

Dr. Leonard M. Young
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To: Susan Rupert, MOPTA President
Re: Quotes from Robert's Rules Re Electronic Meetings

Dear Susan:

I understand that you would like me to put together information that units and councils could use if they wished to hold an electronic meeting.

Below is what *Robert's Rules of Order Newly Revised* (RONR) says about electronic meetings. The key is they must be authorized in the bylaws and must, at a minimum, provide for simultaneous aural communication. So just doing voting electronically without the provision for the give and take associated with a real meeting (making nominations, debating, making motions, etc.) is not permissible.

Here is the quote from RONR Page 97-98:

EXTENSION OF PARLIAMENTARY LAW TO ELECTRONIC MEETINGS. **Except as authorized in the bylaws**, the business of an organization or board can be validly transacted only at a regular or properly called meeting—that is, as defined on pages 81–82, a single official gathering in one room or area—of the assembly of its members at which a quorum is present.

Among some organizations, there is an increasing preference, especially in the case of a relatively small board or other assembly, to transact business at electronic meetings—that is, at meetings at which, rather than all participating members being physically present in one room or area as in traditional (or "face-to-face") meetings, some or all of them communicate with the others through electronic means such as the Internet or by telephone. **A group that holds such alternative meetings does not lose its character as a deliberative assembly (see pp. 1–2) so long as the meetings provide, at a minimum, conditions of opportunity for simultaneous aural communication among all participating members equivalent to those of meetings held in one room or area. Under such conditions, an electronic meeting that is properly authorized in the bylaws is treated as though it were a meeting at which all the members who are participating are actually present.**

If electronic meetings are to be authorized, it is advisable to adopt additional rules pertaining to their conduct.

TYPES OF ELECTRONIC MEETINGS. Various provisions for electronic meetings are possible, so that more than the minimum standard of an audioconference may be required. Thus, if the bylaws provide for meeting by videoconference (but not merely by "teleconference" or "audioconference"), the meeting must be conducted by a technology that allows all participating members to see each other, as well as to hear each other, at the same time. **Provision may also be made for the use of additional collaborative technology to aid in the conduct of a meeting.**

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RONR RULES REGARDING ELECTRONIC MEETINGS

It is important to understand that, regardless of the technology used, the opportunity for simultaneous aural communication is essential to the deliberative character of the meeting. Therefore, a group that attempts to conduct the deliberative process in writing (such as by postal mail, e-mail, "chat rooms," or fax)—which is not recommended—does not constitute a deliberative assembly. Any such effort may achieve a consultative character, but it is foreign to the deliberative process as understood under parliamentary law.

In this time of crisis, it would be understandable if local units or councils wished to conduct business electronically. If they wish to do so, such must be provided for in their bylaws as indicated above. These bodies should remember that in their bylaws regarding terms of officers there is the phrase "or until their successors are elected." This provision would allow current officers to remain in place until it was safe to call a general meeting to do elections. This is the other alternative to trying to meet electronically and the one that they will have to follow if they have not provided for electronic meetings in their bylaws.

I hope this is helpful information. Should any unit or council need additional help, I will be glad to give it.

All the best,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Leonard M. Young". The signature is written in black ink and has a fluid, connected style.

Dr. Leonard M. Young
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