Simplified Rules of Order

(Slightly modified Martha's Rules)

I. PREAMBLE

With the recognition that we are rarely arguing contentious positions, and never need the complexity of Robert's 700 pages of rules; this is a proposal to switch from Robert's to this slightly modified version of Martha's Rules of Order. Because we strive for a consensus; rather than a "majority rules" approach to parliamentary procedure, which can result in disenfranchising a minority view. There is also a concern that Robert's linear model of parliamentary control can lead be an impediment to moving forward with action. We anticipate that Martha's rules will speed-up meetings, as the consensus check may frequently simplify discussion.

As with any decision made under these rules, the rules themselves are open to discussion and revision but the revision of them would occur from within the existing rules.

The proposed rules share with the basic Martha's Rules, a few assumptions or requirements of its participants:

1. The participants must be willing and able to listen carefully to what others are saying. That is, everyone must make a good faith effort to understand each other.

2. The participants must be trusting and brave enough to speak their minds; the expectation is that every effort will be made to be clear but that there is no requirement or expectation that participants will present well-formed arguments on the spot.

3. The participants must prioritize the group's welfare over their own preferences and agendas.

II. GENERAL OPERATING GUIDELINES

1. Meetings:

Meetings, either in person, electronically, or via teleconference, shall be moderated by the designated officer. In most cases this will be the Chair, but may be taken up by another member if there is an agreement to do so. As the meeting business occurs through consensus the membership/board

has a shared responsibility to ensure that the standing rules are being followed.

The facilitator of the meeting will provide a prepared agenda of the topics anticipated to be discussed. This agenda will include any reports from committees or officers, pending business, or proposals for new action. As the meeting continues, the paramount concern is for consensus to be reached on an issue, not coverage of all planned agenda items.

2. Reports:

Reports of officers or committees are not only a recounting of information, but the opening for a discussion and/or questions to occur. Proposals for action will often originate from reports, but the proposals themselves can be adopted or not independent of the "receipt" of the report.

3. Proposals:

A proposal is a recommendation that a specific action be taken. (E.g., "We ought to purchase stock in Lunar Outpost Company.")

It is natural, normal, and expected that there will be multiple proposals related to a specific topic to be on the table at any time in a discussion. Every effort should be made to ensure that all participants understand which proposal is being focused on at each point in the conversation. It is not permissible to insist that discussion remain on one proposal prior to moving to another proposal on the same topic. (Discussions will not be linear.) However, proposals on one topic should be settled before proposals on another topic are considered.

Once a proposal is made, it belongs to the group. As such the person who proposed it no longer "owns" the proposal and cannot withdraw it. There is no need to second a proposal.

4. Amendments:

In the midst of discussing proposals it is likely that they will be amended. The amendment(s) will be adopted by a consensus model which mirrors that of adopting proposals more broadly. As the proposal belongs to the group, not the person who proposed it, there are no "friendly" amendments.

III. ADOPTION OF A PROPOSAL

A proposal that is adopted is to be specific in wording and specific in actions to follow from its adoption. If the group merely wishes to have an issue explored and brought back for further discussion the proposal to be adopted

should be to refer the issue to a committee – either existing or newly created.

As decisions are made by consensus, the vast bulk of all proposals will be unanimously approved. There are instances in which that does not occur, which are covered below in the discussion of voting.

IV. VOTING

Voting occurs in two potential stages in this model, the **consensus check** and the **vote**. Moving to a consensus check or a vote should not occur until it is clear that all voices on a proposal have been heard. (This is not to say all members/officers, but rather all opinions.)

As detailed below in IV.1.c.iii, a proposal may be adopted at the consensus check stage without moving to the vote stage.

1. The consensus check

   a. Purpose of the consensus check: to discover how the group feels about the proposal.

   b. Procedure for the consensus check:

      i. The facilitator states the specific proposal being considered.

      ii. The facilitator takes count of the following:

         -Who likes the proposal?

         -Who can live with the proposal?

         -Who is uncomfortable with the proposal?

         -Who is uncertain about the proposal?

      iii. This is repeated with all the proposals on the particular topic. The facilitator tracks the results of the consensus check.

   c. Interpretation of the consensus check:

Interpretation of the results includes looking for a balance:

      i. If most are "uncomfortable" the proposal should be scratched.

      ii. If most are "uncertain" the proposal should be clarified, or more information gathered, prior to checking for consensus again.

iii. If the totality of the group "likes" or "can live with" the proposal, then the proposal is considered to have consensus and is adopted.

iv. If there remain any members of the meeting who are "uncomfortable" or "uncertain" then discussion should continue (as detailed below) until consensus is reached, or if it is determined that consensus is not possible then a vote should occur.

d. Following the consensus check:

i. Find out what the "uncomfortables" are uncomfortable about and what the "uncertains" are uncertain about, and see if the group is willing to decide by majority rule.

1) Those who are uncomfortable are asked to explain what makes them uncomfortable with the proposal (i.e. what they believe is wrong with the proposal).

2) Those who are uncertain explain what makes them uncertain (i.e. what additional information is needed).

3) The entire group is invited to offer explanations, thoughts, or information to help resolve the discomfort and uncertainty and move the group toward consensus.

ii. It is possible that after the clarification of these issues members might have changed their minds. For that reason it is helpful to repeat consensus checks occasionally to see if consensus has been reached.

iii. If it becomes clear that some members will not be able to be satisfied with the proposal, but it is still desired to have clarity on the issue rather than reconsidering it at a later time, then a vote occurs. (The clarity of the need to move to a vote could occur in multiple ways, perhaps the most common would be that there is no movement toward consensus following a discussion post-consensus check or any number of "uncomfortables" or "uncertains" state that they do not see themselves being moved to at least a "can live with it" during the meeting.)

2. The vote

a. **The question at hand for every vote is**: "Should we implement this decision over the stated concerns of the minority, when a majority of us think that it is workable?"

   i. "Yes" means one favors majority rule.

   ii. "No" means postponing the decision.

   iii. These are the only two options allowed under the vote. No abstentions are permitted.

b. If the "yes" votes win, the proposal passes.

c. If the "no" votes win, the proposal is defeated, and the group is faced with a few options:

   i. Generate a new proposal, taking into account the concerns of the "uncomfortables"/"uncertains"

   ii. Accept that the issue can't be decided at this time. This provides two options:

      a. Returning to the proposal at a later time with the group as a whole.

      b. Refer the proposal and the concerns about it to a committee which contains at least one person who was in favor of the proposal and one person who was either uncertain about or uncomfortable with the proposal among its members. That committee would work to revise the proposal such that a later discussion on the issue could occur.