

Memorandum

Date: May 17, 2023 (updated from February 17, 2021 version)

From: University Secretary

Subj: Consent Agendas – The Use of Consent Agendas to Run Efficient and Effective Meetings

Content of Consent Agendas

A consent agenda will allow the governing body to approve routine, procedural or non-controversial items together without needing to vote repeatedly on individual motions. Consent agenda items usually do not require discussion or explanation prior to the governing body taking action, or they have already been discussed at a previous meeting and are being brought forward again for formal approval.

Items that are often seen on consent agendas include:

- Approval of the minutes
- Housekeeping amendments to previously approved policies or previously approved standing committee terms of reference
- Committee reports that are presented for information
- Routine reports provided for placing them on record
- Non-controversial appointments and renewals

Purpose of Consent Agendas

Consent agendas are intended to assist with time management at meetings and ensure that there is sufficient opportunity for the consideration and discussion of policy and strategy matters. Consent agendas also help pivot the focus of meetings from process to discussion, which helps better leverage the expertise of the governing body and strengthens the quality of governance.

Use of Consent Agendas

Consent agendas are not intended to disguise important issues or stifle discussion and, as such, they should be employed in keeping with the following best practices:

- Materials must be distributed in sufficient time to be read by all members prior to the meeting.
- Items included in the consent agenda must be clearly identified.
 - Agendas are clearly identified as Consent Agenda items and include a listing of every item on the consent agenda.
- At the beginning of the meeting, the Chairⁱ will highlight those matters proposed for the consent agenda and ask members whether there are any items they wish to have removed from the consent agenda.
 - Members may also contact the Secretary in advance of the meeting to have an item removed from the consent agenda.
- Members may request that an item be removed for any reason. Most often items are removed to:
 - Facilitate further discussion.
 - Facilitate voting against or abstaining from voting on an item ¹
 - Because a conflict of interest exists²
- When there are no more items to be removed, the motion to approve the meeting agenda, including the consent agenda, is moved and seconded. The consent items, including any related motions, would then be considered approved as part of the overall approval of the meeting agenda.
- Minutes of the meeting will reflect which items were approved as part of the consent agenda.

Items Removed

Items removed from the consent agenda will be considered in the normal sequence of the agenda or as noted by the Chair.

Reconsideration of Approved Consent Items

After the consent agenda is approved, it is procedurally time consuming to call a separate vote on an already approved consent item. Given that one purpose of consent agendas is to reduce the time spent on procedural matters, the Chair may ask members to consider the need to reconsider an approved consent item. The one exception to this practice is when a member failed to declare a conflict of

¹ If a member wishes to abstain from voting on, or vote against, an item on the consent agenda, this item must be removed from the consent agenda. Furthermore, the Good Governance Policy for the Board of Governors requires that members not abstain from voting without good reason. Therefore, members may not abstain from voting on the consent agenda as a matter of expedience when they only have an issue with only one or a few items.

² If there is a conflict of interest related to an item, it must be removed from the consent agenda so the conflict can be noted and the member in conflict can abstain from voting. It is not possible to abstain from voting on individual items on the consent agenda.

interest on an item approved as part of the consent agenda.³ In this case the Chair must facilitate a separate vote once the conflict is identified.

Time permitting; members are welcome to ask questions about items approved as part of the consent agenda later in the meeting. However, it is preferable that items requiring meaningful discussion be removed from the consent agenda.

Authority

The Chair shall conduct the proceedings of the meetings in conformity with the applicable bylaws and the rules of procedure enacted by the governing body. In all cases not provided for, the most recent edition of Bourinot's Rules of Order shall be observed in conducting the business. The Secretary provides advice to the Chair in keeping with the procedural reference in Bourinot's Rules of Order. This reference does not consider the use of consent agendas and, as such, the advice of the Secretary is based on a scan of best practices in the higher education and municipal sectors.

ⁱ For the purposes of this document Chair is used, however this may also refer to a Speaker or Deputy Speaker (Senate)

³ In this case, the Chair would call for a motion to reconsider the approval of the consent agenda, followed by a separate vote on the item with a newly declared conflict.