

Stepping Down vs Abstaining

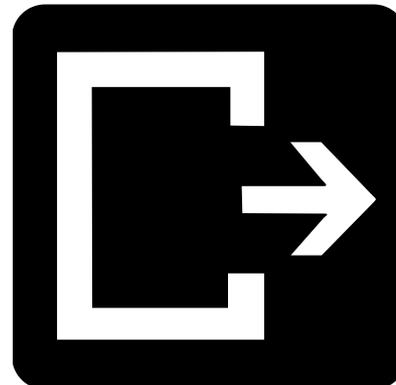
An easy guide to difficult questions.

Note: Quotes are from the “Robert’s Rules of Order”

Stepping Down

Definition/Action:

- Person steps down from the position temporarily as a board member
- Person must leave the room*



Question: When should I step down?

- Conflict of Interest
- Possible Financial Gain from the Project

*Exception Example:

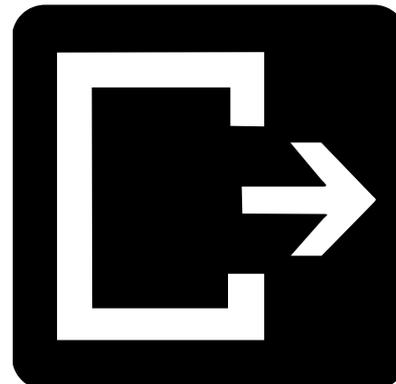
A board member is the landscape architect or the historical consultant for a project. The board member would then step down from his/her position on the board, but would stay in the room in order to present and/or answer questions.

Stepping Down

Member Makes a Statement:

1. During the General Business Announcements; and
2. After the Chair introduces the item to be reviewed so that it is clear to the applicant why the board member is leaving the room.

“Mr./Madam Chair, I am stepping down from this item.”



Abstaining

Definition/Action:

- Board member abstains from commenting and voting on the project, but may ask questions.
- Board member remains seated in his/her usual place at the table/daises or, per normal practice, may choose to move to a different part of the room in order to view the presentation on the wall screen better.



Abstaining

Questions

Question: When should I abstain?

- Not present at a previous review and
- Has not reviewed the project's meeting **video, plans and minutes.**

Question: Do I count as part of a quorum if I'm abstaining?

- Yes.

Question: Do I count in the vote if I'm abstaining?

- No: *"...Abstentions do not count in tallying the vote..."*

Abstaining

Questions continued

Question: If I don't count in the vote when I abstain, how does the vote get tallied?

• "...*The basic requirement for adoption of a motion by any assembly with a quorum is a Majority Vote [...]. A Majority is 'more than half' of the votes cast by persons legally entitled to vote, excluding blank votes and abstentions.*"

Example:

There are nine members on the board, but one is absent, three are stepping down and one is abstaining. $9 \text{ members} - (4 \text{ out of room} + 1 \text{ abstaining}) = 4 \text{ members}$ are entitled to vote.

There is still a quorum for purposes of reviewing the item, but the majority vote would have to be three members or more in order for the motion to pass ($\text{half of } 4 \text{ plus } 1 = 3$).

Abstaining

Member Makes a Statement:

- During the General Business Announcements; and
- After the Chair introduces the item to be reviewed so that it is clear to the applicant.

“Mr./Madam Chair, I am staying for purposes of becoming familiar with the project, but I will be abstaining from voting on this item.”



Abstaining

REMINDER

According to [www..robertsrules.com](http://www.robertsrules.com) frequently asked questions:

Question 6:

Do abstention votes count?

Answer:

The phrase "abstention votes" is an oxymoron, an abstention being a refusal to vote. To abstain means to refrain from voting, and, as a consequence, there can be no such thing as an "abstention vote."

Clearly, under Robert's Rules of Order Newly Revised, section 4, (page 44 in my version) a failure to cast a vote on a question is an abstention:

The chair should not ask for abstentions in taking a vote, since the number of members who respond to such a call are meaningless. To "abstain" means not to vote at all; therefore, if a member does not respond if "abstentions" are called for, it would still be abstaining just as much as one who responds to that effect.

Question: How, then, should a chair handle abstentions?

See next slide

Abstaining

The Chair's Role

Question: How should a chair handle abstentions?

- When a board member states that he/she is abstaining:
"All those in favor? All those opposed? Commissioner(s) _____ abstain(s)."
- Even if the board member that is abstaining does not state so, and the chair knows ahead of time that the member is abstaining:
"All those in favor? All those opposed? Commissioner _____ abstains."

Abstaining

Staff's Role

Question: What can Staff do to assist the Chair?

- When Staff sees that a member simply does not vote for or against a project, Staff needs to confirm whether the board member is abstaining or voting:

“Mr./Madam Chair,

Is Commissioner _____ abstaining from voting?”

or

“Mr./Madam Chair,

May I confirm Commissioner _____ 's vote on this item?”

In Conclusion

Stepping Down:

- Leave the Room
- Conflict of Interest
- Possible Financial Gain

Abstaining:

- Unfamiliar with a Previous Review
- Stay in the Room
- Ask Questions to Familiarize Yourself with the Project
- Exclude Yourself from Commenting and Voting

Stepping Down vs Abstaining

Questions for staff?

Gabriela Feliciano, HLC Commission Secretary