

call to order

Commit, Refer

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As stated in a *Call to Order* article, county boards in Wisconsin are considered a legislative body and use a strong committee structure much like the Wisconsin State Legislature. A county board exercises its powers by adopting resolutions and ordinances. Upon introduction, depending on the county's process, the chair refers the matter to the appropriate committee. The board then considers the matter once the committee has acted upon it. If the board considers the matter and it appears more study is needed, the body can *Commit* or *Refer* the matter to committee.

The motion to *Commit* or *Refer* should specify the committee and could attach instructions. The instructions can specify when the committee should meet, when to report back, if experts should be consulted, or any other orders.

It is important to remember that committees are a subunit of the board and therefore take direction from the parent body. The committee should consider all questions raised by the main body. Once the matter has been referred to committee, the committee is free to make amendments as well as recommendations regarding approval or denial of the matter. The committee is not bound by any amendments or debate that occurred at the board meeting.

The motion to *Commit* or *Refer*:

- ❖ Takes precedence over the main motion, Postpone Indefinitely and to Amend (the main motion);
- ❖ Yields to Postpone Definitely, Limit or Extend Limits of Debate, Previous Question, Lay on the Table and Amend (when applied to it);

- ❖ Can be applied to main motions with any amendments that may be pending;
- ❖ Cannot be Postponed Indefinitely;
- ❖ Is out of order when another member has the floor;
- ❖ Must be seconded;
- ❖ Is debatable; however, debate must be limited to the advisability of referring the matter to committee and cannot go into the merits of the main question;
- ❖ Is amendable;
- ❖ Requires a majority vote;
- ❖ Can be Reconsidered if approved and can be Reconsidered or Renewed if defeated, only after significant progress in debate has occurred.

Robert's Rules of Order suggests that a motion to *Commit* or *Refer* that is obviously absurd or unreasonable, should be ruled out of order as dilatory. Such might be the case if the pending question is time sensitive or would have the effect of defeating the purpose of the main motion.

If the committee fails to act and the board wants to take action on the matter, the board can bring the matter back with a motion to *Discharge the Committee*.

Generally speaking, when a resolution or ordinance makes its way through the committee process, the board adopts the committee recommendation. When that does not happen and the board performs committee work on the board floor, it is time to send it back to committee. The motion to *Commit* or *Refer* allows a committee to discuss the matter more freely without adhering to all of the rules governing the main body.

Source: *Robert's Rules of Order Newly Revised, 11th Edition*