

Stevens and Permanente Creeks Watershed Council Executive Committee By Laws

1. An executive committee of no more than seven (including the Council Executive Director, Chair, Secretary, Streamkeeper, and Treasurer) will be responsible for developing the proposed agenda and for discussing proposals before bringing them to the Council for approval. Each committee member will perform their duty based on a position description for each committee function.
2. Decisions will be made by consensus (see **Consensus** attached.) Decisions will be made only when a quorum is present at meetings (defined as more than half of the members)
3. When consensus cannot be reached, after trying all steps outlined below, a voting method will be employed (see **Voting Method** attached.)
4. When a quorum is not present, the proposed decision will be shared with the Executive Committee membership via email, for comment and discussion, and if not time sensitive, a final decision will be made at the next meeting.
5. Time sensitive decisions between Executive Committee meetings will be discussed via email. If a consensus is reached by 100% of the committee, a synopsis of the opinions expressed and the decision made will be emailed to all members. If no obvious consensus is reached, a conference call or emergency meeting will be held.
6. All members may propose agenda items, and new projects or policies.

Consensus

Definition of consensus: *"A state of mutual agreement among members of a group where all legitimate concerns of individuals have been addressed to the satisfaction of the group."* (from Rules for Reaching Consensus: A Modern Approach to Decision Making)

Effective consensus decisions share the following characteristics:

1. Decisions are made by mutual agreement - Members don't vote; but modify options or seek alternatives until everyone agrees that the best decision has been reached.
2. Total participation - All major interests are identified and brought together.
3. Members educate each other - They spend time discussing the history of the issue, their perceptions and concerns, and ideas for solutions.
4. Members keep their own groups and the rest of the people who live in the watershed informed.
5. Members discuss and agree on a constructive definition of a problem.
6. Members do not assume that someone must win and someone must lose when discussion reaches stalemate - look for the next-most-acceptable alternative for all parties.
7. Members do not change their mind simply to avoid conflict and to reach agreement and harmony.

8. Members are responsible for implementation - The group identifies ways to implement solutions.

Steps to Reaching Consensus

1. **Presentation**

The proposal is presented as clearly as possible by its author.

2. **Clarifying Questions**

Questions are asked by anyone about the proposal to make sure that everyone understands it before you discuss it.

3. **Discussion**

The proposal is discussed. Possible amendments to the proposal are made. The author(s) always reserves the right to alter the proposal as s/(t)he(y) see fit. *Differences of opinion are natural and expected and will ensure greater likelihood of an adequate solution. Seek them out and try to involve everyone in the decision process.*

4. **Take general feelings on the proposal**

These can be registered through a "round robin" where all members verbalize or use a signal (such as thumbs up/middle/down) to express their opinion of the proposal. This can be used to modify the original proposal, consider going forth with a vote, or scrapping it altogether..

5. **Call for Major Objection or Strong Concern**

A single *major objection* blocks the proposal from passing. If you have a major objection it means that you cannot live with the proposal if it passes. It is so objectionable to you/those you represent that you will stop the proposal from passing. A major objection isn't an "I don't really like it" or an "I liked the other idea better." It is an "I cannot live with this **proposal** if it passes, and here's why ... !" A *strong concern* does not block the passing of a proposal, but it is a public statement of why you dislike it (so you can say 'I told you so!' later.). All strong concerns are written in the minutes of the meeting or otherwise recorded by the group note-taker.

6. **Is the Proposal Adopted?**

- a. If the feelings of the group are generally positive and there are no major objections, then the proposal passes. (When agreement seems to come too quickly and easily, be suspicious, explore the reasons and be sure that everyone accepts the solution for similar reasons.)
- b. If the group feelings are generally negative, the proposal doesn't pass.
- c. If general feelings are positive, but someone has a strong concern, the proposal passes, but the concern is documented in the minutes.
- d. If general feelings are positive, but someone has a major objection to the proposal, the proposal doesn't pass.
- e. If the group feelings are mixed, not generally positive or negative, discussion continues, or the proposal is tabled until the next meeting, or until more information is available.

7. **If discussion seems to be going on forever without the possibility of resolution, the group can:**

- a. Decide to drop the proposal;

- b. Attempt to break the proposal into pieces that can be individually agreed upon;
- c. Send the proposal to a 'reconciliation committee' - or perhaps the original author - for rewriting to work out the objections.

Voting Method

If no consensus can be reached, the Executive Committee may employ a voting method. The preferred voting method, assuming that the issue cannot be decided by consensus, requires a 75% majority for a decision to carry. Minutes recording Executive Committee decisions reached by a voting method must contain both the decision and any associated minority reports.

Minority Reports:

Executive Committee advocating the different viewpoint are responsible for writing the minority report(s). Minority reports must be no more than two pages in length and will be a part of the final decision. Minority reports are signed by the respective parties for record keeping and follow-up. The Executive Director must ensure that minority report(s) are attached to the decision in the official records of the Executive Committee. In addition, if the decision is not reached by consensus, the Executive Director should ensure that the section of the minutes discussing the issue and recording the vote is attached to the file as part of the official record. Individual Executive Committee members must ensure that minority report(s) are presented with the decision when they present it to external groups. A Voting Method decision is final and is not considered consensus.

Meeting Ground Rules

- 1) Maintain flexibility and a sense of humor
- 2) Be open and positive
- 3) Be brief
- 4) Be respectful
- 5) Maintain a "safe zone" where people can explore ideas
- 6) Listen to understand, seek overlap in ideas
- 7) Talk one at a time
- 8) Seek advice among members and outside experts
- 9) Take time to affirm good ideas, efforts
- 10) Recognize the legitimacy of other's goals and feelings
- 11) Take time for clarification
- 12) Avoid side conversations
- 13) Stay focused
- 14) Work towards consensus – to share common goals