



What's a Snippet? Glad you asked! A Snippet is short article about meetings or parliamentary procedure. New snippets are released on the first day of every month at www.agreatmeeting.com.



Snippet #178 Withdrawing Motions

When you were a child and played games with other children, sometimes there were differences of opinion on how to play the game. If that difference wasn't resolved, the child who brought the game pieces might simply pick up the game and go home. It's not that easy for the person who makes a motion at a meeting.

When a motion is made, it begins the motion process. The second is obtained and the motion is stated by the chair. At that point the ownership of the motion is transferred to the assembly, which might be a board, house of delegates, or members. The person who made the motion is no longer in control of the motion. This means that other members can propose amendments for consideration and adoption, modifying the motion. Although the maker can disagree and vote against them, he does not have veto power to refuse consideration of amendments, and he can't take his motion and go home. Once the motion is stated, everyone owns an equal piece in what to do with it.

For some reason, people take making a motion very personally and have problems with the idea that their motion might not get the votes it needs. If they see a motion running into difficulty, they might prefer to remove it from consideration rather than watch it fail. If the discussion has progressed to the point at which debate has revealed this discontent, it's too late for the maker to withdraw the motion without permission. Only until the chair finishes stating the motion can the maker control its fate.

It is also at this moment that friendly – or not so friendly – amendments can get made that can complicate the process. If the friendly amendment is made before the chair has placed the motion on the floor, and if it is acceptable to the maker, the motion is thus modified, even if the member who seconded the motion withdraws the second. The person who made the friendly amendment has in effect supplied the second. However, when a motion has been causing angst, other members often want to see the motion go away as much as the maker. Even if there are amendments pending, all the maker need do is ask for permission to withdraw the motion. The chair then simply uses general consent by asking if there is any objection to the withdrawal. If there is no objection, the motion is withdrawn by general consent, and the amendments or other pending motions go away with it.

But things aren't always neat and clean. If the idea of withdrawal hasn't occurred to the maker, any member can request that the maker withdraw the motion. If the maker agrees, the chair can consider this as a request and a second, and the chair can proceed to ask if there is any objection. Or, if there is objection to the request for withdrawal, the chair simply states the question on granting permission for withdrawal. Because it is procedural, it is not debatable and requires a majority vote to grant permission.

On the other hand, if the maker refuses to withdraw the motion, the matter is closed. The assembly can't force the withdrawal against the maker's will. Instead, a different method must be used, such as postpone indefinitely which, by majority vote, allows the assembly to set the motion aside and take no action. In that sense, the maker still has a bit of limited control with regard to this motion.

All that's left is to document the decisions. It would make no sense to withdraw a motion, yet see it come back to life in the minutes. It was never decided, therefore it was not an action of the assembly. Thus, withdrawn motions are not recorded in the minutes. But wait – there's more. If the underlying motion was the subject of another action that appeared in a previous set of minutes or a notice, such as having been postponed from an earlier meeting or made the special order for a meeting – enough information to show its disposal must be included in the minutes at which the motion was withdrawn to show the final action on the motion.