

SUBJECT: Concerns and suggestions related to Robert's Rules of Order

January 31, 2025

Dear Mayor and Council,

We are writing to express our concerns and to offer suggestions related to the Town Council's vote during the January meeting to conduct all future Town Council meetings using *Robert's Rules of Order, Newly Revised*. Based on the council's discussion during the January meeting and the Q&A document about *Robert's Rules* on the town's website, we understand that the reason for adopting these rules was the need for shorter, more orderly meetings following a written agenda and consistent format. It was stated at the January meeting that this approach would be fairer because both councilors and residents will know what to expect ahead of each meeting and will be able to prepare accordingly.

Currently, residents have an opportunity to ask questions and/or speak about a specific topic or issue, but their participation is limited to a three-minute time slot at the beginning of each meeting. We believe that restricting residents' inputs to the beginning of each meeting eliminates the ability of residents to comment on and/or ask questions about points raised DURING the meeting.

We have always thought of the Town Council as a deliberative body that comes to a consensus at the monthly meetings, but our understanding is that if Robert's Rules are strictly enforced, councilors are now expected to come to each meeting fully informed and ready to declare their position. According to the Q&A, residents are encouraged to share their opinions and concerns ahead of time – either through letters posted to the mayor and council, engagement with specific committees, and/or through independent discussions with the council members.

Knowing how difficult it is for many residents to keep up with the issues in general and especially in-between council meetings, it seems that the strict application of Robert's Rules and the new meeting format may have unintended negative consequences. We feel that these rules and new format unnecessarily impose restrictions on and may actually discourage many town residents from participating in discussions about both issues on the agenda and issues that arise during the council's discussion of agenda items.

Given these concerns, we respectfully ask that the council explore specific measures to 1) improve transparency regarding the anticipated TIMING of votes, and 2) ensure that residents have an adequate opportunity to express their views and clarify questions BEFORE final votes are taken.

We offer the following suggestions:

1. Acknowledging that Robert's Rules of Order are quite intricate and long, it was suggested during the January Town Council Meeting that the council **adopt a specific subset of the rules** for use in town meetings. We request that the councilors clarify which of the rules the council meetings will operate under in the future.
2. Once clarified, we suggest that a clear explanation of the adopted rules be published on the town's website and widely circulated through the newsletter and a specific Town Alert, so that all residents are informed and aware of what rules we are operating under; that a direct link to the adopted set of rules and the Q&A be posted on the homepage of the Washington Grove website, under the "How do I...?" tips column; and that a reminder be shared with residents when the agenda for Town

Council Meetings is sent by the mayor, inviting/reminding residents to read about the policy on the town website and to ask questions by writing to the mayor and council.

3. To avoid potential manipulation of the rules during council meetings, we also suggest that if a resident or councilor states that a rule has been violated, that the specific rule adopted by Washington Grove be cited.
4. During the January Town Council Meeting, Mayor Compton noted that the council could decide to allow residents' comments about items on the agenda. Previously, residents could only comment on items NOT on the agenda. The information on the town website regarding this distinction is vague. We suggest that the council confirm the mayor's statement and clarify it on the website.
5. We strongly suggest that the council open the floor to include an additional round of public comments (length to be defined) before a final vote is taken on a motion. Since Robert's Rules save time, this extra comment period should be feasible.

Thank you for taking our concerns and recommendations into consideration. We fully support adopting the rules that promote order and efficiency, as long as it is not at the expense of restricting residents' input. We look forward to having a fuller discussion of these ideas with the mayor, councilors and other residents.

Respectfully submitted by:

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