

CHAPTER 3

Community Engagement



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Introduction

The participation and input from Normal residents have been invaluable to the Town's efforts to update the Bicycle and Pedestrian Master Plan in a way that reflects the values and aspirations of the community. Through numerous engagement activities and communication channels, Normal residents have helped the Town better understand community needs and values, craft a vision for the future of walking and biking, and identify specific projects and strategies to make active transportation and recreation safer, more comfortable, and more accessible for people of all ages and abilities.

The engagement process included steering committee oversight, an online survey that garnered 431 responses, an open house in the Fall of 2019, and numerous stakeholder meetings to expand the plan's reach and expand the conversation to a wider audience. This chapter summarizes the plan's engagement process and highlights key themes and ideas that have shaped the direction and content of the plan.



Engagement Process

From start to finish, community engagement has been an integral component of the master plan update, providing a continuous feedback loop to guide the plan towards an ambitious vision for the future of walking and biking that is grounded in the practical realities of plan implementation. Each of the engagement strategies employed for this plan are described below.

Steering Committee

The Town of Normal convened a steering committee to provide guidance, direction, and input to the planning team throughout the course of the project. The steering committee consisted of representatives from various Town departments, local and regional government agencies, Illinois State University, Friends of the Constitution Trail, Unit 5, local running clubs, and community residents. The committee met five times during the course of the project to explore and discuss key project components, including community engagement processes, current conditions, plan vision and goals, draft recommendations, and implementation strategies.

Online Survey

The online survey offered community residents an easy, quick, and accessible means of participation in the planning process and helped the Town of Normal better understand common issues, needs, and desired improvements. Four hundred and thirty-one individuals responded to the survey, and nearly three quarters of respondents completed the entire survey. People spent an average of nine minutes completing the survey.

Survey questions were designed to gain a better understanding of current bicycling and walking activity, issues people face when biking and walking, and the types of improvements that they would like to see in the future. Analysis of these survey responses yielded valuable information to help the Town tailor recommendations that address common themes and issues for people who currently walk and bike or who would like to walk and bike in Normal.



Demographics

The age distribution of survey respondents indicated a disproportionate representation of adults aged 35 to 64 when compared to the larger population. Respondents in this age range represented nearly 65 percent of all survey respondents, compared to an estimated 27 percent of Normal’s total population. Conversely, children and young adults under the age of 24 represented less than nine percent of survey respondents, yet constitute more than half of the

population in Normal. While underrepresentation from children and young adults is common for similar municipal transportation surveys, it should be noted that the results of this survey may not fully capture the needs and considerations of younger system users, who have different travel behaviors and needs.

When asked about gender identification, roughly 52 percent of respondents identified as male, and 48 percent female.

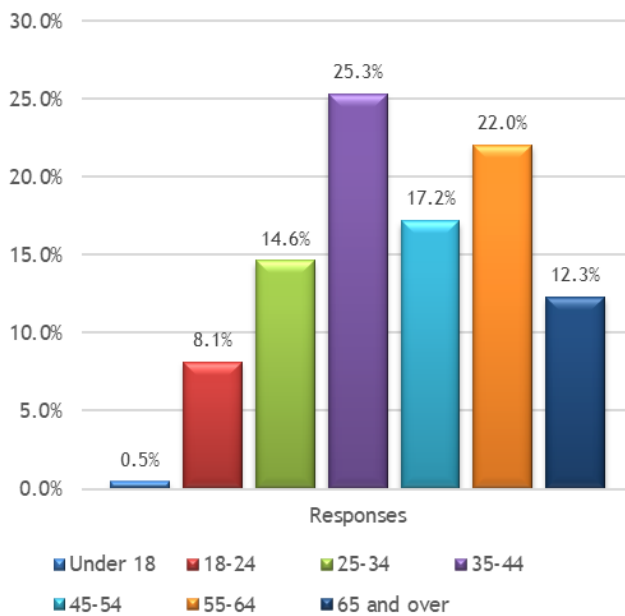


Figure 11. Survey Respondent Age Distribution

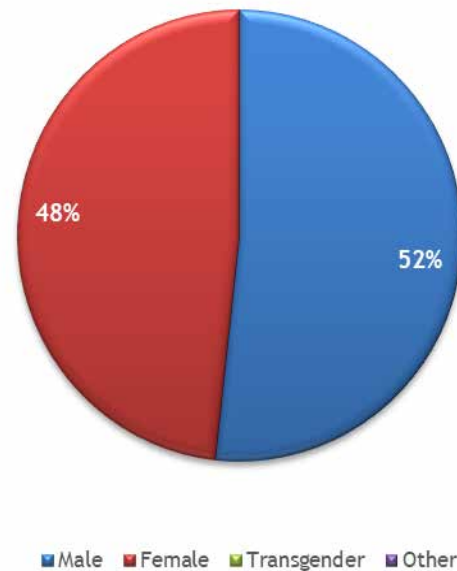


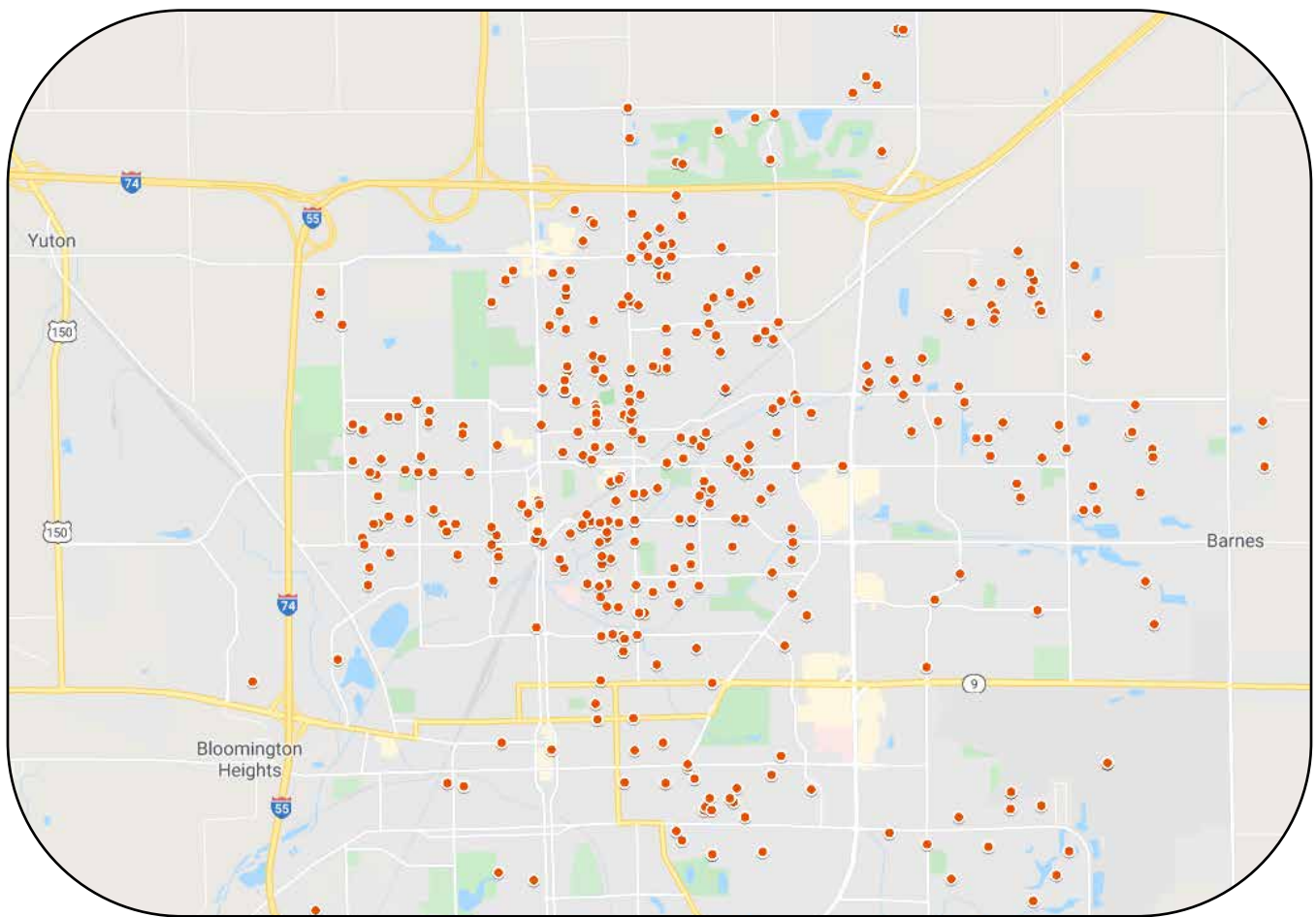
Figure 12. Survey Respondent Gender



Respondents also provided information about home location, either in the form of full address or street and cross street. The geographic distribution of respondent residences shown in Map 14 indicates a participation not only from residents of most Normal neighborhoods, but also residents of neighboring communities, a reflection of the importance of walking and bicycling conditions in Normal to the wider region.

Activity

Survey questions regarding frequency and purpose of biking and walking trips provide a benchmark for gauging community-wide interest and participation in active travel. Private automobile travel is the dominant mode choice for both short trips (less than one mile) and moderate trips (one to five miles). Fifteen percent of respondents always travel via personal car for short trips, compared to just five percent



Map 16. Survey Respondent Home Location



who always walk and less than two percent who always bike. The disparity is greater for moderate-length trips, for which one third of respondents always travel by car, compared to half of one percent who always walk and less than two percent who always bike.

Responses to questions relating specifically to walking activity indicate that recreation and fitness are the most common purposes and reasons for walking. Fifty-six percent of all survey respondents walk for exercise or recreation at least three times a week, and 26 percent do so five or more times a week. Roughly 11 percent walk to school or work three or more times a week, and eight percent do so to shop, dine, or run errands. The most common barrier to walking is distance (70 percent), followed by traffic safety concerns (21 percent), insufficient lighting (20 percent), lack of sidewalks (19 percent), and sidewalk condition (16 percent).

Responses to questions relating specifically to bicycling activity also point to fitness and recreation as the most common purposes and reasons for biking. Twenty-six percent of survey respondents bike for exercise or recreation at least three times a week, and 65 percent do so at least once a week. Nearly 10 percent of respondents bike to work or school three or more times a week. For all categories except exercise and recreation, the majority of respondents do not bike at all. When asked about barriers to bicycling, 50 percent of respondents cited distance and time, 45 percent pointed to concerns about traffic safety, 40 percent noted a lack of dedicated bikeways, and 18 percent identified insufficient lighting and lack of bicycle parking as barriers.

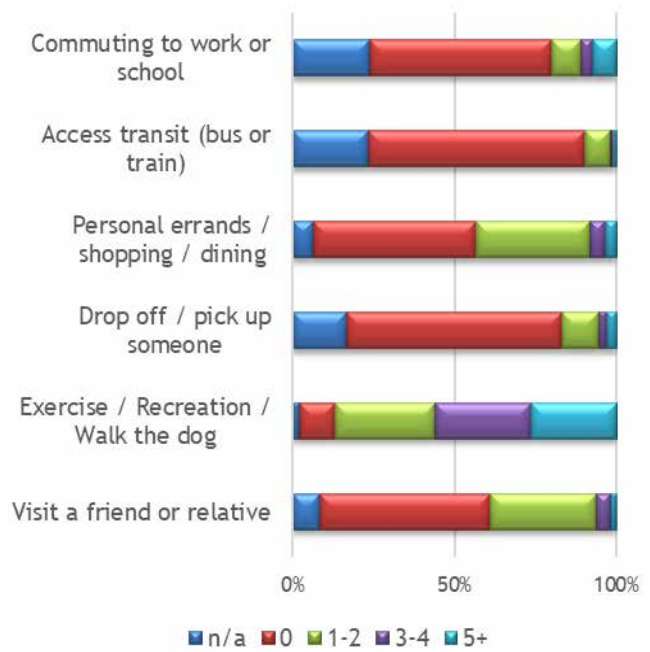


Figure 13. Frequency of Walking Trips per Week by Purpose

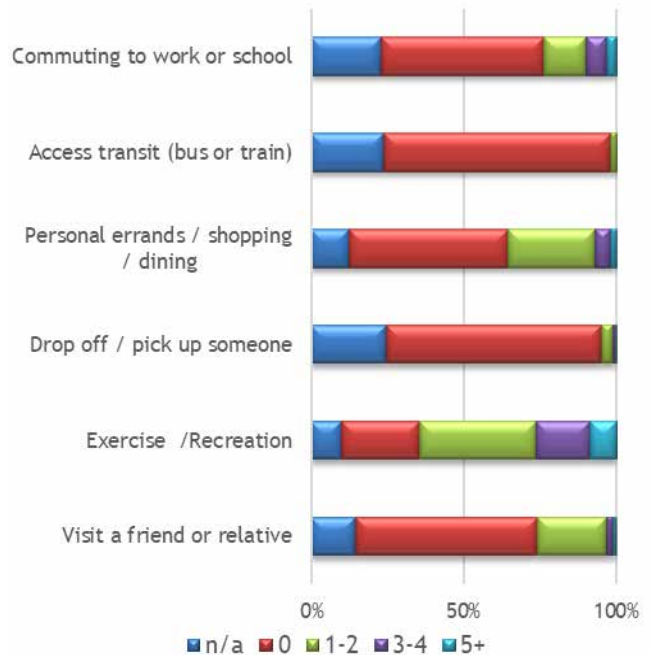


Figure 14. Frequency of Biking Trips per Week by Purpose



Desired Biking Improvements

In the series of questions related to bicycling, respondents were asked about their priorities for bikeway network development and the types of improvements they would like to see. Sixty-three percent of respondents identified trails and greenways as a priority, followed by safer intersections (55 percent), separated bike lanes (41 percent), buffered bike lanes (36 percent), and conventional bike lanes (33 percent).

Other Issues and Ideas

Through open-ended questions with write-in responses, community members shared the following ideas, which are grouped roughly into four overarching categories: Walking, Biking, Trails, and Other Themes.

• Walking

◦ Sidewalks

- Sidewalk cracks, heaving, and other quality issues for skateboarding, strollers, kids biking, and other wheeled users
- Widen sidewalks (like on College Ave) to convert to trails
- Need direct connections to Connect Transit stops and boarding zones
- Snow removal, ponding, mud accumulation issues
- Some neighborhoods lack sidewalks
- People bicycling on sidewalks create unsafe conditions for walkers
- Need sidewalk on Pine east of Beech
- Need sidewalk on Shepard
- Need sidewalk on west side of Landmark

◦ Safer Intersections

- Crosswalk marking maintenance issues
- Diagonal curb cuts direct pedestrians to the center of the intersection

- Improved Veterans Parkway crossings or grade-separated crossings, especially at Ft. Jesse and College
- Main Street crossings north of ISU are difficult
- Marked crosswalks at Broadway and Vernon
- Beaufort and University intersection is dangerous
- High pedestrian volumes at Kingsley and College
- Dangerous crossings at Adelaide and College
- Dangerous crossings at Henry and Shelbourne
- Consider roundabouts along Beaufort at Broadway, Fell, and University
- Longer crossing times for slower pedestrians
- Safer crossing of College to Anderson Park
- Safer crossing at Beaufort and School

• Biking

◦ On-Street Bike Facilities

- Maintenance and design challenges
- Some wider streets present low-cost opportunities over the next 5-10 years
- Need more dedicated routes
- Concerns about motor vehicle capacity
- Greater separation from motor vehicle traffic

◦ Safer Intersections

- Raab and Linden
- Broadway and Beaufort Street
- Safer crossings at Raab and Main
- Safer intersections and crossing locations along Veterans Parkway

◦ Parking and Supporting Infrastructure

- Not enough bike parking throughout Normal
- Need more fix-it stations and tire pumps



- Poorly designed bike racks are very common in Normal
- **Constitution Trail**
 - Centerline striping through busier sections
 - Wider trail surface
 - Control speeds of faster trail users
 - Safer crossings at road intersections, especially Vernon
 - Mile markers for emergency services
 - Improve trail surface for inline skating and skateboarding
 - More east-west trails
 - More access/connections to the trail
 - Trail lighting for evening use
 - Debris and gravel along Route 66 Trail are challenges to many trail users
 - New trail along Sugar Creek
 - Better maintenance of trail overgrowth and tree/shrub limbs to increase visibility
 - Maintenance needed on northern sections of the trail
 - More, smaller trailheads and parking areas for trail users
 - Security enhancements like greater police presence or security cameras
 - More visible street names at crossing approaches
- **Other Themes**
 - **Enforcement & Education**
 - Motor vehicle speeds and compliance with traffic regulations
 - Bicycle and pedestrian compliance with traffic regulations, especially at trail crossings
 - Distracted driving and walking issues
 - **More education for all road users**
 - **Wayfinding**
 - Wayfinding signs are low-cost, effective enhancements
 - Better signage needed to connect Route 66 trail to community destinations
 - **Lighting**
 - Lighting on trails and local streets can be improved for both safety and security



Open House

On the evening of November 13, 2019, the Town of Normal held an open house at the Community Activity Center to share information about the Bicycle and Pedestrian Master Plan update and learn from residents about their issues and aspirations for walking and biking. The open house consisted of a series of informative display boards providing background information and potential elements of a bicycle and pedestrian plan, a 20-minute presentation covering the basic elements of a bicycle and pedestrian plan, and a summary of accomplishments since the previous plan was adopted in 2009, and maps on which people could highlight issues and opportunities to address in the plan.



Scenes from the October 2019 Open House.



Over 40 residents attended the event and shared their ideas and inspiration with the project team. One way in which attendees shared their ideas was voting for different values, facility types, programming opportunities, and other ideas displayed on project boards located throughout the room. As the charts on this page indicate, attendees expressed their interest in bicycle and pedestrian improvements that increase separation from motor vehicle traffic, more sidewalks to connect to everyday destinations, new trails and greenways, and safer roadway crossing opportunities throughout town. While the League of American Bicyclists' Bicycle Friendly Community Report Card identified a variety of strategies to reach the silver-level designation, attendees were most interested in bikeway network expansion and the creation of a community-wide Vision Zero plan aimed at eliminating traffic fatalities.

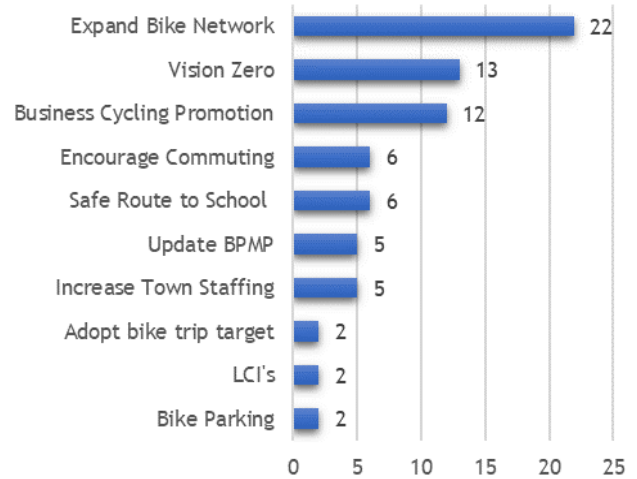


Figure 16. Bicycle Friendly Community (BFC) Key Steps Feedback

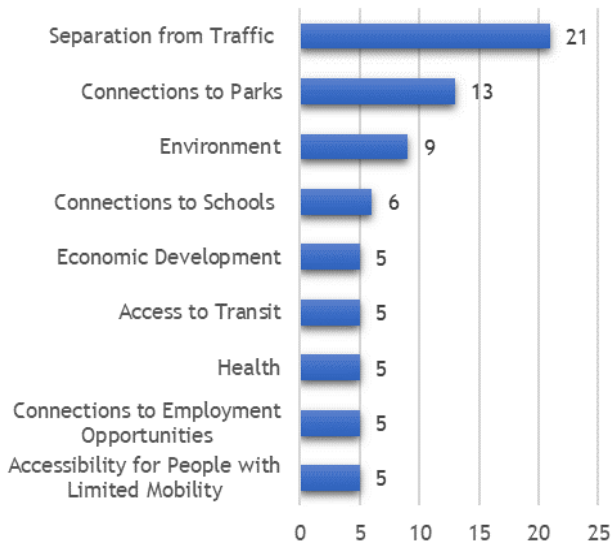


Figure 15. Community Values Feedback

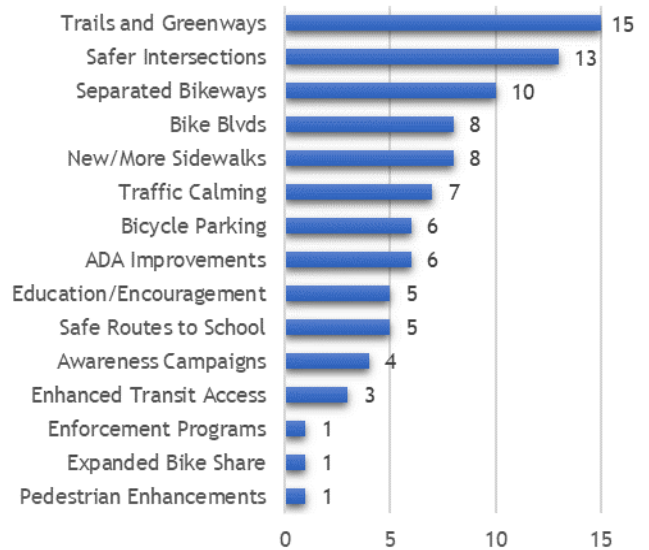


Figure 17. Investing in Biking and Walking Feedback



Community Meetings

In early 2020, the Town of Normal reached out to a number of institutions, neighborhood associations, and community groups and organizations to expand the reach of the plan and better understand bicycle and pedestrian issues and needs of specific user groups. The Town met with the following groups from January through May:

- Lake Run Club
- Friends of the Constitution Trail
- ISU staff organizations
- ISU sustainability groups
- Old North Normal Neighborhood Association
- Bicycle advocacy groups

While each group shared specific issues and ideas with Town staff, the following themes and shared concerns emerged from these conversations and helped to guide the Town in developing tailored Plan recommendations for infrastructure improvements and supporting policies and programs:

- Wayfinding on and to the trail
- Constitution Trail
 - Crossing improvements (especially Vernon Ave)
 - Trail system expansion and connections
 - Centerline striping on busier sections
 - Landscaping and lighting
- Problematic intersections
 - University and College
 - Kingsley and College
 - Broadway and Beaufort

- On-street bikeway network expansion (especially separated bike lanes)
- On-street bikeway maintenance
- Bicycle and pedestrian safety and facilities on and across the Veterans Parkway corridor
- Winter maintenance and snow clearing on sidewalks and trails
- Public education - rules of the road
- Greater focus on safe bike and pedestrian routes near schools
- Bike racks and fix-it stations (especially near ISU campus and off-campus housing)
- Address sidewalk gaps (especially East College)
- New trail map app
- More loops for recreational routes
- Lowering the citywide speed limit
- Additional safe north-south routes
- Better routes out of town to get to the lakes
- More bike and walk events



Public Review

During the final stages of the planning process, the Town of Normal made the difficult decision to forego the final public open house in consideration of the COVID-19 pandemic and the health and safety of Normal residents. The Town instead made the open house presentation boards available for public viewing in Uptown and posted the plan on the Town website for comments. Town staff promoted the draft plan and comment period through social media and direct outreach to stakeholder groups.

During the two-week comment period in September 2020, the Town of Normal received over 60 comments from Normal residents and interested individuals from neighboring communities who work, shop, go to school, or use recreational facilities like the Constitution Trail in Normal. The comments received were overwhelmingly positive, reflecting broad-based support for active transportation and related infrastructure. Trail system expansion, trail crossing safety, on-street bicycle network expansion, and pedestrian safety were among the most mentioned plan elements in respondents' feedback.

The Town of Normal also received multiple submissions through the online comment form expressing concern or disapproval for the plan. Among the topics of concern were the lack of resources to implement the plan and the need to address other priorities, including transportation issues like pavement condition; specific projects perceived to have a negative impact on individuals' property or experience as Normal residents; and traffic safety concerns resulting from increased bicycle activity on Normal streets.

Input Informing Action

At each step in the planning process, the two-way dialogue with community residents and stakeholders has provided the Town of Normal with valuable information, ideas, and inspiration. Along with technical analysis and an inventory of existing conditions, public input provides a solid foundation for the plan's vision, direction, and recommendations. The themes, topics, and issues described above are reflected in the following chapters of the plan, from the high-level vision down to specific network recommendations and implementation strategies.



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