

THE CONSENT AGENDA aka Consent Calendar
Roberts Rules of Order

NOTE: 2022 HCSO BOE and Hudson City Council have Consent Agenda policies documented. HLHS BOT do not use it.

I. What is a consent agenda? A consent agenda groups the routine, procedural, informational and self-explanatory non-controversial items typically found in an agenda. These items are then presented to the board in a single motion for an up or down vote after allowing anyone to request that a specific item be moved to the full agenda for individual attention. Other items, particularly those requiring strategic thought, decision making or action, are handled as usual.

Why would an organization want to use a consent agenda? Consent agendas are popular with many nonprofit organizations because they help streamline meetings and allow the focus to be on substantive issues.

What does it mean if we adopt a consent agenda?

- ☐ Documentation for consent items must be provided to the board prior to meetings so that directors feel confident that their vote reflects attention to their duty of care.
- ☐ Board members are encouraged to ask prior to the meeting all the questions that they want related to consent agenda items.
- ☐ If it is determined that an item on the consent portion of the agenda actually requires action or a decision that item should be removed from the consent portion of the agenda and raised later in the meeting.
- ☐ Any board member can request that an item be moved to the full agenda.
- ☐ A vote on the single motion applies to all the items on the consent portion of the agenda.

What does it *not* mean if we adopt a consent agenda?

- ☐ Consent agendas do not make it easier to ramrod through decisions since decision items are not placed on the consent portion of the agenda and all items on the consent portion of the agenda are still open to discussion and debate if someone requests they be moved.
- ☐ It is not always necessary to remove an item from the consent agenda if people have simple questions or wish to discuss the item further. Discussion is permitted after the motion for approval is made, but before the vote. However, everyone should remember that extensive conversation defeats the purpose of the consent agenda.

What normally is found on a consent agenda? Routine, informational, procedural and self-explanatory non-controversial items are generally placed on the consent portion of the agenda. These typically are such things as:

- ☐ Approval of board and committee minutes
- ☐ Correspondence requiring no action
- ☐ Committee and staff reports
- ☐ Updates or background reports provided for informational purposes only
- ☐ Appointments requiring board confirmation
- ☐ Approval of contracts that fall within the organization's policy guidelines
- ☐ Final approval of proposals that have been thoroughly discussed previously, where the board is comfortable with the implications
- ☐ Confirmation of pro forma items or actions that need no discussion but are required by the bylaws
- ☐ Dates of future meetings

What is the process for using a consent agenda?

- ☐ The board must begin by approving a motion to adopt the consent agenda for its meetings.
- ☐ The board should then craft a policy about what may and may not be included in the consent portion of the agenda.
- ☐ The full agenda, including the consent items should be disseminated prior to the board meeting along with copies of reports and back up materials so that board members can do their due diligence prior to voting.
- ☐ As the first item of business the chairman should ask if anyone wishes to remove an item from the consent portion of the agenda.
- ☐ The chairman then asks for a motion to accept the consent agenda.
- ☐ Once the motion has been received, the chairman opens the floor for any questions or discussion on the items remaining on the consent agenda. The understanding, though, is that the directors have come prepared and, other than a quick point or question, they are comfortable voting for the items or they would have asked to have them removed.
- ☐ If any items were removed from the consent portion of the agenda the chairman may determine where on the agenda those items will be discussed, e.g., immediately after the consent agenda has been accepted or later on the agenda.
- ☐ Quickly reviewing the remaining items, the chairman asks for any objections to the adoption of those remaining items. If none are offered all items on the consent agenda are considered to be passed.

II. Q: What is a "Consent Agenda" and how will it make our meetings go faster?

At every board meeting, at least a few items come to the agenda that do not need any discussion or debate either because they are routine procedures or are already unanimous consent. A consent agenda (Roberts Rules of Order calls it a consent

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calendar) allows the board to approve all these items together without discussion or individual motions. Depending upon the organization, this can free up anywhere from a few minutes to a half hour for more substantial discussion. *Consent Agenda is not addressed in Sunshine Laws, except, Sunshine demands openness meaning open deliberation and discussion based on documentation and presentation that leads to decision-making and voting.*

What belongs on the consent agenda?

Typical consent agenda items are routine, procedural decisions, and decisions that are likely to be noncontroversial.

Examples include:

- Approval of the minutes;
- Final approval of proposals or reports that the board has been dealing with for some time and all members are familiar with the implications;
- Routine matters such as appointments to committees;
- Staff appointments requiring board confirmation;
- Reports provided for information only;
- Correspondence requiring no action.

How are items on a consent agenda handled?

A consent agenda can only work if the reports and other matters for the meeting agenda are known in advance and distributed with agenda package in sufficient time to be read by all members prior to the meeting. A typical procedure is as follows:

1. When preparing the meeting agenda, the president or chairperson determines whether an item belongs on the consent agenda.
2. The president prepares a numbered list of the consent items as part of, or as an attachment to the meeting agenda.
3. The list and supporting documents are included in the board's agenda package in sufficient time to be read by all members prior to the meeting.
4. At the beginning of the meeting, the chair asks members what items they wish to be removed from the consent agenda and discussed individually.
5. If any member requests that an item be removed from the consent agenda, it must be removed. Members may request that an item be removed for any reason. They may wish, for example, to discuss the item, to query the item, or to register a vote against the item.
6. Once it has been removed, the chair can decide whether to take up the matter immediately or place it on the regular meeting agenda.
7. When there are no more items to be removed, the chair or secretary reads out the numbers of the remaining consent items. Then the chair states: "If there is no objection, these items will be adopted." After pausing for any objections, the chair states "As there are no objections, these items are adopted." It is not necessary to ask for a show of hands.
8. When preparing the minutes, the Secretary includes the full text of the resolutions, reports or recommendations that were adopted as part of the consent agenda.

How to start using a consent agenda

In order to start using a consent agenda, the board should first adopt a rule of order allowing for the consent agenda process. A sample rule is "A consent agenda may be presented by the president at the beginning of a meeting. Items may be removed from the consent agenda on the request of any one member. Items not removed may be adopted by general consent without debate. Removed items may be taken up either immediately after the consent agenda or placed later on the agenda at the discretion of the assembly.

It is important to make sure that all directors know what items belong on the agenda and how to move items to and from the consent agenda. For this reason, instruction on using the consent agenda should be part of the board orientation program.

NOTE: Consent Agenda is not named in Sunshine Laws; although Sunshine clearly defines what constitutes openness of public meetings requiring deliberations and discussions based on informational materials leading to votes and or action. Fast tracking business items during open meetings should follow a process requiring a standing Consent Agenda policy.