



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 #102 Consent Agendas

(Picking the Low-Hanging Fruit)

Not all decisions are equal. Some are routine and non-controversial, while others require more deliberation. Some decisions in a meeting are simply awaiting final approval, having been discussed at prior meetings. Wouldn't it be nice to "pick the low hanging fruit" at the start of the meeting so that the rest of the time can be devoted to more difficult decisions? A consent agenda is a great way to dispose of routine or uncontroversial matters quickly and easily. It's a simple process, but care must be taken to preserve the members' rights and prevent confusion by choosing appropriate items for the consent agenda. The process takes 4 simple steps.

1. The consent agenda is compiled by the chair, secretary and staff when the agenda for the meeting is designed. Only items that are very likely to be adopted without the need for additional debate or amendments should be placed on the consent agenda. Each item is numbered, and for every item an alternate location is identified on the regular agenda. Your consent agenda might look like this:
 1. Approval of Betty Baker as chair of the bylaws committee
 2. Approval of the Rainbow Supper Club as the location for the annual banquet
 3. Approval of minutes of last month's meeting
 4. Set dates for delegate training: 3/12, 4/20, 5/17
 5. Authorize board chair to contact local police for safety workshop at annual carnival.
2. At the beginning of the meeting, the chair calls up the consent agenda and asks if anyone wants to remove anything from the list. Items that are *not* removed are adopted en bloc (all at once) without separate debate or vote. Because of this unusual circumstance, any item can be removed on demand of just one member. Members do not need recognition, they can simply call out the number they want removed. For example, if someone wanted to propose a change to a training date from 5/17 to 5/21, the item would have to be removed from the consent agenda. He would simply call out "Number 4." The chair then responds by saying "Number 4 is removed." The person does not need to give any reason for removing an item from the consent agenda. In essence, the chair is asking if there is unanimous approval for all of the items on the list. If an item is pulled, the chair proceeds to announce when it will be taken up, using the alternate location already identified when the consent agenda was compiled.
3. When there are no more items to be removed, the chair takes the vote by general consent by stating that, if there is no objection, the remaining items are adopted. Although a binding action, there is no need for a traditional voice vote, because it can safely be assumed that anyone who would vote against an item had it pulled when the consent agenda was called up.
4. If necessary, items that were removed from the consent agenda are taken up separately at the prior-determined location on the agenda.

The consent agenda is not suited for every meeting – if you don't have at least three items you won't save any time. It's also very important for everyone to understand their roles in the process. Putting together a consent agenda requires careful thought as to whether or not the item is truly appropriate for decision by this method. Members or directors are responsible for studying the items that have been placed on the consent agenda and being ready to pull or agree to each.

The consent agenda is like any other tool – available to you if and when you need it to pick the low hanging fruit!