



The Main Motion and Secondary Motions Relating to it

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Motions are the tools that a governing body uses to start, discuss, and complete its business. Robert’s Rules of Order (RONR) provides a chart¹ categorizing the types of motions into three Parts:² (1) Main Motions; (2) Incidental Motions, and (3) Bring Back Motions.

This month, I discuss Part One, **Main Motions**, which ranks the secondary motions from §21 to §10 (high to low).³ Part One notes the various secondary motions (§21 to §11), that typically relate to the main motion (§10). Using the RONR chart, a higher-ranked secondary motion outranks all lower ones. When discussing the **main motion**, secondary motions are discussed and decided by their order of rank.

To illustrate, consider this scenario: A village president wants to attend the League’s Local Government 101 training, so they decide to make a motion at the next board meeting to take this training.

At the next meeting, before making their motion, the president turns the chair duties over to the vice-president (if applicable) or another trustee, to ensure the motion’s impartial handling. The vice president now is the meeting chair. Then, the president seeks recognition and makes their **main motion**, “I move that I should attend the League’s training, and the village should pay the meeting

registration and travel expenses.” This **main motion** (§10) is duly seconded and repeated back to the board.

Trustee #1 dislikes spending money and immediately *moves to postpone indefinitely* (§11), Trustee #2 likes to discuss every motion and seconds. Trustee #3 wants every board member to attend the training and moves to *amend the motion* (§12) accordingly, #2 seconds. Then, Trustee #4, concerned about the budget, moves to *refer the main motion to the finance committee* (§13) to study the cost impact; again, #2 seconds. With four motions on the floor, how should the chair proceed?

Here the chair remembers, each secondary motion has a rank and should be addressed in that order. Here, the *motion to refer* (§13) has the highest rank and is addressed first. The board discusses the motion and a majority votes to refer the **main motion** to the Finance Committee. Now what happens? As the motion goes to the finance committee, #1’s *motion to postpone indefinitely*, the *motion to amend* and **main motion** are now moot, pending the finance committee’s review and recommendation.

What if the *motion to refer* did not pass? The board would then discuss the next highest-ranked motion. In this case, the *motion to amend* (§12). If the board

discusses and approves the *motion to amend*, what is next?

The *motion to postpone indefinitely* (§11) (as amended, see above) has the next highest rank and comes next. Since the board just approved the amendment to train all trustees, the board votes this motion down. Because the board has resolved other motions, now, the chair can take up the **main motion** (§10).

However, Trustee #1 moves to *adjourn the meeting* (§21), #2 seconds. The president consults the RONR chart. “*Adjourn the meeting*” is the highest-ranked motion and the chart notes the board must vote immediately without any discussion. Here, the village board, by a majority, votes down the *motion to adjourn*.

However, Trustee #1 isn’t done yet and moves to *table the motion* (§17), #2 seconds. The chair asks: what is the need to lay the **main motion** aside temporarily? Trustee #1 cannot identify a need, and the motion to postpone *indefinitely* was previously defeated, so the chair rules the motion to table out of order. Finally, the board takes up the **main motion**, which after a short discussion, passes.

Hopefully, this scenario illustrates the benefit of understanding and using the RONR Motions Chart.

1. The Main Motions
§21-Adjourn - I move to adjourn
§20-Recess - I move to recess
§19-Raise a Question of Privilege - I rise to ask a question about the proceedings
§18-Call for the Orders or the Day - I ask the chart to follow the agenda

§17-Lay on the Table - I move to lay the current item aside temporarily
§16-Previous Question - I move close debate
§15-Limit or extend debate - I move that discussion be ____
§14-Postpone to a Certain Time - I move to postpone the motion to ____

§13-Commit or Refer - I move to refer the motion to committee ____
§12-Amend - I move to amend the motion by ____
§11-Postpone Indefinitely - I move to postpone the motion indefinitely
§10-Main motion - I move to ____

2. RONR MOTION Chart <https://robertsrules.org/motions.htm>
3. RONR (11th Ed.), Charts, Tables and Lists, P. 3