



# How to Make a Motion



**MICHIGAN ECONOMIC  
DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION**

## *What you will learn:*

*The importance of motions*

*The different components  
of a motion*

*How to make a motion*

Motions are the permanent record of official actions taken at a meeting. Discussion, deliberation or consensus provide the rationale for decisions and become a part of the record. Robust deliberation (fact finding) is important; it helps a commissioner develop a well-crafted, legally defensible motion.

The motion should state the conclusion, and the rationale for the conclusion, and indicate how the facts support the decision reached. In some communities, discussion of the issue, if thoroughly documented in the minutes, may be adequate to provide enough information to comply with the standards of the ordinance. Otherwise, a summary of the discussion is appropriate.

In some communities, staff or legal counsel prepares a motion or several motions in advance with space for additions/deletions. This is not a recommended practice, since it implies that decisions were determined prior to the public meeting.

## **HINT**

If the case is complex, like a site plan, or special land use approval, take notes while deliberating. Then when you make a motion to approve or deny, your facts and conditions are ready to be integrated into the motion.

A motion includes the following parts:

- A maker
- A description of the request (type of request, case number, address/location)

## What the Law Says:

### The Michigan Zoning Enabling Act:

#### Site Plans

A decision rejecting, approving, or conditionally approving a site plan shall be based upon requirements and standards contained in the zoning ordinance, other statutorily authorized and properly adopted local unit of government planning documents, other applicable ordinances, and state and federal statutes.

#### Special Land Uses

The body or official designated to review and approve special land uses may deny, approve, or approve with conditions a request for special land use approval. The decision on a special land use shall be incorporated in a statement of findings and conclusions relative to the special land use which specifies the basis for the decision and any conditions imposed.

- The type of action being taken (approval, approval with conditions, denial, tabling, postponing)
- Why is this action being taken (how the standards for approval have or have not been met)
- Any conditions attached.
- Support. The motion must have a second or support otherwise the motion dies for lack of a second.

important to have the clerk or secretary read back the motion so the entire commission understands what they are voting on.

In most cases, a simple majority of the commission is required to pass a motion.

Remember that motions must withstand legal scrutiny. A motion is made and supported before it is discussed. Sometimes, another commissioner may want to add a condition to the main motion. Some communities require that the main motion can only be changed with a new motion, strictly following Robert's Rules of Parliamentary Procedure.

Other communities allow "friendly amendments," provided that the maker and seconder of the motion are in agreement with the change. In the case of friendly amendments, if the maker and seconder don't agree, then a new motion (amending first one) is the next step.

Once discussion concludes, the chair should confirm that everyone is clear on the motion before the vote proceeds. With particularly complex cases, it is

### **Deny or Not Approve—What is the difference?**

What happens if the case/project doesn't meet the standards for approval and must be denied or not approved? Communities handle these types of votes differently. Check with staff to find out if your community's custom is to always make motions in the positive and then vote "no" on the case or if the community's custom is to move to deny in which case a "yes" vote means you are in favor of the denial. If your staff person isn't sure, check with your municipal or township attorney. Either way, you want to make sure everyone understands what their yes or no vote means.

This tear sheet was developed by the Michigan Association of Planning (MAP) for the Michigan Economic Development Corporation (MEDC). The Michigan Association of Planning is a 501 c 3 organization, dedicated to promoting sound community planning that benefits the residents of Michigan. MAP was established in 1945 to achieve a desired quality of life through comprehensive community planning that includes opportunities for a variety of lifestyles and housing, employment, commercial activities, and cultural and recreational amenities.

