
MLT NEWSLETTER SPRING 2017



Cultivating Resilient Communities

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Welcome to this spring's edition of MLT's newsletter. Back issues are always available along with all kinds of other material at www.michiganlandtrust.org. Donations and memberships are of course, always welcome and convenient to do from either sending the form at the end of this issue or via Paypal from the website.

We start off this issue with a vision of building sustainable community. This has been talked about before - focusing on exploring the possibility of using our tax benefits as a vehicle for optimizing land tenureship to build ecovillages. Bangor area resident Julian Lauzzana offers realistic scenarios for acquiring land and building communities to solve deep societal and environmental problems.

The Lean Rural Alternative: Community Homesteading

Community Homesteading converts rural properties from single family homes into community living environments; similar to eco-villages, intentional communities, co-housing and other forms of eco-development but requiring less infrastructure and development. By sharing resources, skills, creativity, land and time while collectively focusing on production for use rather than production for market, we can address many rural challenges:

- Inefficient land use based on sprawl and separation
- Limited lifestyle options and career opportunities = low income + high expenses
- Socioeconomic disparity and a competitive culture of winners and losers
- Ecological degradation fueled by hyper-consumption and a wasteful culture
- Legacy concerns of aging farmers who lack a land stewardship plan

- Health concerns related to diet, lifestyle and environment
- Lack of desirable options for aging gracefully outside elder care facilities
- Difficulties of small farmer facing Farm Bill regulations and GAAP certification
- Inter-generational separation and cultural “age-ism”

The process of converting a farm or homestead property into a Community Homestead is mostly a matter of “connecting the dots.” Many individuals are facing what appear to be insurmountable challenges related to the above bullet point list. If we hope to preserve and improve rural culture we must partner land-owners with the landless, young with old, skilled with unskilled, willing labor force with overburdened farmers, rural and urban populations, etc. To create resilient thriving communities in the future we must also find ways to collaborate with our neighbors to share machinery, skills, land and resources. In order to make this lifestyle choice appealing we have to find ways to promote vibrant interconnected Community Homesteads and create models that fit various demographic and personal needs. Some may want to live in a spiritual community, some may want to live in a vegan or vegetarian community, some may want to live on a homestead that cares for animals of all kinds, some may prioritize the need for inter-generational living and having a place to age gracefully in a community setting. All of these options are viable but require specific needs related to staffing, housing, legal and financial matters.

For any social movement or community action to have significant impact it must simultaneously address multiple concerns. In terms of designing systemic solutions to curb the destructive nature of our destructive society, I consider Buckminster Fuller (<https://www.bfi.org/>) and Paolo Soleri (<https://arcosanti.org/>) to be without parallel. Fuller and Soleri were both visionaries striving for comprehensive solutions to humanity’s problems who observed negative trends of the current paradigm and proposed specific changes related to land use, technology, education and lifestyle. Here we focus on a distinctly rural paradigm which can partner well with sustainable urban planning to increase density at existing farmhouse properties; creating shared live/work opportunities for young and old. I am asking anyone who has read this far to seriously consider how they might participate in creating or supporting a Community Homestead. In my view we are down to the wire and the proverbial you-know-what is increasingly hitting the fan.

Based on various conversations, research, outreach and over five years hosting dozens of visitors from Kalamazoo to Siberia at my own Community Homestead, I believe there is much interest from potential community homestead members in this type of arrangement. Potential members include students, young adults, families, baby boomers, drifters and many types of disenchanted or traumatized individuals. I also have personal experience speaking with struggling landowners and farmers who face legacy, labor and land use concerns. Many of them would consider entering into an arrangement if it were presented to their liking. We are culturally very independent and thus a community living arrangement will challenge us in many ways. Some concerns include: privacy, equity, financial matters, diet, spirituality, transportation, staffing needs, etc. We are not generally trained in such things as community governance, conflict resolution and consensus building. Only those who are honestly interested in creating a life together should enter into the dialogue and membership needs to be selective in order to maximize potential for success. Luckily there are many existing individuals, organizations and networks which have been working on these issues and can offer guidance, tools, potential members, training, legal help and support: The Global Ecovillage Network (www.ecovillage.org), The Fellowship for Intentional Community (www.ic.org), World Wide Opportunities on Organic Farms (<https://www.woofusa.org/>), American Farmland Trust (<https://www.farmland.org/>), Custom Academic Programs in Ecovillages (<http://www.cape.consulting/>), Camphill Association (<http://www.camphill.org/>), and Equity Trust (<http://equitytrust.org/>), to name a few. A vast network of like-minded individuals exists to strengthen and build up the Community Homestead models around this region and beyond. There is clearly a desire for more options to age artfully, especially within the baby boomer generation. Many years for

intergenerational living and continuous care onsite.

Building healthcare into a community will require experienced and skilled staffing. It is my belief and experience that many practitioners of health care would be interested in using their knowledge in a new environment that is supportive, holistic and stimulating. Our health care system offers amazing technological advancements and synthetically derived and petroleum based pharmaceuticals but seems to be creating much dis-ease right along with our lifestyles, diet, jobs, stressful culture and toxic environment.

We must act now, collectively, to create new opportunities for education, healthcare, food systems, energy production and entertainment. We must consider what options exist in the legal and financial creation of Community Homesteads: Private and Community Land Trusts, Conservation Easements, Income Sharing Nonprofits, Cooperatives, Educational Nonprofits, LLC, etc. When we find out what fits the needs of a group of individuals wanting to share land we can begin in earnest to move forward to address the needs related to such matters as healthcare, energy, food systems, water and land use, transportation, community governance and decision-making. These and other important matters should be discussed in depth prior to forming a Community Homestead. Here are some examples of possible Community Homesteads:

- An aging farmer finds a family to steward the land
- Multi-family homestead with homeschooling, gardens, several parents working off-site
- A “haven” with skilled staff (PTSD, climate refugees, domestic abuse, autistic)
- A spiritual community dedicated to community service
- Urban/rural educational exchange sharing nature and permaculture courses
- Eco Bed and Breakfast offering a rural retreat to city folks
- Agri-tourism hub for seasonal urban visitors to u-pick and process food for personal use
- Aging artfully community focused on providing elders with a positive healthy community.

Currently there are many communities in the region and around the world that are focused on similar efforts. There is no claim to originality here, rather a synthesis of existing inter-related movements, trends, demographics and socio-economic-ecological realities with a focus on our particular region of Southwest Michigan. My wish is to build partnerships with others who wish to put energy into forming and sustaining these communities at a steady pace in our region. We will need to conduct research with existing landowners and potential members. We must make phone calls, host events, create a database, find landowners and members, have open dialogue sessions, form interest groups, build fundraising models to convert existing properties into Community Homesteads. Additionally we can observe and contact existing communities to learn about their successes and challenges. Producing food, energy, art and community together on one piece of land, then through connection with other communities, offers great promise for strengthening our resilience. It is not meant as a cure all but as a new synthesis related to this region and the challenges we are facing at this time. Please get in touch and spread the word. We need a core group to make this happen! Thanks for reading.

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While in high school I attended the first Earth Day at Bronson Park in 1970. I don't remember any details except for the positive feeling present and that it was a really nice April day. This year's successful Earth Day celebration in Paw Paw continues to "keep hope alive" and Rita tells us why we must keep pushing for a clean environment in the tradition of Earth Day.

Earth Day Celebration Update

By Rita Bober

In the late sixties, Lake Erie was incredibly polluted, due to heavy industrial dumping. A fire occurred on the Cuyahoga River (which feeds into Lake Erie). The Cuyahoga River actually caught fire several times. But in 1969, a fire on the river caught national attention. Also families had to close their car windows when driving past the steel mills in Gary, Indiana and people in Kalamazoo would hold their noses as they crossed over the Kalamazoo River. Wild fish in most local rivers were not safe to eat. In response to this and other environmental catastrophes, US Senator Gaylord Nelson spearheaded the first Earth Day celebration on April 22, 1970 to honor the Earth and demonstrate support for environmental protection. This annual event is the largest secular observance in the world.

The Environmental Protection Agency was established after that first Earth Day. The tough Clean Air Act of 1970 was passed. Within the next three years, the Clean Water Act, the Endangered Species Act and the Resource Conservation & Recovery Act were passed. These were all passed with strong bipartisan support.

But there is still a need to continue to fight for a clean environment. Climate change, dying species, oil spills, and pollution of our water and air continue and are getting worse. On Saturday, April 22nd, an Earth Day Celebration was held at the Paw Paw District Library where over 200 people attended. This was spearheaded by Local Lawton and with a grant from the Michigan Land Trustees. There were tables set up where guest speakers talked about their subjects such as The Wild Ones on Native Plants and the Two Rivers Coalition on protecting our rivers. We also learn about Bees and other Pollinators and we heard about Monarch Butterflies, receiving milkweed seeds to plant. Master Gardeners were available to answer questions; the Lawton Seed Bank had seeds to share. Free pine trees were given away, provided by the Michigan DNR. We planted three Paw Paw trees on the Library property. Kids made craft pictures with natural materials, families visited our nature table where touchable items were displayed like skulls, special rocks, unique feathers, and more. Many stopped by for a free cookie.



Wild Ones Display



Planting Paw Paw Trees



Free Red Pine Give-away

Jack D. Forbes, PhD, Professor of Native American Studies and Anthropology told us: "I can lose my hands, and still live, I can lose my legs and still live. I can lose my eyes and still live. I can lose my hair, eyebrows, nose, arms and many other things and still live. But if I lose the air I die. If I lose

the sun I die. If I lose the water I die. If I lose the plants and animals I die. All of these things are more a part of me, more essential to my every breath, than is my so-called body. We do nothing by ourselves. When the tree exhales, I inhale oxygen. When I exhale, the tree inhales carbon dioxide.” We thank the Earth for all it provides for us.

What more practical education can we provide to children than to introduce and expose them through hands on learning to respect and enjoy growing food? MLT has supported Kalamazoo’s Fair Food Matters financially over the years and is in agreement with their core values.

The Importance of School Gardens

By Rita Bober

For eons, human beings spent most of their formative years in nature. But within the space of a few decades, the way children understand and experience nature has changed radically. According to parents, their children spend less time in nature because of lack of access to natural areas, competition with electronic entertainment, and time pressures, including increased homework and longer school hours. When was the last time your child explored the woods in solitude or lay in a field listening to the wind and watching the clouds move? When did your child play in the dirt, hold a worm in their hand, and watch plants grow into food for the dinner table?

Getting children connected with nature can be as simple as having a garden. More schools are beginning to see that having a school garden is one way of creating a learning environment with a variety of fun, hands-on activities where students learn where food comes from and spend time outdoors. School subjects like science, math, social studies (Native American Three Sister garden), and English language arts can be reinforced on a regular basis. A garden can create an environment for working together as a team, for cooperating to get the job done, to have patience as the seeds grow, to express feelings and listen to others, and share the fruits of our labor

Providing a nutritional program would add value to a garden program. Produce from the garden can be used to make a variety of products such as using zucchini for zucchini bread. Salsa could be made with school grown tomatoes, peppers, and cilantro. Also kale chips can be made with kale grown in the garden and pesto created from basil and garlic. The students will learn more about the benefits of healthy eating. They are more likely to eat something when they grow it themselves.

Both California and Florida have made a commitment to provide all schools in their states with school gardens. Michelle Obama had a garden on the White House grounds for students to grow food. Let’s learn more about the school gardens in our area.

Roots of Knowledge Garden at Woodward Elementary, Kalamazoo: Heather Crull, Executive Director and lead educator of Fair Food Matters coordinates this garden. Fair Food Matters is a grassroots non-profit that works to improve access to healthy, local food by educating, connecting, and empowering youth in the Kalamazoo Community.

In 1998 parents, teachers, and community members wrote and received a grant to start the school garden at Woodward Elementary, a school for kindergarten through 5th grades. Garden beds and a small pond were developed. In 2006, Fair Food Matters became involved with Heather coordinating recruitment of volunteers, coordinating with teachers, and raising funds as well as being the lead teacher. This program serves about 400 students each year in full classes, small groups, and an after-school club (Club Grub). The garden has a variety of vegetables, fruits, herbs, flowers, and uses the small pond as part of their program.

Heather states, “we never use a ‘canned’ curriculum; we create and provide engaging lessons tailored to our students, families, and classes. Students explore how to grow food organically and learn about the entire growing process, from seed to compost. We investigate plant and animal life cycles, spin food webs, taste-test new fruit and veggies (graphing our results), set out on bug hunts, search for shapes in the garden, compose playful garden stories, and devour tasty dishes made from our fresh garden produce.”

Heather works in partnership with K College students (Center for Civic Engagement), Master Gardeners, and neighborhood volunteers as they connect with students in the garden at least three times a week. They rotate with various grade levels and every time they are out in the garden, they are eating something like tasting herbs, green onions, etc.

Woodward Elementary is located in a high poverty area. A majority of students are African American. Sometimes social justice issues need to be addressed with adult volunteers. Heather addresses these issues through her training with ERAC/CE (Eliminating Racism and Claiming/Celebrating Equality).

Rita and Norm Bober coordinate the school garden at Lawton Elementary. The students know them as Grandma Rita and Grandpa Norm.

Vegetable Island, Lawton Elementary School, Lawton: In 2012, a garden committee was formed with 4th and 5th grade science teachers, Carolyn Brayman and Leslie Holder along with Norm and Rita Bober, (volunteers from the Local Lawton community group working to help Lawton become stronger and more resilient in the face of economic crisis, peak oil and climate change). It grew out of a Nutrition and Nature club started by Jana Serbenski and Rita Bober in 2011. The garden is all organic and “constant vigilance” (cv) is how we control any invaders.

With a grant from Project L.E.A.N., the garden started with 4 large beds on the south side of the school. The beds had been planted in Native flowers for a number of years. The flowers were dug up and given away to teachers and families in the school. We looked at our space and decided that in order to grow a variety of vegetables successfully, we needed to be creative. That’s when the idea of a square foot garden came into our minds. Square foot gardening is formed when a bed is divided into 1-foot squares with each square holding a different vegetable based on the eventual size of the plant. So, for example, if the seed packet recommends thinning seedlings to 4 inches apart, you would plant your plants or seeds 4 inches apart. Therefore, for bush beans, you would plant nine seeds in a square with no wasted space. With our grid developed, we show the students how to plant the seeds or seedlings into the pattern developed. Soon another garden space was formed in the courtyard where vine plants could be grown. That first year, a Three Sister Garden was grown there with pumpkins (instead of squash).

We received another grant from Midwest Energy Cooperative in 2013 which enabled us to expand the garden program with the purchase of grow lights and a compost tumbler. Now we were able to cover the whole growing season from planting seeds under grow lights through making compost with garden plants at the end of the season. At times all the 4th and 5th graders come to an educational session such as learning what a Three Sister Garden is, or learning what to put in the compost tumbler and how to take care of it, along with learning a song about “Scat,” that’s the scientific name for worm “poop”. We usually have small groups of students work in the garden and we are working on these students reporting back to their classroom what they did and learned.

During the summer, tutored students and summer school students help with the garden especially in picking produce that has ripened. They also help with watering the beds along with several volunteers. We try to grow produce that will be ready in the fall when students return to school such as popcorn, potatoes, kale, sunflowers, beets, carrots, and onions. Several foods are made from garden produce such as pesto made from the Basil and garlic and Kale chips made from the Kale grown in the garden. One time we had brownies with a “secret” ingredient from the garden – beets!

Each Friday during “Fun Friday Activities,” students can work in the garden. We talk about the soil and how important it is to keep our soil “alive” and healthy. The students are always surprised to find so many worms in the soil. Although we bought gloves for the students, they often just like to get their hands into the dirt. We see students excited about coming out to help plant and take care of the garden. They work cooperatively to get the jobs done. They have smiles on their faces. They are gaining a lifelong appreciation for the environment and nature.

Portage Central High School Garden. Janet Lavasseur, English teacher and Ann Alburtus, Advisor, started the garden club in the spring of 2013. Janet especially was influenced by friends who started gardens at their schools. With the building of their new high school, they wanted to re-image the school as being progressive; “it just felt like the right thing to do.” They started with a small patch of mostly herbs. After receiving a grant from the Calhoun Conservation District, they were able to extend the garden, buy supplies, and fence the area. The Woodshop students built a garden shed and stained the fence. Eagle Scouts made the raised beds and a compost station was developed. Best practice is to use organic methods for raising the produce.

Several additional grants were received including one from the Kalamazoo Foundation and the Portage Foundation. Donations from community members help with seeds and other needs. Janet attended a Kalamazoo Extension beginning garden program where she learned that it is best when gardening for those with limited income to grow the most expensive produce like tomatoes, versus potatoes and onions which are less expensive. So they grow a lot of tomatoes every year.

The garden is described as a community garden. Food is given to the gardeners--fresh food they have grown themselves. Food is also shared at the Portage Community Center, and to anyone in need. When students didn't want to eat the beets that were grown, they were advised to take them to the Portage Senior Center and learn what the Elders could tell them about cooking and eating beets. One year, students went door to door with bags of produce from the garden offering it to community members for free. Through the Food and Nutrition Class, produce is made into food dishes like salsa and eggplant parmesan.

This is an after school program. Freshman in their half-day introduction tour of the school can sign up if they are interested in participating in the Garden Club. Also at the beginning of each year, all the English teachers are asked to show a two-minute youtube video titled: “One Million Gardens Can Change The World” and students can sign up if interested in helping with the school garden. The students come all summer. They share what they learned with other students. There is no formal curriculum set up.

So many students say how much they enjoyed working in the garden. They credit Janet as a significant person who influenced their lives. The garden has enhanced their awareness of growing food and the relationship between soil, seed, and nurture.

Do you know that working in the garden can make you smarter? From a study published six years ago, Sage College professors describe how *mycobacterium vaccae*, a nonpathogenic species of bacteria that lives naturally in soil, has been found to release serotonin, which helps elevate mood and decrease anxiety. Mice exposed to the bacteria not only had a reduction of anxiety but were able to complete a maze twice as fast as those who were not exposed. So if you want your children to become smarter, you need to get them into a garden. School gardens may be the place to start.

This book is nearly hot off the press (should be available by June 1)! Rita Bober gives her take on it. Maynard will be doing a book talk on this book at the Bangor Branch Library on June 7 at 5:30 pm. A video of Maynard and fellow co founder Judy Yaeger discussing OGM is available on the MLT website.

Book Review: The Organic Movement in Michigan

Edited by Maynard Kaufman and Julia Christianson

When we moved back to Michigan from the Washington, DC. area in 1979, one of the first people we met in southwest Michigan was Maynard Kaufman. He introduced us to the Organic Growers Movement. Though we weren't farmers, we had always grown our food organically. It was great connecting with other organically minded people at our on-going potluck meetings.

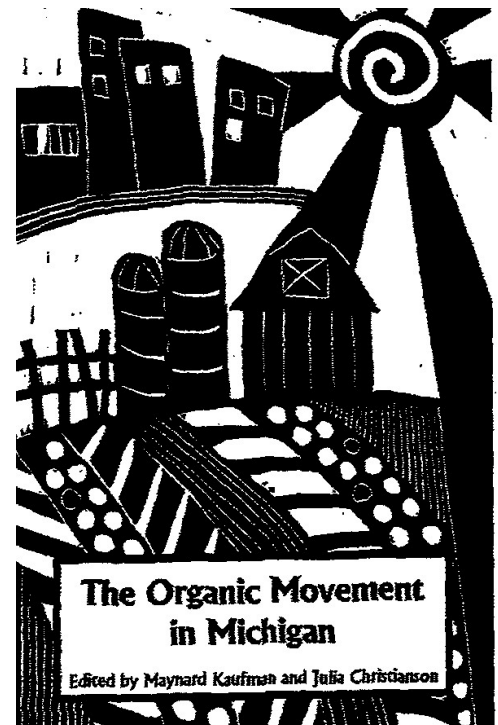
Reading this new book: *The Organic Movement in Michigan*, was like those meetings we had, warm and fuzzy, as well as educational. The book takes you back to the very beginnings of "organic" in Michigan; one of three states which had farmers' organizations that developed standards for the certification of organically-grown food in the early 1970's.

Many voices are heard sharing their views and experiences in leadership roles in this unique movement. Remember, years ago, there was only "organic" farming in this country. I learned that "George Washington Carver was one of the first Americans to promote what have become known as organic methods" in the 1890's. Things changed after World War II, when synthetic fertilizers and pesticides began taking over agriculture.

Support for organics and its challenges are described through chapters on the beginnings of the organization OGM (Organic Growers of Michigan, MOFFA (Michigan Organic Food and Farm Alliance, and other organic groups that formed in Michigan. Articles on CSA's (Community Supported Agriculture, Food Co-ops, Soil Management, and more, recognized the different facets that both support and help "spread the word".

Finally, essays on the future need for Organic Farming in a time of Global Warming, concerns about big business involvement, and the movement of organic products into the mainstream, lets us know that we must continue the struggles to become more sustainable and chemically-free growers of our food. Organic Farming is growing and there is a need to become better stewards of the land that sustains us. This book helps us understand the successes and failures of the organic movement in Michigan.

Written by Rita Bober, organic grower for over 50 years.



Maynard and Barbara submitted the following back in January before the inauguration. They have not been proven wrong in their assertion that the Trump administration has been very unfriendly to the environment and very friendly to the well to do.

TRUMP'S DISASTROUS DENIAL OF CLIMATE CHANGE

AN INAUGURATION DAY LAMENT

Maynard Kaufman and Barbara Geisler

Unfortunately, Donald Trump will be inaugurated on January 20. This paper is to share our concern over the future he is promoting. He says he wants to make America great again, but when he was campaigning he said whatever came into his head at the moment to get people to vote for him. A consideration of his proposed cabinet is a more definite indication of what he wants to do.

First of all, most of his nominations are multi-millionaires, like he is. So we can expect a government of the rich for the rich, standard behavior for politicians, perhaps, but likely to cause more hardship for the other 99% of us. Many who voted for him will feel betrayed.

Second, a look at some of Trump's nominations for crucial cabinet positions can provide more specificity about how the Trump administration will govern. He nominated Scott Pruitt to head the Environmental Protection Agency, a man who is suing it to stop the EPA Clean Power Plan. Pruitt is a climate change denier, like Trump, who also denies any need to curtail the rate of global warming. Another of Trump's astounding nominations is that of Rex Tillerson, who, as the head of Exxon-Mobil, has not only denied climate change but spent millions to cast doubt on it. Tillerson was nominated for Secretary of State, so an oil man would negotiate U. S. policies with other countries. As head of the Energy Department Trump has nominated Rick Perry, who wanted to abolish that department a few years ago. Like many Republicans, these men do not like regulations.

These three nominations to his cabinet indicate the way that Trump hopes to make America great again. He wants to boost a failing economy by liberating business enterprise from any constraining regulation. This is Trump's big mistake, exactly the wrong policy for this time. The economy is already failing because the energy resources that made it great in the past, mainly fossil fuels, will be increasingly expensive and hazardous to burn because they pollute the atmosphere with carbon dioxide and methane, so-called greenhouse gases, which warm the atmosphere. In a few years the costs of climate change will exceed any short-term benefits of growth: more storms and floods, more droughts and failing crops, more forest fires, rising tides and storm surges along the coasts.

The world now has a brief period to slow the rate of climate change. Soon, as warming temperatures release more methane from tundra and from the oceans, global warming will be more rapid and irreversible. Eventually, as glaciers melt, rising ocean levels will inundate many of the world's large cities and millions of refugees will seek resettlement. And while climate change will be the most destructive of our environment, it is on top of the many other insults that industrial activity has inflicted upon the earth, including loss of topsoil and desertification, pollution of fresh water supplies by fracking and other damaging energy extraction methods. Industrial civilization is not ecologically sustainable and should be scaled down. The issue is whether it will crash or come to a soft landing. Trump's policies are leading to a crash after a short-term boom.

How could our leaders promote a soft landing? First, forget the myth of progress understood as economic growth. This myth is the most powerful falsehood. Second, accept rather than deny the reality of climate change. Third, promote the appreciation of the earth as it is threatened. Fourth, gratefully accept what the earth offers but refuse to take more by force. This means raising food with organic methods instead of chemicals and harnessing power from sun and wind. Fifth, help people resettle the countryside of America, which remains a place of fragile but threatened beauty.

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tomar@i2k.com **www.michiganlandtrust.org**

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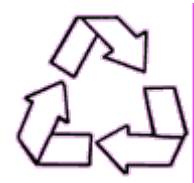
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