

Practical Procedure: Three Subsidiary Motions that Suspend Debate



Motion	Related Rules	Primary Purpose	Comments and Cautions
Lay on the table	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Must be seconded • Is not debatable • Is not amendable • Requires a majority vote 	To put aside a question temporarily to allow the board to deal with a more urgent matter	<p>The motion “to lay on the table” can never be qualified as to when the motion will come back before the board.</p> <p>A tabled motion will come back before the board only if and when a motion is adopted to “take (or lift) the motion from the table.”</p> <p>There is a time-limit on taking a motion from the table: at the same meeting at which it was originally tabled, or the next regular meeting.</p> <p>A motion not taken from the table within this timeframe “falls from the table” and must be reintroduced as a new motion.</p>
Postpone definitely or postpone to a definite time	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Must be seconded • Is debatable • Is amendable • Requires a majority vote 	To put aside a question to a specific, future time	<p>A board may postpone consideration of a question for a number of reasons: to obtain more information, to allow more time for debate, to ensure all voices are heard, etc.</p> <p>A postponed motion should appear as an item of business on a future meeting agenda, once the condition of postponement has been met.</p>
Postpone indefinitely	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Must be seconded • Is debatable • Is not amendable • Requires a majority vote 	To suppress a question without debate	<p>A board may postpone indefinitely consideration of a question that a majority believes should never have come before the board.</p> <p>Examples of questions that may be postponed indefinitely include those for which either an affirmative or negative vote have undesirable consequences, a question that is somehow embarrassing, or a question that falls outside the board’s mandate.</p> <p>If used too frequently or unnecessarily, the motion to postpone indefinitely may be seen as an attempt to stifle debate.</p>

¹Debate may go into the merits of the main question before the board