

# A Robert's rule to limit debate would have been welcome

The Bethlehem Gadfly Wage equality March 10, 2020

 *Latest in a series of posts on wage equality* 

Question: What according to Robert's Rules should follow a motion to postpone?(Councilwoman Van Wirt made a motion to table, but Solicitor Spirk recognized that what she meant was a motion to postpone.)

Answer: Nothing.

Nothing, that is, except set a date for reconsideration and everybody get out of Dodge.

Nothing, that is, except "limited debate" on "whether the postponement is appropriate." Debate should be "restricted to the pros and cons of postponement, and to what time the question should be postponed." "Debate may not go into the merits of the main motion." (Quotes from Gadfly editions of Robert's Rules)

What happened after the motion to table/postpone at the Human Resources committee meeting on the wage equality ordinance February 25?

The discussion continued, wandering to and fro over already well trodden ground for another 15 minutes — and ended up regrettable.

In Gadfly's (admittedly non-expert) opinion, a chair familiar with Robert's Rules should have "limited debate" to agreement on a date to meet again and called it a day. Committee members familiar with Robert's Rules could have called for the same with Robert's Rules as authority.

What about Solicitor Spirk, you ask?

Gadfly is not familiar with the protocol in such circumstances. He is not sure that it is the place for the Solicitor to intervene uninvited. He is not sure the Solicitor plays umpire if he's not asked to.

If he can intervene to make a call, however, Mr. Spirk probably decided that there was just enough talk about the appropriateness of postponement sprinkled throughout this period for discussion to continue. When Councilman Callahan finally did address the Solicitor after the formal vote on postponement was taken in yet another attempt to keep discussion going, Mr. Spirk definitely indicated that the vote to postpone ended discussion, and the meeting was finally adjourned.

Gadfly is reminded of his [recent “modest proposal”](#) *that every Council member be required to attend a training seminar in Robert’s Rules of Order every year.*

If discussion had ended soon after Councilwoman Van Wirt’s motion to postpone, we might have been saved much unpleasantness.

The case for postponement is that Councilwoman Negron asked for further research by Solicitor Spirk and Councilwoman Van Wirt wants to do research on adding a “salary sharing” component. Both want Councilman Callahan to address the enforcement issue.

The case against postponement is that the ordinance is fine as is, it is exactly the same as ordinances successfully adopted in other cities, there has been plenty of time for Councilwomen Negron and Van Wirt to bring amendments for discussion now, and that changes can be made before the ordinance reaches Council and even at Council.

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