

The Nature *of* Possibility

SOUTH BUFFALO DESIGN WORKSHOP

Over the past 2 years, the City of Buffalo has been leading an initiative to transform over 1,200 acres (486 hectares) of former heavy industrial lands situated in South Buffalo. Within 10 minutes of the international border and downtown Buffalo, and bounded by the Buffalo River, the City of Lakawanna, Lake Erie and Hopkins Street, South Buffalo was once the center of the region's steel manufacturing and related industries. The South Buffalo Redevelopment Project is now a catalyst for innovative approaches to regeneration and is critical in shaping the quality of life in the city - and the region - in the next century.

The Waterfront Regeneration Trust and the Buffalo Economic Renaissance Corporation (BERC) have developed a progressive series of public meetings to emphasize the importance of a comprehensive vision and implementation strategy for the South Buffalo Project. The emerging vision integrates environmental restoration, new public amenities, and meaningful job creation that reflect Buffalo's rich industrial and natural heritage.

On November 1, 1999 the Trust's International Brownfield Exchange Program and the BERC hosted a design workshop to bring together local and international representatives interested in redevelopment of derelict land. The objective was to further develop and test specific design ideas to help communicate new opportunities and a new image for the former industrial lands in South Buffalo. In addition to local architects, students, City staff and business leaders, three German urban regeneration experts and one from The Netherlands participated in the workshop.

In welcoming participants, Kevin Greiner noted that the time is right to develop design concepts for specific parts of the South Buffalo Project. Translation of guiding principles into design concepts for the South Buffalo Project will help define the new image for the City and Mr. Greiner emphasized that it is timely for all those interested in the redevelopment of South Buffalo to participate in defining that image.

"We can learn a great deal from our European colleagues who are with us today. Their appreciation of industrial heritage and existing natural features, and their experience in adaptive reuse of old structures allows them to see opportunity where others see obstacles. And their experience with regional approaches to planning, practical solutions for environmental remediation, and design excellence leads them to solutions that have long term benefits for the environment, residents, visitors and investors. We look forward to the results of today's efforts."

Kevin Greiner, Buffalo Economic Renaissance Corporation



November 1st, 1999

The challenge for participants was to create design concepts that would illustrate and develop the following principles developed for the South Buffalo Project at the first international design charette, in March, 1999:

- Encourage development nodes that emphasize mixed use and connect existing infrastructure and businesses;
- Establish a connected system of green space and trails;
- Protect and enhance views to Lake Erie, Buffalo River and the City;
- Establish new connections to the water's edge;
- Promote year-round use of the waterfront;
- Celebrate and interpret industrial and natural heritage;
- Encourage adaptive reuse of heritage buildings.

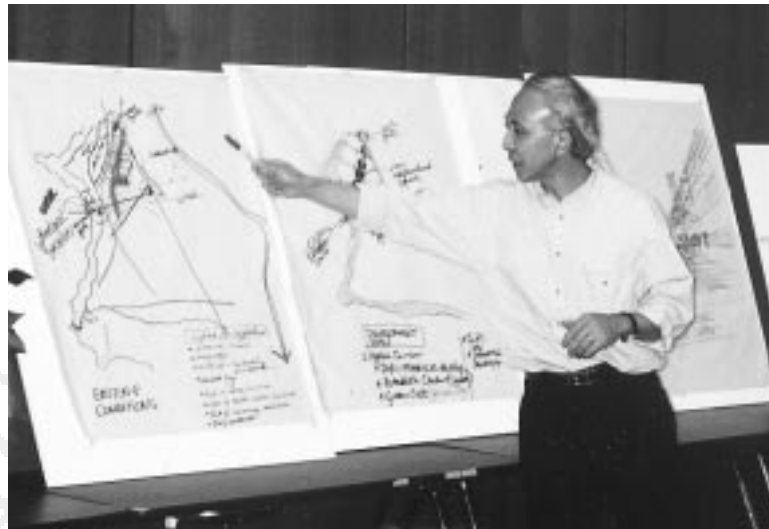
Workshop Guidelines

Participants were asked to test ideas for sustainable redevelopment that focused on built form, landscape design and land use in order to:

- Improve physical connections;
- Highlight existing natural features and create a linked system of green infrastructure;
- Identify opportunities to celebrate cultural heritage;
- Create a place where people want to live, work and visit.

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With land acquisition and environmental clean up completed in some areas, the time was right to ask participants to illustrate the qualities of a *Livable Community* using three sites: the Union Ship Canal and two properties located in the Buffalo River Corridor - the Cargill Superior Elevator Shoreline and the Concrete Central property. Participants were divided into three groups so that each site could be considered in detail and design concepts produced. Faculty and students from the SUNY School of Architecture and Planning, Urban Design Project assisted with background research on each site and participated in the workshop.



"It is exciting to see our city as we have never seen it before. We welcome the International Brownfield Exchange to Buffalo to help us know our true potential."

Mayor Tony Masiello,
City of Buffalo.



Concrete Central

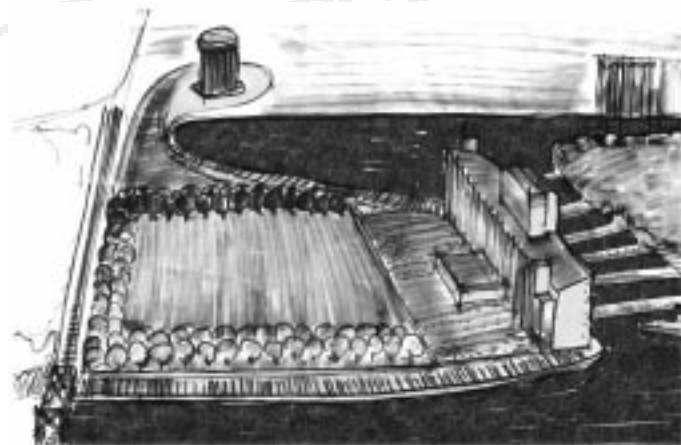
The Concrete Central site is an historic landmark and point of reference for the City. Stretching along the Buffalo River for more than a quarter mile, the elevator stands abandoned in silent magnificence amid a grassy field. The scale of the silos presents a humbling and daunting task for those who engage in serious consideration of the potential of these industrial monuments for new uses. Workshop participants agreed that re-interpretation and reuse of the Concrete Central complex

would help to establish a distinct cultural value and "sense of place" for this site - and perhaps for the whole City.

The design concepts captured the value of the Concrete Central site as a cornerstone to a new International Heritage Park. A range of public uses were envisioned and four points linked the various ideas together:

- The silos are extraordinary structures and should be renovated to enable new uses;
- Public access and physical connections within the site and to the surrounding area should be established;

Concrete Central continues next page





Celebrate the industrial landmarks by illumination of the structures, landscape design that reconnects, interpretation, and utilizing the structures and landscape for the arts;

- Accept and design a "vernacular" landscape respecting its past uses.

One of the novel design concepts suggested a poetic for the entire South Buffalo site linking all the silos along the Buffalo River thematically by naming them "The Great Ladies of the Great Lakes." This idea was interpreted

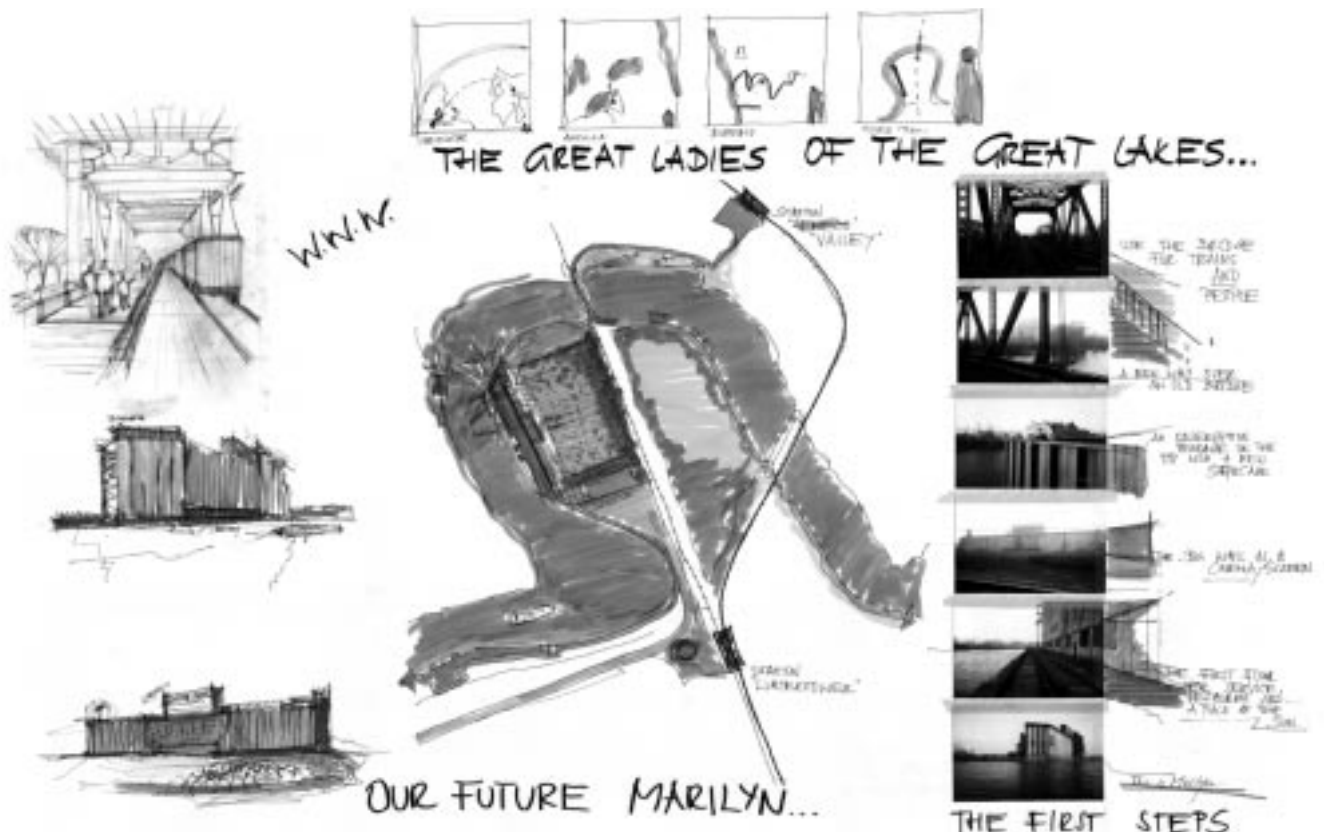
in a design concept that included a perimeter trail along the Buffalo River and the reuse of the rail corridor to bisect the site between park and open space to the east and recreational/commercial reuse of the silos site to the west. Two rail stations at the Water Tower and across the River to the "valley" would connect the site to the City of Buffalo. A water taxi would bring visitors from the north side of the River to the site.

The first steps to implement this

concept included the following:

- Create an observation terrace on the top of the silos with a new staircase;
- Re-use the silos exterior walls as outdoor cinema screens;
- Rehabilitate the first floor for service, restaurant and a place in the sun;
- Name Concrete Central Marilyn;
- Upgrade the bridges to permit pedestrian access as well as rail use.

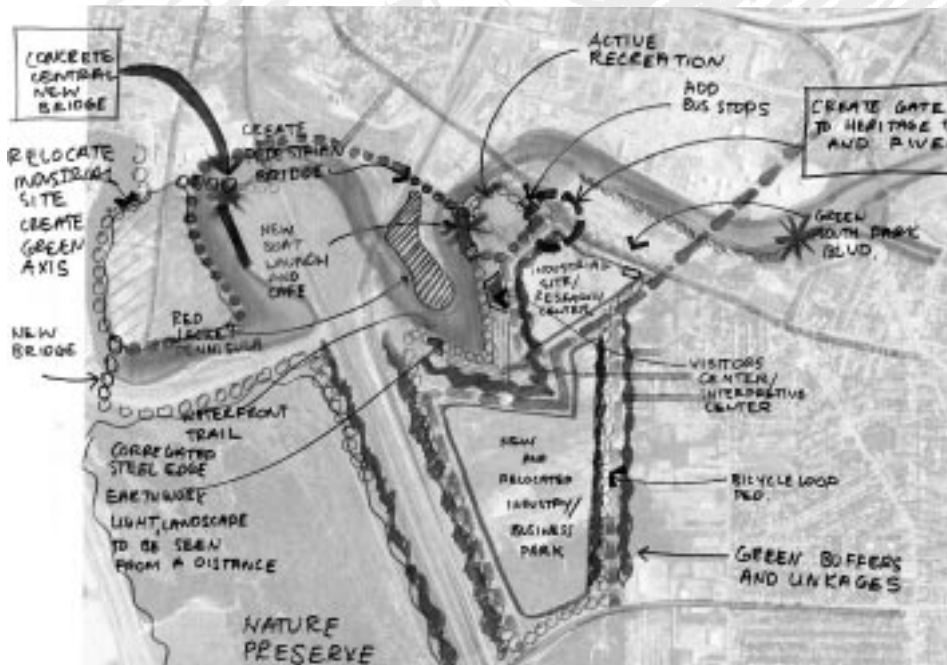
Alternate concepts considered Concrete Central as an inter-modal hub, for centering access to all modes of transport including LRT, water taxi, trails, bridges, roads, and possibly cable cars. The silos would be preserved with the interiors rehabilitated into large multi-use spaces including a transit station. Consistent with the former concept, the silos could on occasion become a projection screen seen from across the Buffalo River from a large landform that creates an amphitheatre with "bumper seating" along the shore. Also proposed was an urban plaza to the east of the Concrete Central silos and a more natural landscape set around this plaza to the south, linked to Tift Nature Preserve.



South Shore of the Buffalo River - Regenerating the River Edge

The design ideas that emerged for the Cargill Superior Elevator Shoreline demonstrated a range of opportunities for mixed uses, public amenities, and more continuous access along the south shore of the Buffalo River. A major new gateway to the heritage trail along the river's edge was suggested. Specific suggestions included improved boat launch facilities in five locations combined with small cafes and restaurants. Opportunities for shoreline naturalization were highlighted in the eastern section of the Buffalo River where regeneration is already underway. The potential for placing large artworks in the landscape was identified and lighting ideas for existing heritage structures were noted to heighten awareness and create new qualities in the landscape that can be viewed from a distance.

Incremental development was viewed as important in this area as a way to increase public awareness, improve connections, and to allow for smaller scale restoration projects in the early phases. First steps would include completion of a continuous waterfront trail along the southern shoreline of the River, a new bridge at the south east end linking Concrete Central, landscape features to protect existing natural areas as well as residential neighborhoods, and the creation of a green corridor in the existing north/south railway right of way. It was recognised that this former steel manufacturing property is a highly manipulated landscape and design ideas should make this explicit.



Thanks to our European Participants

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Union Ship Canal

The Union Ship Canal site has historic significance as an important marine transportation link to Lake Erie. Today, this area holds promise for transformation into a mixed-use development, access to the water's edge, new lake-front recreational uses and connections along the waterfront. The design challenge is to create a sense of place that

establishes the appropriate scale of development and reconnects people to the landscape and the water's edge. Several different ideas emerged for land uses along the edge of the canal. There was consensus that a relatively dense, mixed use urban form should be the objective, with the north and south sides of the Canal treated differently.

One group proposed that the east
Union Ship Canal continues next page

You were there...

Beth Benson
 Angella Blanas
 Carrie M. Breindel
 Eric Brodfueher
 David Brody
 Jan Brouwer
 Betty Chetny
 Ron Ciminelli
 Lucy Cook
 Barb Courtney
 Tom DeSantis
 Michael Diebold
 Sophie Fitek Baj
 Glen J. Gelinas
 Muffett Mauche George
 Mr. & Mrs. Charles Gordon
 Peter J. Gorton
 Dean Gowen
 Kevin Greiner
 Nathan Guntrum
 David Hahn Baker
 Hiro Hata
 Gail Johnstone
 Kent Kleineman
 Joshua R. Laird
 Kevin LaSpisa
 Bonnie Kane Lockwood
 Julie Loehr
 Mark Mistretta
 Jo K. Nasoff
 Samson Oshunrinde
 Terry Paquin
 Kisha Patterson
 Christopher Pawenski
 Jerilyn Perine
 Iris Reuther
 Irene Rota
 Chris Schmidt
 Lynda Schneekloth
 Jonathan Schultz
 Gabriele Seelemann
 Robert Shibley
 Peter Smith
 Martin Stein
 Rachel Stein
 Edmund Sullivan
 Ken Swanekemp
 Oscar Traynor
 Mark J. Tytka
 Karen Wallace
 Amy Weymouth
 Gail Wittmer
 Leslie Woo
 Carol Yamarino

end of the Canal be encircled by a Central Core of mixed uses, including residential; 1st floor retail, and restaurants set back from the water by a wide public space. On the north side of the Canal they introduced a recreational area with an "extreme sport" park; volleyball courts and motor cross circuit. To the south they proposed an Industrial Heritage Park, taking advantage of the existing ruins.

The east end of the Canal was identified as a focal point which could be marked with an observation tower or significant institutional buildings such as regional brownfield research laboratories. It was also suggested that a wide bank of steps connect this area to the edge of the Canal.

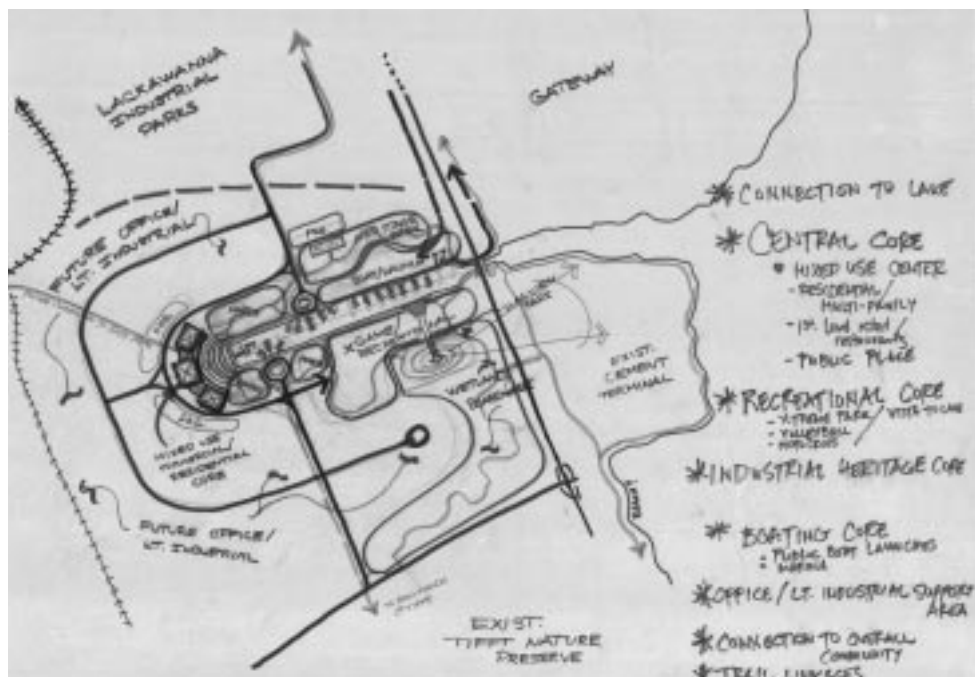
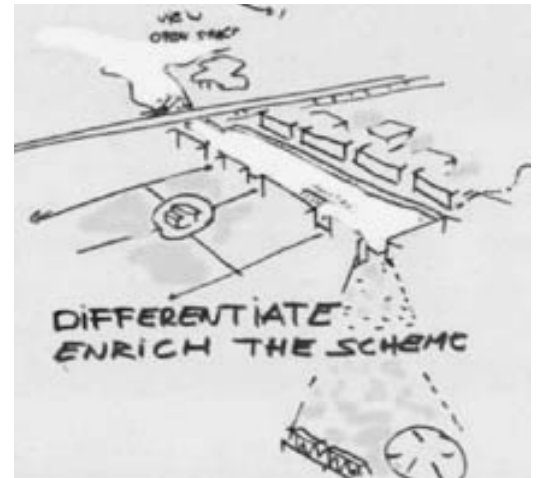
Other suggestions for differentiating between the two sides of the Ship Canal included:

- Approach the canal like a large room – with development on three sides, and with the development on the long sides acting as a filter through to a more wild/natural areas in behind. The north side (also the sunniest) should have a wider set back;
- Use diverse built form and height, creating uninterrupted views to the Tiff Nature Preserve, the Buffalo River and Lake Erie;
- Create an expanded water area parallel with the canal on the south side that highlights the industrial artifacts in the landscape and defines the southern most edge with mixed commercial/retail uses.

The canal itself was considered as a lap pool or skating rink or a more active marine center for cruise ships or sail and power boat docking.

Building a coherent regional trail system that links the Union Ship Canal with the waterfront and both north towards Niagara Falls and south to Lakawana was a recurring idea. Many participants elaborated the trail concept by suggesting local connections to Tiff Nature Preserve, Hopkins St. and South Park. Other linkages included one-way vehicular traffic around the perimeter of the Canal, introduction of a rail hub on axis east of the canal, and a pedestrian bridge across the middle of the Canal.

The results of the students' investigations reinforced the need for an urban development pattern that shows relationships between development of the Canal, the historic Joseph Ellicott radial street plan and the Fredrick Law Olmsted green parkway system. The Union Ship Canal was understood as another key element of the Olmsted Park system.



The Union Ship Canal is a place for mixed uses and a relatively dense urban form.



Conclusions

The charette results illustrate the potential of the South Buffalo Redevelopment Project to set a new standard in design quality for "The Liveable Community". New possibilities emerged as participants wrestled

with the industrial legacy, the contrasts of landscape and built form, mixed landuses, expansive nature of the area. The results present a new image for South Buffalo as a model for economic and environmental transformation that could be recognised as an **International Industrial Heritage Park**.

All of the design concepts captured the need and the opportunity for improved *connection*. Ideas for each site demonstrated how connections could be established or enhanced using design

features to help overcome the prevailing sense of physical and psychological isolation. Two main design strategies emerged:

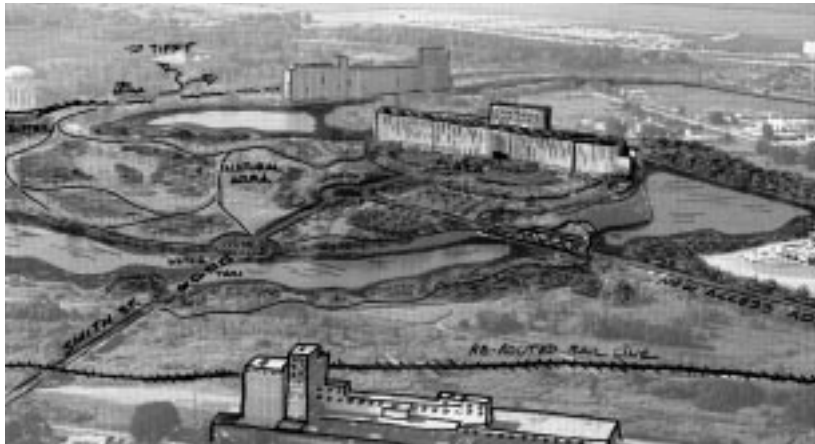
Establish access using a variety of transportation modes.

Create physical connections to the City, adjacent neighborhoods and existing transit routes to overcome the sense of isolation. Several specific opportunities for reuse of abandoned infrastructure were identified, including conversion of rail bridges to pedestrian and bicycle paths, railway right-of-ways converted to trails, and extensions of the existing urban street grid into the redevelopment street plan.

Connect to existing green spaces and other natural systems.

Integrate the Olmsted Park System with new regional green spaces and trail corridors, including the Buffalo River

Ecology Corridor, Tiftt Nature Preserve and a restored South Park. The southern shoreline of the Buffalo River at Parkside Drive was viewed as a good location for the Heritage Park entrance.



Led by the Waterfront Regeneration Trust, the objective of the International Brownfield Exchange is to add value to the work already underway in local municipalities in three key ways:

- Share international experiences on the redevelopment of former industrial areas;
- Create new opportunities for multi-disciplinary groups from North America and Europe to test ideas for built form, land use and landscape design;
- Disseminate the lessons and results of the international collaboration to a broad audience, including local communities and decision-makers.

Waterfront Regeneration Trust thanks our partners

Buffalo Economic Renaissance Corporation (BERC)
Community Foundation for Greater Buffalo
The Urban Design Project,
University of Buffalo, School of Architecture and Planning
Environment Canada
US Environmental Protection Agency
The German Marshall Fund of the United States
Heinrich Böll Foundation
Expo 2000 Sachsen-Analt Ltd.



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