



RECONSIDER AND ENTER ON THE MINUTES

By Tim Wynn, PRP

I was recently contacted by members of a local organization who found themselves with an interesting problem. They explained that a group of members who had never attended the monthly meetings of the organization were hatching a plan to suddenly attend the next meeting and make a motion to spend a considerable amount of the organization's money on a party for themselves. The members who contacted me explained that they feared these first-time attendees would have the necessary votes to adopt the motion.

The organization has hundreds of members, who pay considerable dues each year, but most members never actually attend a meeting, with the normal turnout at each meeting being just a few dozen. These concerned members asked whether the motion to throw a lavish and expensive party would be out of order simply because it seemed like a bad idea. Of course, I replied that parliamentary law had no prohibition against adopting motions that represented potentially bad ideas. In fact, I explained that the purpose of parliamentary law was to provide an efficient and orderly method for discerning the will of the assembly, which is accomplished by a vote.

The concerned members explained that the rest of the members in the organization would never support this, and it would be seen as a small group rushing the meeting to grab money for themselves. It's easy to understand, then, why the adoption of this motion would feel out of order to these concerned members. However, there's nothing out of order about a majority of members in a meeting adopting a motion. While explaining that their best approach would be to encourage more members to attend the meeting to take part in the vote on this motion, my mind was secretly contemplating a motion that I honestly never thought I would have the opportunity to recommend. One of RONR's most obscure motions.

Back when I first took an interest in parliamentary law, when I was reading *Robert's Rules of Order* for the very first time (the tenth edition), I was intrigued by this peculiar motion of American origin, though I doubted I'd ever have any call to use it. But, before we get into that motion, we'll need to talk about its big brother, the motion to *Reconsider*, which is, itself, one of the most interesting motions in all of RONR, with all its unique characteristics. The motion to *Reconsider* is so complicated that for sheer volume of pages, its section ranks behind only the sections on *Amend* and the *Main Motion*. It can only be made by certain individuals, its vote requirement is different in committees, it can be made at one time and taken up at a different time, and it outranks everything—well, almost everything. It doesn't outrank its little brother. And as interesting and useful as the motion to *Reconsider* is, it wasn't the motion I was about to recommend to these concerned members. It was that little brother of a motion that these



members needed: the motion to *Reconsider and Enter on the Minutes*—a motion that accounted for only seven paragraphs in *Robert's Rules of Order Newly Revised* 12th edition. It was extremely small, but extremely potent.

Robert's Rules Of Order Newly Revised 12th edition, section 37, paragraph 46, states, “Its purpose is to prevent a temporary majority from taking advantage of an unrepresentative attendance at a meeting to vote an action that is opposed by a majority of a society's or a convention's membership.” In this regard, we see that the motion to *Reconsider and Enter on the Minutes* is tailor made for the situation described by these concerned members.

If the concerned members take the preemptive approach of warning the membership ahead of time, in hopes of drawing enough members to the meeting to prevent the adoption of the motion to spend the association's money on a frivolous party, there's a high probability that members will ignore this warning, owing to the fact that it sounds too far-fetched to warrant attention, leaving the concerned minority in the meeting to have to take matters into their own hands if a temporary majority does arrive at the meeting and adopt the motion.

So, how would the motion to *Reconsider and Enter on the Minutes* work in this situation? Well, if the motion to spend the money on a frivolous party is made and put to a vote, a member who opposes it will need to determine, at the time of the vote, whether the motion is going to be adopted. If the affirmative vote appears to be large enough to prevail, this concerned member will need to vote in the affirmative (since the motion to *Reconsider and Enter on the Minutes* can only be made by a member who voted on the prevailing side). If the motion is indeed adopted, the concerned member who voted in favor can then move to *Reconsider and Enter on the Minutes*. If this motion receives a second, the chair says, “It is moved and seconded to reconsider and enter on the minutes the vote on the motion related to the party. The secretary will enter this on the minutes, and all action resulting from the vote on the party is suspended.”

The concerned members can now alert the membership that a motion to spend the association's money on a party for only a few members was *actually* adopted in a meeting and that it will go into effect unless members attend the next meeting and vote to reconsider it and to subsequently reject it. Members will be far less likely to ignore this warning, seeing that a motion was actually adopted as opposed to simply being theorized.

RONR (12th ed.) 37:49 states, “If the motion to Reconsider and Enter on the Minutes is seconded, all action required by the vote proposed to be reconsidered is suspended, and there is time to notify absent members of the proposed action.”



You'll notice that no vote was taken on the motion to *Reconsider and Enter on the Minutes*. This is an essential characteristic of the motion: “. . . it cannot be called up until another day, even if another meeting is held on that same day.” - RONR (12th ed.) 37:46

Robert's Rules of Order Newly Revised 12th edition further explains, “Thus, with a view to obtaining a more representative attendance, it ensures reconsideration of a question on a different day from the one on which the question was put to vote.”

With two members being able to suspend action taken by the assembly in this way (by one making the motion and another seconding it), it's easy to imagine blatant misuses unfairly thwarting the will of the assembly. RONR (12th ed.) 37:52 addresses this concern by stating, “If an actual minority in a representative meeting makes improper use of this motion by moving to reconsider and enter on the minutes a vote which requires action before the next regular meeting, the remedy is to fix the time for an adjourned meeting on another suitable day when the reconsideration can be called up and disposed of. In such a case, the mere making of a motion to set an adjourned meeting would likely cause withdrawal of the motion to Reconsider and Enter on the Minutes, since its object would be defeated.”

You'll notice that this approach works quite well for a majority in a fairly represented meeting, but it provides no protection for a temporary majority in a meeting with unrepresentative attendance. Just like in the example of the temporary majority seeking to use the organization's funds to throw itself a party, the temporary majority's power relies on its ability to conduct business quickly before the true majority has an opportunity to have its votes counted. So, while the temporary majority could schedule an adjourned meeting for a different day to take up the motion to *Reconsider and Enter on the Minutes*, doing so will not change the fact that the motion has eliminated the element of surprise that the temporary majority needs. There will be an opportunity to alert the members and make the adjourned meeting a true representation of the membership.

As an additional note on this topic, if an organization finds itself subject to these types of situations, it can, of course, adopt a special rule of order requiring notice or a higher vote requirement for the adoption of certain motions, such as a motion to spend more than a certain amount of money or to deviate from the budget by more than a certain margin.

In closing, I encourage you to read the seven short paragraphs contained in RONR (12th ed.) 37:46-52, which highlight a little motion that is rarely needed, but that has the potential to save the day for the missing majority.