published in a local newspaper but it must be posted in a place "readily accessible to the general public at all times for at least 72 hours before the scheduled time of the meeting with certain exceptions." Only 2 hours of notification are required of an emergency meeting.

Section 551.141 of the Government Code provides that the actions of any Commissioners Court conducting a regular or special session without public notice is in violation of the Open Meetings Act and are voidable and constitute a criminal offense and subject a member or a group of members to fines of not less than \$100 nor more than \$500 or imprisonment in the county jail for not less than 1 month nor more than 6 months, or both.

### Taking Minutes

Section 81.003 of the Local Government Code provides that the County Clerk shall be responsible for recording the minutes of each Commissioners Court meeting. These minutes are to be read by the clerk and approved by the Commissioners Court. A Statement of Approval should be signed by at least a majority of the court. This statement should be filed behind the minutes in the record and should show the date of the meeting and which members of the court were present. Format of the minutes will vary at the preference of the clerk, but all minutes for a particular meeting should be recorded on consecutive pages of the record book. The clerk will probably be asked to reproduce the minutes for distribution to various county offices and other interested parties.

Good minutes should leave no doubt in a reader's mind as to exactly which items have been considered by the Commissioners Court and what action has been taken on each item. The following procedures will help ensure that accurate minutes of a court meeting have been taken.

- There should be a short summary of each topic taken under consideration which may include pertinent comments or points made by individual members of the court.
- All motions for action should be recorded exactly as they were put forth and not paraphrased.
- The County Clerk should record the name of the person making the motion, the name of the person seconding, and the vote of each member of the court.
- Items such as contracts, special bills, records of payment and proclamations will also be recorded in the minutes. The County Clerk should either collect

these documents at the meeting or make a note of where they will be filed to facilitate subsequent recording.

- Prior to recording, the minutes should be compared to the agenda and any notes of the meeting to ensure that the minutes are complete.
- All documents and instruments to be recorded as minutes should be examined for proper seal and signature where either is required.
- Each page of the minutes should be assigned a volume and page number in the permanent record.
- A copy of the minutes should be bound into the permanent record.
- The original minutes should be filed in an appropriate place after returning any instruments or documents not to be kept in the County Clerk's office.

The County Clerk should maintain a record book entitled *Index to Commissioners Court Minutes* to facilitate access to the minutes. To provide a useful index, many County Clerks have adopted the keyword method of indexing. In this system, each motion, instrument or document will be cross-indexed under every meaningful or key word in its title. Take, for example, a motion to "Advertise for bids to pave Woodcrest Street." The County Clerk may select "advertise," "bids," "pave" and "Woodcrest" as key words that would lead an interested party to the particular minutes.

The index is kept alphabetically by key word and includes:

1. The keyword
2. Full title of motion, instrument or document
3. Volume and page number of the minutes
4. Date of Commissioners Court action

In addition to maintaining minutes for public meetings, the Commissioners Court must make provisions to record closed or executive sessions. Section 551.103 of the Government Code requires a governmental body to keep a certified agenda of the proceedings for a meeting closed to the public. The certified agenda must identify the date and time (beginning and ending) of the meetings, state the subject matter of each deliberation and include a record of any further action to be taken. It is the responsibility of the presiding officer of the closed meeting to certify that the agenda is a true and correct record of the proceedings. The certified agenda is made available for public inspection only upon a court order.



In lieu of a certified agenda, the governing body may make a tape recording of the proceedings. The tape or certified agenda should be preserved for at least 2 years after the meeting.

### Quorum

As the administrative body for conducting county business and affairs, the Commissioners Court must make important decisions for the county. These decisions are made through the democratic process of voting. However, before a vote can be made, there must be a quorum present. Section 81.006 of the Local Government Code provides that any three members of the Commissioners Court may constitute a quorum for the transaction of all business with the exception of levying county taxes. Therefore, any three Commissioners or the County Judge and two Commissioners may transact most county business as a quorum. Four members of the Commissioners Court are required to constitute a quorum when county taxes are being levied and a county tax may be levied at a regularly scheduled meeting of the Court.

### Conducting Commissioners Court

No two counties conduct Commissioners Court in exactly the same manner. However, most counties have an established procedure for conducting their meetings and use some variation of parliamentary procedure. Listed below is one example of the procedure for conducting Commissioners Court in a typical Texas county:

1. The County Clerk greets all persons attending the meeting and asks them to sign a roster to be used in preparation of minutes of the meeting.
2. The County Judge calls the meeting to order and notes any court member who is absent.
3. The County Judge announces any variation from the posted agenda.



4. The minutes of any previous meetings (which have been prepared and distributed to the members of the Court) are considered for approval. The County Judge asks for any additions, deletions or corrections. Any changes are recorded and the minutes are approved or rejected as submitted.
5. The County Judge reads each agenda item and calls for discussion on the matter. After all persons have had an opportunity to speak, the County Judge calls for a motion, a second and a vote. The County Judge announces if the motion has carried or failed.
6. After all agenda items are considered and approved, rejected or tabled, the County Judge asks if there are other matters for discussion. This is for discussion only, with no action to be taken.
7. If there is to be a closed executive session that has been properly posted, the County Judge announces the time of the executive sessions and that it is closed to the public. All visitors are asked to leave the courtroom. At the end of the closed session, the meeting is reopened to the public, the time is stated and the County Judge announces any action to be taken on the closed session. If there is no action to be taken, the County Judge so states and adjourns the meeting.
8. If any of the posted agenda items cannot be considered on this date but will require action prior to the next meeting date, the meeting is **recessed**. If all matters on the final agenda have been discussed, the County Judge announces the meeting **adjourned**.

## MOTION CHART

<b>RANKING MOTIONS</b>	<b>Can Interrupt</b>	<b>Need</b>	<b>Can be</b>	<b>Can be</b>	<b>Vote</b>
<i>from highest to lowest</i>	<u>speaker</u>	<u>second</u>	<u>debated</u>	<u>amended</u>	<u>required</u>
<b><i>Privileged Motions</i></b>					
Fix the time to which to adjourn	N	Y	N	Y	Majority
Adjourn	N	Y	N	N	Majority
Take a recess	N	Y	N	Y	Majority
Raise a question of privilege	Y	N	N	N	Chair rules
Call for the orders of the day	Y	N	N	N	Chair rules
<b><i>Subsidiary motions</i></b> <b><i>(when main motion is pending)</i></b>					
Lay on the Table	N	Y	N	N	Majority
Previous question	N	Y	N	Y	2/3 Vote
Limit/Extend debate	N	Y	N	Y	2/3 Vote
Postpone definitely	N	Y	Y	Y	Majority
Commit or refer	N	Y	Y	Y	Majority
Amend	N	Y	Y	N	Majority
Postpone Indefinitely	N	Y	Y	N	Majority
Main Motions	N	Y	Y	Y	Majority
<b><i>Motions that bring a question again before</i></b> <b><i>the assembly (same rank as main motions)</i></b>					
Take from the table	N	Y	N	N	Majority
Rescind or amend something previously adopted	N	Y	Y	Y	*
Discharge a committee	N	Y	Y	Y	Majority
Reconsider	N	Y	Y	N	*
<b>NON-RANKING MOTIONS</b>					
<b><i>Incidental motions (procedural)</i></b>					
Appeal the decision of the chair	Y	Y	Y	N	Majority
Consideration by paragraph or seriatim	N	Y	N	Y	Majority
Division of a question	N	Y	N	Y	Majority
Division of the assembly	Y	N	N	N	None
Objection to the consideration of a question	*	N	N	N	2/3 Vote
Parliamentary inquiry	Y	N	N	N	None
Point of information	Y	N	N	N	None
Point of order	Y	N	N	N	Chair rules
Request permission to withdraw a motion	*	*	N	N	Majority
Suspend the rules	N	Y	N	N	2/3 Vote

\* See Robert's Rules of Order Newly Revised for special rules.

# Example of Typical Public Notice

## THE STATE OF TEXAS

TO ALL PERSONS INTERESTED

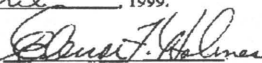
### COUNTY OF LIMESTONE

NOTICE IS HEREBY GIVEN, in accordance with Chapter 551 of the Government Code (§ 551.001, et. seq.) "The Open Meetings Act", as amended, that a REGULAR MEETING of the Limestone County Commissioners' Court, the governing body of Limestone County, will be held MONDAY, APRIL 12, 1999, at 9:00 A.M., in the County Courtroom in the City of Groesbeck, Texas, at which time the following Agenda will be considered:

#### AGENDA

1. Call to order and proof of posting of notice.
2. Verification of quorum.
3. Approve minutes of previous meeting.
4. Hear visitors.
5. Approve payment of bills.
6. Approve payroll and comp time reports.
7. Approve bonds submitted on County Employees and Officials.
8. Discuss matters relating to Limestone County Detention Center:
  - a. Approve payment schedule.
  - b. Approve Contracts.
  - c. Discuss and/or approve capital improvements
9. Approve Investment or Recall of Funds.
10. Approve Securities pledged by County Depository.
11. Safety Committee Report. - Commissioner Stone
12. Discuss and/or take action on Suit No. 3839-A; Limestone County, City of Mexia and Bi-Stone Municipal Water Supply District, Lots 4 and 5, Block 10, Sunset Central Addition, Mexia.
13. Discuss and/or take action on Big Creek Watershed Project.
14. Appoint Salary Grievance Committee Members.
15. Authorize County Auditor to advertise for bid for bank depository contract for county funds according to Section 116.021 and Section 116.022 of the Local Government Code.
16. EXECUTIVE SESSION: *Personal Matters*; a closed meeting will be held pursuant to Chapter 551.074 of the Government Code, to deliberate the appointment, employment, evaluation, reassignment, duties, discipline, or dismissal of a public officer, employee or Court appointment.
  - a. Road & Bridge Department
17. Discuss and/or take action on Limestone County Personnel.
  - a. Road & Bridge Dept.
18. Comments and summaries by Commissioners.
19. Adjournment.

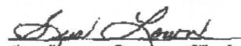
SIGNED this the 8<sup>th</sup> day of April, 1999.

  
Elnor F. Holmes  
County Judge  
Limestone County

FILED FOR RECORD  
99 APR -8 PM 3:48

SUE LOWN  
COUNTY CLERK  
LIMESTONE COUNTY, TX  
*Sue Lown*

The State of Texas {}  
County of Limestone {} I, the undersigned authority, do hereby certify that the foregoing Agenda and Notice of said meeting of the Limestone County Commissioners' Court is a true and correct copy of the notice placed on file in the County Clerk's Office under file # 6199, at the time and date stamped hereon, and that a true and correct copy was posted on the official bulletin board and on the front entry door of the Limestone County Courthouse located at 200 West State, Groesbeck, Texas on the 8<sup>th</sup> day of April, 1999, at 3:48 p.m.

  
Sue Lown County Clerk  
Limestone County, Texas

By \_\_\_\_\_  
Deputy





# The Senate of The State of Texas

## SENATE RESOLUTION NO. 589

**WHEREAS**, The Institute of County Government was created in 1969 by the 61st Texas Legislature to be a part of the Texas Agricultural Extension Service of the Texas A&M University System; and

**WHEREAS**, The Institute of County Government was created to be a source of objective, dependable, and directly attainable information which may be utilized by county officials in conducting the business of county government and for local, area, and statewide short courses, seminars, and conferences; and

**WHEREAS**, Presidents of all of the Texas county officials' professional associations actively serve as an advisory board to the institute; and

**WHEREAS**, The Institute of County Government has had a permeating influence since its creation in almost every movement constructive to the growth and development of county government in Texas; and

**WHEREAS**, This admirable program seeks to provide a learning experience for the Texas county officials, to acquire knowledge, and to fulfill legislative continuing education mandates to enable them to become self-directed, informed, productive, and contributing members of their county government administration; and

**WHEREAS**, The program undoubtedly could not have achieved the success that it has today were it not for the service of its coordinator, faculty, and staff, who have given generously of their time, talents, energies, and resources to the county officials of Texas, along with the county officials who served to nurture, advise, and ensure that the institute served the dynamic needs of all county officials in Texas; and

**WHEREAS**, Throughout its proud history, the Institute of County Government has developed a strong and positive relationship with Texas county officials and through its innovative and inspiring programs continues to build character, to develop competence, and to instill the ethical values that have made our state strong and great; now, therefore, be it

**RESOLVED**, That the Senate of the State of Texas, 76th Legislature, hereby commend the V. G. Young Institute of County Government of the Texas Agricultural Extension Service on its 30th anniversary and recognize the many county officials who have learned from and worked to make the program a success; and, be it further

**RESOLVED**, That official copies of this Resolution be prepared for the administration of the Texas Agricultural Extension Service, The Texas A&M University System, and the V. G. Young Institute of County Government as a token of the appreciation of this Senate for the exceptional service of this program to Texas county officials and all Texans.

Ogden

Armbrister  
Barrientos  
Bernsen  
Bivins  
Brown  
Cain  
Carona  
Duncan  
Ellis  
Fraser

Gallegos  
Harris  
Haywood  
Jackson  
Lindsay  
Lucio  
Luna  
Madla  
Moncrief  
Nelson

Nixon  
Ratliff  
Shapiro  
Shapleigh  
Sibley  
Truan  
Wentworth  
West  
Whitmire  
Zaffirini

Perry, President of the Senate



Rick Perry  
President of the Senate

I hereby certify that the above Resolution was adopted by the Senate on April 21, 1999.

Scott Lujan  
Secretary of the Senate

Steve Ogden  
Member, Texas Senate

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**For additional information contact:**

.....  
The V. G. Young Institute of County Government  
Texas Agricultural Extension Service  
7607 Eastmark Drive, Suite 104  
P.O. Box 2450  
College Station, Texas 77841

Phone (409) 845-4572  
Fax (409) 862-1516

.....  
<http://vgyi.tamu.edu>

*Educational programs conducted by the Texas Agricultural Extension Service serve people of all ages regardless of socioeconomic level, race, color, sex, religion, handicap or national origin.*

Issued in furtherance of Cooperative Extension work in Agricultural and Home Economics, Acts of Congress of May 8, 1914, as amended, and June 30, 1914, in cooperation with the United States Department of Agriculture. Texas Agricultural Extension Service, The Texas A&M University System.