



Town of Hopkinton office of Select Board

330 Main Street, Hopkinton, NH 03229-2627 - (603) 746-3170 – www.hopkinton-nh.gov

SELECT BOARD PUBLIC MEETING MINUTES

Hopkinton Town Hall – 330 Main Street,

Monday, December 9, 2025 - Approved

I. CALL TO ORDER:

Chair Sabrina Dunlap called the Budget Work Session to order at 5:34 PM. Chair Dunlap stated that the meeting was recorded and convened as the final budget work session for the 2026 budget cycle.

Select Board Members Present: Chair Sabrina Dunlap, Steven Whitley, Victoria Bram (remote), Alyssa McKeon, and Jeffrey Donohoe.

Ms. Bram joined in person at 6:46 PM.

Staff Present: Karen Hambleton, Town Administrator, Kelly Henley, Finance Director, and Thomas Hennessey, Police Chief.

Chair Dunlap motioned to allow the remote participation of Ms. Bram. The motion was seconded by Mr. Whitley and unanimously approved by roll call vote.

Sabrina Dunlap	Yes
Steven Whitley	Yes
Jeffrey Donohoe	Yes
Alyssa McKeon	Yes

II. ADMINISTRATIVE (2:39)

i. Approval of Consent Agenda (03)

TOWN OF HOPKINTON - SELECT BOARD			
CONSENT AGENDA			
9-Dec-25			
ITEM	DATE	ACTION	COMMENT
AP MANIFEST			
AP MANIFEST DATED 12-08-2025	12/9/2025	APPROVE	\$82,627.66
EMPLOYEE PAYROLL DATED			
DIRECT DEPOSIT:			
PAYROLL CHECKS:			
PREVIOUSLY APPROVED - NO ACTION NEEDED			
OTHER			

Mr. Whitley made a motion to approve the Consent agenda. The motion was seconded by Ms. McKeon and approved by a roll call vote.

Sabrina Dunlap	Yes
Steven Whitley	Yes
Jeffrey Donohoe	Yes
Alyssa McKeon	Yes
Victoria Bram	Abstain

ii. Approval of the Public Meeting Minutes November 17, 2025 (04A)

Mr. Whitley made a motion to approve the Public Meeting Minutes of November 17, 2025. The motion was seconded by Mr. Donohoe and approved by a roll call vote.

Sabrina Dunlap	Yes
Steven Whitley	Yes
Jeffrey Donohoe	Yes
Alyssa McKeon	Abstain
Victoria Bram	Yes

III. PUBLIC APPOINTMENTS (4:03)

Mr. David Feller, Chair of the Capital Improvement Program Committee (CIP), presented the CIP to the Board. He summarized the following key points. CIP Committee members Michael Foley and William Palizzolo were also present.

- The charge and mission of the Capital Improvement Program Committee and the state statutory basis for the Capital Improvement Program (CIP).
- Capital Projects are defined as:
 - A gross cost of at least \$10,000; and
 - A useful life of at least 5 years; and
 - Is non-recurring (not an annual budget item); OR
 - Any project requiring bond financing.
- Ms. Hambleton and her staff were invaluable and supportive in developing this year's CIP.
- This is the first year that the CIP Committee became actively involved with the School District.
- The CIP Committee has reviewed all requests and met with the appropriate Department Heads as necessary. The recommended appropriations to cover these requests are \$1,320,000. This figure is exactly equal to the anticipated amount in last year's "plan". This recommendation represents a 5.1% over last year's \$1,256,000.
- The CIP Committee further recommends an appropriation into the Maintenance Trust (Non-CIP) of \$130,000. Again, this figure is exactly equal to the anticipated amount that was in last year's "plan". This recommendation represents a 9.7% over last year's \$118,500.
- One objective of the CIP Committee is to plan long-term to avoid significant spending spikes in any given year. Reductions this year would result in higher increases in subsequent years.

- Field maintenance is provided in two areas and needs to be corrected.
- Bonds must be shown in the CIP, but do not impact the bottom line and are for informational purposes only.
- The only way to decrease the appropriation is to reduce spending.
- The appropriations are voted on at the Town Meeting.

The Board discussed migrating recurring items into the operating budget. Ms. Hambleton noted that if items are included in the operating budget, the funding is lost and not reserved for recurring items that may be higher in some years than others. The Board discussed whether the CIP should review the maintenance trusts.

The following slides were summarized.

CIP COMMITTEE LONG-TERM APPROPRIATIONS

	2025	2026	2027	2028	2029	2030	2031	2032	2033	2034	2035	2036	2037	2038	2039	2040	2041	2042	2043	2044
TOTAL CIP Appropriations	1,256	1,320	1,596	1,809	1,921	2,441	2,408	2,255	2,169	2,172	2,135	2,128	2,165	2,176	2,111	2,115	2,118	2,121	2,124	2,127
% Increase		5.1%	20.9%	13.3%	6.2%	27.1%	-1.4%	-6.4%	-3.8%	0.1%	-1.7%	-0.4%	1.8%	0.5%	-3.0%	0.2%	0.1%	0.1%	0.1%	0.1%
TOTAL Maintenance Trust Appropriations	119	130	126	127	127	137	137	137	137	147	147	142	142	147	147	147	147	157	162	150
% Increase		9.7%	-3.5%	1.0%	0.2%	8.0%	-0.1%	0.0%	0.0%	7.3%	0.0%	-3.7%	0.0%	3.5%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	6.8%	3.2%	-7.1%

Bucket Illustration

Appropriations – Fill the Bucket and are approved at the Annual Town Meeting
 Expenditures – Remove \$\$ from the Bucket and are approved by the Select Board

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**SELECT BOARD QUESTIONS / CONCERNS
MEETING OF NOVEMBER 24, 2025**

- **CIP Plan:**
 - Cemetery "Fund" balance is \$6,125. No further allocation and no planned expenditures.
 - Fire Department - Forestry Truck - \$95,000, needed? Yes, this is the main truck. Moving forward the other Forestry Truck may not be needed. Yes, there is space for both vehicles.
 - Town Hall Renovations – Generator sized to accommodate the new expansion, if we cut the appropriations here the increase will just be pushed off to add to the increase in future years. This is exactly why the CIP is established. The only way to reduce it is to cut actual planned expenditures.
 - Transfer Station – Trailer expenditure & sale could be offset by the need for replacing/repairing the Landfill Cap
 - Roads & Bridges – Yellow highlight is simply to emphasize the importance of the East Penacook Road Bridge.
 - Recreation Facilities – Track Project, supposed to be a project split between 3 parties (Town, School, Public). This is not on the other party's plan.
 - Bathrooms – the column that is appears in shows that it is planned.
 - Purple = new requests, Green simply means a reallocation of appropriations from one category to another.
 - Bond Payments are for illustration purposes ONLY. NOT included in appropriations. Required to be included per RSA. Current expenditures for engineering studies(?)
 - \$226,000 increase (this does NOT include Bond Payments) – largely driven by Transfer Station and Sludge Removal projects and Roads & Bridges
- **Maintenance Trust:**
 - Fire Department Radio's have been removed from the CIP Plan and moved to the Maintenance Trust. This is part of last years recommendation as a move to more transparency. Perhaps this expenditure should be moved to the Operating Budget.
 - Inconsistencies of departments using this fund versus operating budgets.
 - Payroll Liability Trust Fund – Need to allow a fund or change the policy Increase to get up to \$20,000?
 - This was a result of the Police department Budget having to pay out a large amount of accumulated paid time off upon the retirement of an employee.
 - Human Services Trust Fund – Balance \$29,125 with no further appropriations and no planned expenditures.
 - Recreation Facilities MT –
 - Roofs – To be added... waiting for estimates from Karen and Dan.
 - Earmarked/Unspent column is meant to show that this amount will be spent in the remainder of this year or will be spent in 2026
 - \$11,500 increase
 - Houston Barn – Maintenance or CIP? No Facilities Trust in the CIP?
 - Bigger question is why are there so many separate funds?? Can these be combined? Specific purpose? Change for next years Warrant?

Fire Department Forestry Truck.

Mr. Feller explained that he would like to address the concerns raised by the Select Board in their prior meeting. He said that the CIP Committee spends a great deal of time reviewing the Fire Department requests. Mr. Palizzolo is a former firefighter and provided valuable insight into the Fire Department's needs. The proposed Forestry truck is the largest equipped truck in the Fire Department and is needed. Ms. Bram asked why a Forestry Truck is required, and Mr. Palizzolo explained that a Forestry Truck is typically a heavy-duty pickup truck, such as an F-250, with a water tank and a forestry hose, which is much smaller in diameter, used for firefighting in remote areas. He stated that this truck is not just for forestry; it could also be used to access a home or cabin in the woods that a large truck cannot reach. The Board raised questions about the need for two trucks. Mr. Palizzolo explained that one unit is sufficient if the new, better-equipped truck is purchased. Mr. Palizzolo indicated that the Forest 1 truck would not be sold until the end of its useful life, but would likely not be replaced.

Appropriation Strategy

Questions were raised about the year-over-year appropriation of funding without a clear timeline for when projects will be funded; the Town Hall Renovation Project was cited as an example. Mr. Feller explained that the list of projects is what will be funded and that decisions are made every year about what the priorities are, and “solve” for the lowest number,” and that if an appropriation is removed, there is a project that will not get funded, or bonding would be required to fund projects. Discussion ensued regarding yearly variations in the appropriation, large, anticipated appropriations for upcoming years, and unexpected expenditures, including the following:

- Culvert/Bridge Replacements identified on the State Municipal Red list.
- Sludge Removal and Septage Lagoon Cleanup
- Trailer Purchases
- Landfill Cap repair
- School Track Project
- Field Maintenance
- Athletic Field Bathrooms
- Bond payments (Mr. Feller noted that RSA requires those to be represented in the CIP, but they are not part of the appropriation or expenditure calculations and are just provided for information.

Maintenance Trust.

Mr. Feller indicated that several Fire Department items had been moved to the maintenance trust as they had a useful life of under five years and were less than \$10,000. He explained that a decision was made not to include these in the operating budget at this time, but to revisit the decision later. This, he noted, would affect the operating budget, and any unspent funds would not be reserved for future recurring purchases. The Board discussed reviewing this policy in January and establishing a consistent framework for all departments.

Payroll Liability Trust Fund. The Board discussed how unpaid vacation should be budgeted for and expended for employees leaving service who are entitled to payment for unused vacation. The Board agreed to fund \$2,000 into the Payroll Liability Trust until such a longer-term strategy can be developed. Mr. Feller suggested that all trust funds should be reviewed to understand their purpose and potential for elimination.

Houston Barn. The Board discussed plans to repair the Housing Barn, including a new roof (already completed), installation of a sprinkler system, and new siding.

IV. OTHER (50:32)

i. Dustin Conservation Easement (08).

Rob Knight from the Conservation Commission/Open Space Committee addressed the Board and requested approval of the Dustin Conservation Easement agreement. The Board discussed approving roles in the event that the Five Rivers Conservation Trust is dissolved.

Mr. Donohoe made a motion to approve the agreement as amended. The motion was seconded by Mr. Whitley and unanimously approved by a roll call vote.

Sabrina Dunlap	Yes
Steven Whitley	Yes
Jeffrey Donohoe	Yes
Alyssa McKeon	Yes
Victoria Bram	Yes

ii. Tax Anticipation Note – authorize and sign (11)

Mr. Donohoe made a motion to authorize Select Board Chair Sabrina Dunlap and Treasurer Joel Moyer to apply for and approve securing a tax anticipation note for 30 days, in the amount of \$3 million at a fixed interest rate of 4.5% through Merrimack County Savings Bank. The motion was seconded by Ms. McKeon and unanimously approved by a roll call vote.

Sabrina Dunlap	Yes
Steven Whitley	Yes
Jeffrey Donohoe	Yes
Alyssa McKeon	Yes
Victoria Bram	Yes

iii. Re-sign Flood Insurance Study and Flood Insurance Rate Map Resolution (07)

FEMA has updated the required language for this resolution since the Board first discussed this in their November 24th meeting.

Mr. Whitley made the following motion:

Pursuant to RSA 67457 by resolution of the Select Board, all lands designated as special flood hazard areas by the Federal Emergency Management Agency in its flood insurance study for the County of Merrimack, New Hampshire, dated January 23rd, 2026, together with the associated flood insurance rate map panels, dated April 19, 2010, and January 23rd, 2026, Town Of Hopkinton: are declared to be part of the Town of Hopkinton's zoning ordinance and are hereby incorporated by reference.

The motion was seconded by Ms. McKeon and unanimously approved by a roll call vote.

Sabrina Dunlap	Yes
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Steven Whitley	Yes
Jeffrey Donohoe	Yes
Alyssa McKeon	Yes
Victoria Bram	Yes

iv. Ambulance Billing Rates (10)

Ms. Hambleton presented the following ambulance rates for consideration:

BLS EMERGENCY BASE RATE	\$1,505.30
ALS1 EMERGENCY BASE RATE	\$1,787.57
ALS2 EMERGENCY BASE RATE	\$2,587.26
MILEAGE	\$29.54
NON-COVERED MILEAGE	\$29.54

Mr. Whitley made a motion to adopt the Ambulance billing rates as presented, effective January 1, 2026. The motion was seconded by Ms. McKeon and unanimously approved by a roll call vote.

Sabrina Dunlap	Yes
Steven Whitley	Yes
Jeffrey Donohoe	Yes
Alyssa McKeon	Yes
Victoria Bram	Yes

v. Municipal Solid Waste Removal (12)

Ms. Hambleton summarized the companies she contacted regarding contract consideration and noted that Waste Management offered the best option for the town.

Mr. Donohoe made a motion enter into the waste management contract for the next 5 years for waste management disposal. The motion was seconded by Ms. McKeon and unanimously approved by a roll call vote.

Sabrina Dunlap	Yes
Steven Whitley	Yes
Jeffrey Donohoe	Yes
Alyssa McKeon	Yes
Victoria Bram	Yes

vi. Repair of Transfer Station Cap (13)

Ms. Hambleton explained that she had received a broad estimate of \$800,000 from the Nobis Group to repair the cracked cap at the Hopkinton-Webster Landfill. The Board requested a deferral of action until Public Works Director Dan Blanchette was available to discuss. The Board asked Ms. Hambleton to research the original agreement with the Town of Warner for landfill maintenance so they could contribute to repairs in accordance with its terms.

vii. Discuss/Set Tax Rate (09)

Ms. Hambleton summarized the process for setting the tax rate, noting the following key steps.

- The Budget Committee finalizes the budget and it is submitted to the Department of Revenue (MS-737).
- The Town votes on the proposed budget at the Town Meeting, which will officially set the appropriation for the year.
- The Town's overall assessment is estimated as of April 1st, taking into account the value of all properties, and any credits and exemptions.
- In the fall, the revenues are estimated for the entire year.
- The tax rate is set based on appropriations, less the revenues, divided by the assessment.
- Prior to the tax rate being set, both the estimated revenues and the Town's assessment are reviewed with the Department of Revenue. This allows for adjustment of any last-minute items, such as the Rooms and Meals Distribution.
- Following the review with the Department of Revenue, a preliminary tax rate is generated.
- The Select Board decides if they would like to use a portion of the fund balance to offset the tax rate.
- For 2025, every \$50,000 of fund balance used equates to a reduction in the tax rate by approximately 3.5 cents.

Fund Balance Considerations

Ms. Hambleton stated that her original recommendation was to use \$200,000 of the cash balance to lower the tax rate. She explained that she has reconsidered that recommendation in light of the expected landfill cap expense. She stated that her revised recommendation is not to offset the tax rate with fund balance in favor of utilizing the fund balance to strengthen the Town's cash position in light of the large series of expenses anticipated in 2026, particularly the landfill cap repair. Ms. Hambleton summarized the 2025 approvals and expenditures. Chair Dunlap stated that the state recommends a minimum fund balance of 5%, and that the Town is currently at 8%. The Board discussed the schedule and timing for utilization of the fund balance and its potential use for the East Penacook Culvert Replacement and the Landfill Cap Repair projects. Ms. Henley stated that a stronger fund balance also supports grant expenditures, which are typically reimbursable and require capital outlay at the outset. The Board discussed the fund balance's actual impact on the tax burden, noting that it is minimal and largely a gesture to the public.

Preliminary Tax Rate Considerations/Projections

Mr. Whitley asked if there was any sense about the "all in" impact on the tax rate. Ms. Hambleton stated that this will not be clear until the budget is set. Ms. Hambleton explained that it is too early to comfortably project. She noted there is a \$10 million proposed operating budget and an additional \$1.3 million in the CIP, that revenues are generally between \$4 and \$5 million, and in 2025, \$7.5 million was raised through taxation. Ms. Hambleton stated that funding for licenses, rooms, and meals remains unknown for this year. The Board acknowledged that the impact of using fund balance to reduce the tax rate would be minimal, given rising assessments, but also raised concerns about the Landfill Cap and the Culvert

project's potential impact on the overall budget, and whether these items might require a specific warrant article for funding.

Vicky Bram arrived in person at 6:43.

V. FINALIZATION OF THE 2026 SELECT BOARD BUDGET (1:28.49)

Ms. Hambleton drew the Board's attention to changes that were previously discussed, including the following:

- Executive Office Supplies: Reduce from \$8,500 (proposed) to \$7,500
- Computer Replacements: Reduce from \$20,000 (proposed) to \$18,000 (removing miscellaneous hardware from the line item). A discussion ensued on the need to clarify which computers have been replaced. Ms. Bram noted prior discussions in which the Board was informed that large-scale computer replacements were underway. Staff agreed to continue working to provide clarification on this item. The Board requested that staff review the invoices for computer purchases and provide that information to Ms. Bram before her presentation to the Budget Committee.
- Select Board Expenses: Reduce from \$10,000 (2025) to \$8,000.
- Preserving Vital Records: Maintain \$2,500
- Record Storage: Maintain funding at \$16,000 for record storage/ImageSilo.
- Planning Professional Services: Reduce from \$7,073 (proposed) to \$6,500.
- Personnel Administration: Provide \$100,000 for Personnel Administration (3% merit).
- Cemetery Professional Services: Decrease to \$36,825. Ground-Penetrating Radar (GPR) is deferred at this time.
- Police Department Office Supplies: The Board noted that this line item is showing a negative balance. Chief Hennessey indicated that the Town purchased jackets and returned them, and that the funds were credited to the wrong line item. The Board reduced the Police Dept Office Supply line from \$3,500 (2025) to \$3,000.
- Police Department Custodial Supplies: Increased from \$200 (2025) to \$500.
- Fire Department conferences and training: Reduce funding by \$500 to \$2,000.
- Trash Transport and Disposal: Increase from \$261,823 (2025) to \$339,200 to support the new contract with Waste Management.
- Hazardous Waste Day: Increase from \$15,000 (2025) to \$16,500 to support increased demand.
- Recreation Overtime: Increase by \$500 from \$1,000 (2025) to \$1,500 to reflect actual Lifeguard expense.
- Building and Grounds New Equipment: Increase from \$5,000 (2025) to \$10,500. A discussion ensued regarding unspent funding and anticipated expenses for Fire Station heating repairs, a box scraper, and a new zero-turn lawn mower.
- BOND/Sludge Removal from the Wastewater Treatment Plant: The Board discussed bond payments beginning in 2026 to service the \$712,000 debt.
- BOND/Septage Lagoon Closures at the Transfer Station: The Board discussed the \$33,432.71 in bond payments and their corresponding representation in the Capital Budget.
- Tax Anticipation Note (TAN). The Board discussed the short-term TAN loan and the anticipated interest accrued on it. Ms. Henley stated that she expects most tax bills to be paid upon receipt. Ms. Bram asked why the TAN was needed this year. Ms. Henley indicated that

the tax bills were delayed due to a delay in completing the MS-1s, as the assessor reports arrived late this year. Ms. Henley summarized the steps required before the tax bills can be issued, including setting the tax rate and generating the warrant.

Jeff Donohoe left the meeting at 8:05 pm.

Total Budget

The Board summarized that the total operating budget, based on the notations above, would be \$10,188,257.10, representing a \$429,156 change.

Economic Development Coordinator Position

Ms. Bram stated that she did not feel confident presenting this item to the Budget Committee without additional information. Ms. Bram noted that she had concerns about level-funding the position without a job description, and that the job description should be developed and the salary aligned with the position's expectations. Mr. Whitley stated that he understood the position would be level-funded, and the job description would be revised to align with the Economic Development Committee's mission and values. Ms. Bram stated that the current job description was more aspirational rather than focused on duties and responsibilities. Ms. Bram noted that the compensation appeared misaligned for a half-time position and was inconsistent with other staff salaries. Mr. Whitley stated that he anticipated sorting the job description out and hiring someone in May. Ms. Bram suggested prorating the allocated funding to the start date. Ms. Hambleton reminded the Board that the TIF partially funded the position and that the job description should include duties related to TIF development. Ms. Bram stated that she believes the conversation should shift to determining the position needed to meet the Town's needs. Ms. McKeon noted that she did not think there had been significant gains from the position and questioned whether the Board should request funding for a position that is not yet defined. Ms. Bram stated that, if not funded, there would be no hire in 2026. Ms. McKeon indicated that the job description should align with the Town's needs and the Select Board's stated objectives. The Board discussed when the job description could be developed and when the position could be filled. The Board discussed the timeline for filling the position and the appropriate funding level.

The Board set a target hiring date of April 1, 2026, and reduced funding for the part-time position by 25% to \$38,764.

The Board confirmed that the anticipated Operating Budget, following the adjustment to the Economic Development wage line, would be \$10,175,335.

Mr. Whitley made a motion to approve the operating budget bottom line of \$10,175,335. The motion was seconded and unanimously approved.

Setting the Tax Rate and Utilization of Fund Balance

The Board continued to review the total tax rate options, considering whether to apply the fund balance to anticipated expenditures. Ms. Dunlap stated she felt it would be more responsible not use the fund balance. Mr. Whitley said that reducing bonding is an important goal. Ms. Hambleton noted that debt service accounts for one-tenth of the operating budget. Ms. Dunlap summarized the proposed options:

- Use of zero fund balance – the tax rate would be \$23.39.
- Use of \$100,000 to offset the tax rate – the tax rate would be \$23.31.
- Use of \$200,000 to offset the tax rate – the tax rate would be \$23.24.

She noted that the DRA suggests towns retain a fund balance between 5% and 17%. Ms. Hambleton stated that, with a zero use of fund balance, the Town would retain 8.01% (\$2.925 million). Ms. Dunlap noted that this was up from 6.77% the previous year. The Board discussed using \$50,000 of the fund balance to offset the tax rate. Ms. Hambleton stated that using \$50,000 would result in a remaining fund balance of \$ 2.875 million, representing 7.87%.

The Board decided to apply \$50,000 of the cash balance to achieve a tax rate of \$23.35.

Mr. Whitley made a motion that the Town use \$50,000 from the fund balance. The motion was seconded by Ms. McKeon and unanimously approved.

The Board continued its discussion about the terms of the TAN. Ms. Henley reminded the Board that the rate would be 4.5% and payable within 30 days.

Ms. Hambleton discussed the hiring of a new Administrative/Assessing Assistant. This item, she noted, was under consideration during the non-public session.

VI. NON-PUBLIC SESSIONS

- i. Nonpublic RSA 91-A:3 II (b) Hiring and RSA 91-A:3 II (c) Reputation

Mr. Whitley made a motion that the Board enter into a non-public session under Nonpublic RSA 91-A:3 II (b) Hiring. Ms. McKeon seconded the motion, and it was unanimously approved by a roll call vote.

Sabrina Dunlap	Yes
Steven Whitley	Yes
Alyssa McKeon	Yes
Victoria Bram	Yes

MOTION PASSED 4-0.

The Board, Town Administrator and Police Chief went into nonpublic session, as recorded separately, at 8:52 p.m. The Board returned to public session at 9:19 p.m.

These minutes were not sealed.

Mr. Whitley made a motion that the Board enter into a non-public session under Nonpublic RSA 91-A:3 II (c) Reputation. Ms. McKeon seconded the motion, and it was unanimously approved by a roll call vote.

Sabrina Dunlap	Yes
Steven Whitley	Yes
Alyssa McKeon	Yes
Victoria Bram	Yes

MOTION PASSED 4-0.

The Board and Town Administrator went into nonpublic session, as recorded separately, at 9:19 p.m. The Board returned to public session at 9:27 p.m.

These minutes were not sealed.

VII. ADJOURNMENT

Mr. Whitley made a motion to adjourn. The motion was seconded by Ms. McKeon and unanimously approved.

The meeting was adjourned at 9:27 PM.

Respectfully submitted,

Beverly Mesa-Zendt
Executive Assistant/Grant Coordinator