MAJORITY VOTE VS. CONSENSUS

The bylaws of many clubs dictate that all meetings shall adhere to Robert’s Rules of Order and there are many reasons why this is problematic. One of them is that Robert’s calls for votes where obviously, the majority wins.

While much of our society seems to thrive on the win-lose construct and the concepts of collaboration and consensus have in some halls become anathema, this majority-rules approach is not necessarily the best model for decision-making in a member-owned club. A well-constructed board will host members with disparate views and if they are confronting the high-level issues the board should be focused upon, there will almost always be dissenters. Labeling them the contrarians dismisses the value they and their opinions bring to the table. More often than not, seriously considering their positions and seeking consensus, defined as “general agreement” or “harmony” will help the board arrive at a decision that is better, that is, better than if the board ignores these opposing views and calls for a majority vote.

The challenge comes in finding the position that achieves general agreement. When more than one position is being strongly advocated, the presiding officer should recognize the opportunity to work towards a better option, not to be confused with a middle-of-the-road, weak, or watered-down option.

Consider asking these questions:

- How do these options comport with our values, principles, and goals? (It might be helpful to review them aloud)
- What are the ramifications (pro and con) of our positions on the relevant stake-holders and on the club’s long-term health? (The higher the stakes, the more important consensus is)
- Are there facts that we have not considered? (Whether or not they are currently available)
- Can you be satisfied with this outcome?
- What modifications can we make to increase your satisfaction?
- What modifications can we make to increase your fellow board-member’s satisfaction? (Sometimes, members on the other side of the issue have the solution and need to be invited to bring it forward)

When decisions are being made at your board meeting, consider changing the last of the four traditional elements: motion, second, discussion, and vote, from “vote” to “agreement”. Subsequently, the decision would be documented in the minutes as, “The Board agrees that...”