



Consent Agenda

Daniel Foth, Local Government Specialist, Local Government Education, University of Wisconsin - Extension

Want to make your governmental body (body) meetings shorter and/or more efficient? Consent Agendas (CAs) are a tool that governmental bodies can use to reduce meeting time and improve the body's effectiveness. CAs organize routine and noncontroversial meeting items into a single CA item that allows all of those items to be approved together, rather than individually. Using a CA can expedite meetings and reserve time for more critical discussion matters. As the name implies, CA assumes a general consensus for approval.

Robert's Rules of Order Newly Revised, 12th Edition 41.32 notes that local governments use a consent calendar (synonymous with CA) to reduce a large number of non-controversial matters within a meeting agenda. Using this approach can free up time for more essential discussion and can help a body align its focus with its primary responsibility, deliberation on significant community issues. What agenda items are CA candidates? CAs are for any item that is a routine, informational, self-explanatory, and noncontroversial matter. As with other agenda items, CA items must comply with Wisconsin Open Meetings Law requirements. Body members receiving

the agenda before the meeting should review the CA and other agenda items as part of the due diligence required to understand and cast an informed vote. Each agenda item requires the body's full attention, even if noncontroversial.

There are some procedural and practical steps to implementing a CA approach. First, the body should adopt a meeting policy that allows CA use. The CA policy also helps a body member understand the CA purpose and process. A sample policy might include: "An item may be added to the Consent Agenda (CA) by the chair and included as part of the meeting agenda notice. Any body member may request to remove a CA item. Items not removed are adopted by unanimous consent without debate. Removed items will be taken up immediately after the CA approval or otherwise placed on the agenda as noticed."

What types of items are placed on the CA? Remember, a CA is for routine, informational, self-explanatory, and noncontroversial items. Keeping this mantra in mind, typical CA items can include: approval of or updates to meeting minutes; financial reports or any other reports that are informational only and that do not require debate; topics of a routine/recurring nature;

committee, staff, or office updates and reports, as information only; staff, volunteer, and committee appointments (remember noncontroversial); routine correspondence that requires no action; perfunctory items – formal approval of items that had much past discussion; and dates of future meetings. This list is not exhaustive. Again, an item is only a candidate for the CA if it's routine, informational, self-explanatory, and noncontroversial.

Using a CA requires trust by other body members and the general public. Do not use a CA to approve an item through a process that eliminates their review. That can create future distrust that will impact future body deliberations, decisions, and public confidence.

Here are some helpful hints to consider when using a CA.

1. If you question a CA (or any agenda) item, ask about it before the meeting! If you have concerns, ask to remove the item from the CA so it can be discussed. Ideally, body members should make such a request prior to the meeting so that the clerk can place the item on the regular agenda before the meeting starts.

2. At the start of the meeting, the chair asks the body if anyone wants to remove or discuss any CA item.
3. The chair usually allows body members to ask simple questions, ask for clarification, and allows short conversations about CA items after someone makes a motion and second, but before the body approves. It's unnecessary to remove an item from the CA solely because someone has a simple question that can be addressed quickly.
4. If removing a CA item, the chair reads aloud the remaining consent items, and then a motion and second are made to adopt the CA as a whole. The chair notes there is no objection, and the motion passes unanimously.
5. The minutes will reflect the CA items like other approved agenda items.

When used correctly, a CA can allow a governmental body to focus its time on the critical policy and implementation issues that will help their communities thrive.



Did you know? The published Legal FAQs are taken directly from the extensive library of resources on the League's website. Have a question? Try the search function on the website and get an answer. <http://www.lwm-info.org>

Officers FAQ 8

What factors distinguish a municipal officer from a municipal employee and what are some implications of the distinction?

There is no complete list of factors for distinguishing a municipal officer from a municipal employee. However, a few of the more significant ones that indicate a person is a municipal officer include:

1. The person is serving in a statutory municipal office listed in Wis. Stat. §§ 62.09 (cities) or 61.19 and 61.20 (villages) such as mayor, village president, alderperson, trustee, treasurer, clerk, comptroller, attorney, deputy clerk, deputy treasurer, or is serving on a statutory committee,

commission, or board such as the police and fire commission, board of zoning appeals, or planning commission;

2. the person is serving in a position or capacity listed in the municipality's ordinances as a municipal office; or
3. the person filed an oath of office.

Elected or appointed municipal officers, including members of boards and commissions, are generally not subject to the same employment regulations applicable to municipal employees. Moreover, status as a municipal officer may affect the timing of salary changes, how the person resigns or quits, and how that person is disciplined or removed from office. It also impacts how a vacancy in the office or position is subsequently

filled. Wisconsin Stat. §§ 17.12, 17.13 and 17.16 govern the removal of municipal officers such as mayors, village trustees, and members of municipal boards and commissions. Wisconsin Stat. § 17.01 specifies how municipal officers may resign from office. (rev. 3/21)

Officers FAQ 6

Is a village president a chief executive officer under state law?

No. A village president, unlike a mayor, is not designated as the chief executive officer by state law. Instead, a village president is declared a trustee with certain administrative responsibilities. These responsibilities include presiding at all board meetings and signing all ordinances, rules, bylaws, regulations,