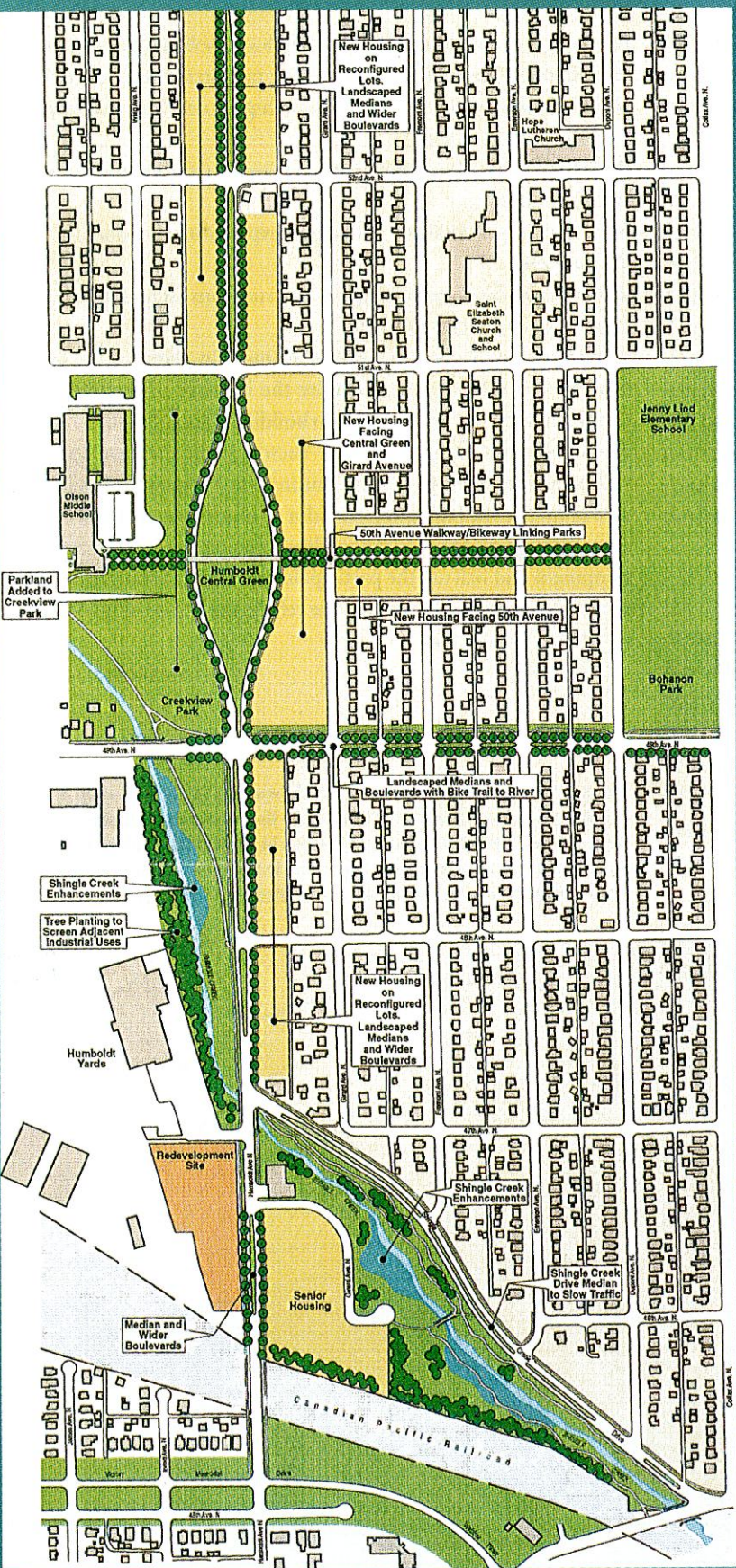


Minneapolis has a history of greenspace development dating back to 1857, long linking parks, lakes, greenways, urban forestry, and aesthetics to economic development. One of Hennepin Community Works' three initial projects is the Humboldt Greenway, which includes a \$34 million greenway installation along Humboldt Avenue.



BIG

REBECCA BRYANT

For most people, the history of American public works can be rendered in a few broad brush strokes: the “Westward ho!” of bridge, railroad, and dam construction across the 19th-century landscape; the declining prestige of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, whose policy of flood control on the Mississippi River led to a 1927 flood that some consider the worst natural disaster in U.S. history; vintage monuments like the Brooklyn Bridge, Hoover Dam, and Works Progress Administration (WPA) projects; then decade after recent decade in which the public works or infrastructure industry thumbed its nose at nature and at the public realm.

As the once-adventurous industry grew stagnant, producing what transportation and infrastructure consultant Nancy Connery calls an onslaught of “ugly, utilitarian, cheap” infrastructure, public frustration deepened, giving rise to the NIMBY and new urbanism movements. Connery, who gained a unique perspective

Hennepin Community Works in Minnesota designs multifunctional projects that increase the return on each dollar of investment.

GER

Is Better

on the industry by directing a major study of U.S. public investment needs for Congress in the 1980s, says that change comes slowly to the industry, which has a huge apparatus in place to protect its turf.

The story of how a stodgy, risk-averse industry is responding to criticism could take many forms. It might focus on diversification of engineering school curricula, privatization, construction of a polymer pedestrian bridge, or a new receptiveness toward public input in the design process. Here is a look at innovation within the industry from a different angle—that of a pioneering experiment in Minnesota called Hennepin Community Works.

Hennepin County, which encompasses the greater Minneapolis area, has taken the lead in a public infrastructure planning and investment program called Hennepin Community Works (HCW) that exemplifies a trend toward “more-bigger-better” projects. More means designing multifunctional projects that increase the return on each dollar of investment. Hennepin County Commissioner Mark Andrew explains that, in a January 1993 series of summit meetings for elected officials, five problems kept popping up: crime, the tax base, the aesthetic environment, economic development,

and housing quality. “Instead of putting a dollar into each of those pots,” says Andrew, “we decided to mitigate all the problems with the same dollar.”

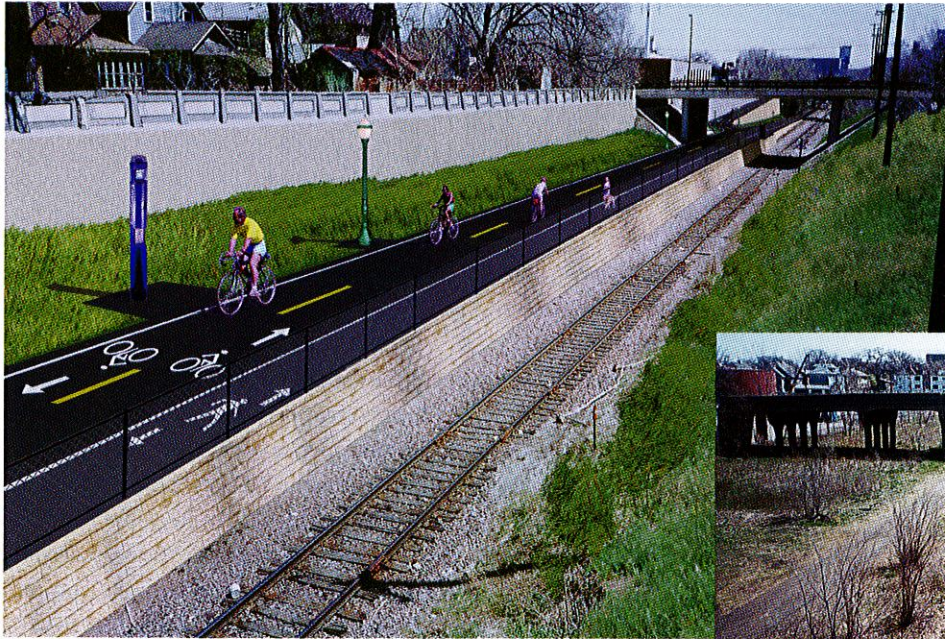
Bigger means increasing the scale of community projects to magnify their impact; it also means crossing jurisdictional boundaries. The seven HCW partners, which operate under a cooperative agreement, are Hennepin County, Hennepin County Regional Railroad Authority (HCRRA), the Suburban Hennepin Regional Park District, the Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board, Minneapolis public schools, the city of Minneapolis, and the Minneapolis Community Development Agency (MCDA). Frequently compared to WPA projects, HCW projects have to be large, says Andrew, because doing small things only slows the rate of decline. “We need to flip the paradigm and do things exponentially instead of incrementally.”

Better means producing projects within an integrated policy framework. The June 1994 feasibility report for HCW states, “The commission’s most important discovery is that carefully designed and integrated parks and public works projects sustain and enhance the long-term tax base and financial viability of neighborhoods while enhancing their quality of life. For projects to be most successful they must be part of a larger vision—an integrated system that crosses jurisdictional boundaries, connecting each neighborhood to its ecological roots, to job opportunities that are sustainable, and to the community as a whole.”

Green Draws Green

Minneapolis, City of Lakes, has a history of greenspace development more akin to that of the garden cities of Europe than that of its American brethren. Minneapolis dedicated its first park—now Murphy Square—in 1857, a year before New York City acquired Central Park. In 1873, the city passed a resolution that tied acceptance of plats to the allocation of park space. Ten years later, prominent citizens, the local press, and the Minneapolis Board of Trade campaigned to secure land for a system of parks and boulevards. Colonel W. S. King, secretary of the Minneapolis Board of Trade, claimed, “It is a scheme which will bring more capital, more population, and add more to the city’s renown than any other scheme which could be devised.” Passed by a rousing majority of Minneapolis citizens in 1883, the Park Act led to the Grand Rounds system of pleasure drives, connecting the Mississippi River, Minnehaha Creek, and a chain of lakes.

Having linked beautification to economic development more than a 100 years ago, the public sector, through HCW, continues to use parks, lakes, greenways, urban forestry, and aesthetics to attract and generate dollars. The closer properties are to the parks, the more they have appreciated in value. Neighborhoods in which proper-



Another HCW project—the 29th Street Corridor—involves a two-track 5.7-mile rail corridor (below). Plans include two bicycle lanes, a pedestrian lane, and a host of ramps, stairs, light fixtures, signs, and benches that incorporate 40 overhead bridge spans (at left).



ties have declined more than 10 percent in value are those with fewer or lower-quality parks. The Board of County Commissioners manages the property tax base like an investment portfolio; thus, HCW's three initial projects—the 29th Street Corridor, the Humboldt Greenway, and the Summer-Olson redevelopment—are all designed first and foremost as infrastructure investments to anchor at-risk neighborhoods. Five principles guide HCW projects: each project should stimulate economic development, build bridges for effective planning and implementation, maintain and improve natural systems, strengthen communities through connections, and enhance the tax base.

The 29th Street Corridor

The 29th Street Corridor—a two-track 5.7-mile rail corridor, much of it trenched 20 feet below grade—begins at Minneapolis's western edge not far from the Lake of the Isles. Moving eastward past Hennepin Avenue, the corridor intersects trendy Uptown, then a developing arts district of brick warehouses. The corridor's mid-section between I-35W and Hiawatha Avenue has been in distress for years: a 2 million-square-foot Sears complex, largely vacant for more than a decade, reflects its surroundings. Modest, mixed-aged, revival-style houses and abundant trees make up the third segment, where property prices ascend as one approaches the Mississippi River.

The 29th Street Corridor parallels a historic commercial zone along Lake Street. Peter McLaughlin, a county commissioner who represents the area, thinks that Lake Street's vitality declined because it did not get direct access off I-35W. "The basic redevelopment strategy," says McLaughlin, "is to piggyback on the infrastructure investment." To evaluate return on investment, HCW did not rely on property value maps alone. Econometric studies show that a \$16 million public and \$7.5 million private investment in the corridor will generate a total return of \$102 million over 15 years. That includes \$97 million in increased property taxes, plus \$5 mil-

lion more in sales, income, and corporate franchise taxes; welfare savings; and crime mitigation savings. Moreover, the project will create 250 new jobs within six years.

The master plan for the 29th Street Corridor was produced by SRF Consulting Group of Minneapolis. Information poured out of interviews, open houses, a neighborhood advisory committee, and a technical advisory committee composed of public agencies with jurisdiction over the right-of-way or the project itself. The resulting design attempts to reorient surrounding development, which has turned its back to the corridor; reduce the sense of containment and isolation in the below-grade segments; maximize open space, neighborhoods, and transportation links; play on the rhythm of 40 overhead bridge spans; incorporate landmarks such as the 250-foot Sears tower, grain elevators, and Pioneer cemetery; address safety concerns; and capitalize on views. The Minneapolis Department of Public Works is orchestrating the first layer of development—two bicycle lanes; a pedestrian lane; and a host of ramps, stairs, light fixtures, signs, and benches. Construction of the first 2.8-mile segment, at a cost of about \$4 million, begins this year. Primary funding sources are the county, the Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act (ISTEA), and HCRRA.

Much of the drive behind development of the corridor comes from the Midtown Greenway Coalition. Executive Director Tim Springer is a bicycling enthusiast who has been with the coalition since it began in 1992, when residents started holding circuit meetings in each other's living rooms. Now incorporated as a nonprofit with an office adjacent to the greenway and a \$61,000 budget, the

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According to Kulash, "With real success it would look like a true town, no longer auto-dominated. The overriding impression would no longer be that of moving and storing automobiles, which it is now."

In five years "the mall will be a very profitable, highly active center with many strong national and local tenants" and potentially a complementary shopping destination for out-of-town visitors to Warehouse Row, believes Gibbs. This designer label outlet mall built downtown in 1989 in renovated turn-of-the-century warehouses attracts shoppers from as far away as Atlanta.

Harrower envisions "a mall that no one will really recognize here in another 12 months. In five years you'll see a vastly different terrain." He describes a scene with outdoor cafés, streets that have sidewalks and grassy medians, and acres of asphalt broken up with plantings and water features—a place built to human scale, "where people could spend the day and not be in a car."

Dover sees 100 years of sustained economic development and a beautiful, livable community, but he cautions that the vision is just the first step in a long transformation. "We can't predict everything that will happen. The vision should allow you to do anything at any size and know that your piece of it will fit the greater whole that we're attempting to build over time. A single property owner, a mall developer, or a subdivision developer can do that with great confidence because they control all of the land. But here, with a variety of property owners, small and large, the only common manager of the whole process is the community, the city. That's why the city is involved in the planning, because no one else is responsible for the big picture."

The task in this suburban area is the same one Chattanooga is addressing successfully in its downtown: restoring a lost center for the community. The pieces are there—community services, stores, offices, homes, and walking trails. Under the guidance of the new plan and its stakeholders, those pieces will be pulled together to create a vital town center. ■

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coalition's function, says Springer, is to provide grass-roots support for the project and to keep the full agenda on the table. The full agenda means all the physical accessories that tend to get slashed from projects; public art, youth mentoring, and landscaping programs that reknit the community fabric; land use planning; and ancillary development. "The bikeway is the seed from which everything else grows," says Springer. "Public art is an important aspect. For each piece you have to answer questions: Who will select the artist? Who will the artist be? What will be the focus of the artwork? Where will it go? Who will own and insure it? It's challenging enough for one piece, let alone many." One proposal that has made it through the battery of questions is sculptor Foster Willey's idea of creating an open-air gallery of 50 concrete portraits under the 4th Avenue bridge.

A second challenge, Springer says, is transforming the corridor into a place where women riding alone on bikes feel safe. The answer, he thinks, is high-volume use and neighborhood ownership. "If we get kids involved in public art and bicycle races, they'll be less likely to throw shopping carts off bridges." Meanwhile, the coalition is throwing its support behind overlay zoning with design guidelines to steer development on nearby land, because neighbors do not want to have to fight parking lots and industrial loading docks on a case-by-case basis.

According to HCW Program Manager Larry Blackstad, the role of HCW is to "work with everyone out there to make sure they're connected to the spine." By everyone he means the likes of Springer; local developer Ray Harris, who recently purchased the Sears complex; city council member Lisa McDonald, who is proposing an urban village; and MCDA, which has been actively engaged in economic development throughout the corridor for years. "As a catalyst," Blackstad continues, "we need to get ideas out there and use limited funding to support or market those ideas." For example, Blackstad hired the firm Zimmerman/Volk of New Jersey to do a housing market analysis that will clarify development options along the corridor. Another example is a public/private partnership called Midtown Community Works (MCW). Its emphasis will be to stimulate mixed-use infill development. Business partners include Dayton Hudson, the Minneapolis Institute of Art, Norwest Banks, Allina Health Systems, U.S. Bancorp, and Honeywell.

A huge boost was given to redevelopment efforts in March when Harris, with the support

of neighborhood groups and public officials, finally closed on the 17.6-acre, 2 million-square-foot Sears complex, which physically spans the 29th Street corridor. The building's uncertain future had stymied other efforts to improve midtown. The developer describes what ultimately will be a \$100 million investment over three to five years as "the most important project the city has seen from an economic development standpoint in the last ten to 15 years." Plans include restoration of retail space on the first floor, offices, a parking ramp, and a transit hub, plus a hotel and theater on outlots. Minnesota Diversified Industries will continue to lease an attached warehouse. "The greenway was a plus," says Harris. "We want to access it through the basement and ground level of our property."

Humboldt Avenue Greenway and Sumner-Olson Redevelopment

In what city residents call "far north," HCW is acquiring the right-of-way for an estimated \$34 million greenway installation along Humboldt Avenue. Here too property values are in decline, but the scene is completely different. One finds what architect Bill Morrish and the staff of the Design Center for the American Urban Landscape at the University of Minneapolis call a classic first-ring suburb. An assortment of bungalows, miniature Cape Cods, ramblers, and ranch-style homes (most in the 600- to 1,000-square-foot range) line up in flanks, forming the Lind-Bohanon neighborhood.

These \$45,000 to \$60,000 properties generate about \$650 to \$900 each in taxes each year. Comparably sized lots in other sections of town can generate twice that amount. Not only does Lind-Bohanon face problems typical of other first-ring suburbs around the country—buckling plywood, zoning that limits retrofit options, poor access to public transportation, unavailable bankers, and changing demographics—but also the houses commit what in Minnesota is a mortal sin: they sit on slabs, not basements.

Five to ten years ago, Lind-Bohanon was socially cohesive and stable. Then it started to slide. The solution, or so it is hoped, is a public works and housing redevelopment project. It entails removal of 210 residential and commercial units along Humboldt Avenue and construction of three- to four-bedroom, move-up housing to repopulate the child-poor but school-rich neighborhood. A 60-unit senior complex also is in the works. Spruced up with landscaped medians, Humboldt Avenue will turn into a parkway with a central green. HCW

will transform 50th Avenue into a landscaped pedestrian way, joining Jenny Lind Elementary to nationally recognized Olson Middle School. Shingle Creek, named for a settlement-era wood shingle factory, was christened County Ditch #13 in 1910 and moved to a completely new channel in 1958. Using riffles, design sleight-of-hand, and ponds and wetlands with spillways, HCW will connect Shingle Creek with the Grand Rounds waterways.

Hennepin County Commissioner Mike Opat says, "In the past, that neighborhood never asked for anything. It had a 'don't bother us' attitude." After two years of public meetings and design charrettes organized by the Design Center, attitudes have shifted. "At first we had rough meetings. People hollered at me. Now some of the people who were hollering are testifying at the state capital for the plan." Others, their roofs leaking and hot water heaters crashing, are calling HCW daily, urging accelerated buyouts.

The origin of HCW's third major project, the Sumner-Olson Redevelopment, lies in a lawsuit, *Hollman v. Cisneros*, one of a series in Minneapolis, Kansas City, Chicago, Baltimore, and Dallas brought by the NAACP and Legal

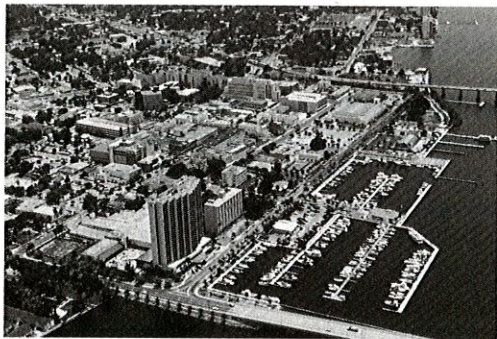


One of Minneapolis's first-ring suburbs, the Lind-Bohanon neighborhood, faces problems typical of other first-ring suburbs around the country—zoning that limits retrofit options, poor access to public transportation, changing demographics, and houses that sit on slabs rather than basements. HCW plans include a major public works and housing redevelopment project.

Aid Society to redress concentrations of poverty. The Hollman suit argued that since the 1930s the city and other agencies had engaged in a purposeful policy of steering people of

color to housing projects in north Minneapolis. The defendants chose to address the issues raised by the lawsuit, and the parties entered negotiations. A \$117 million settlement entails,

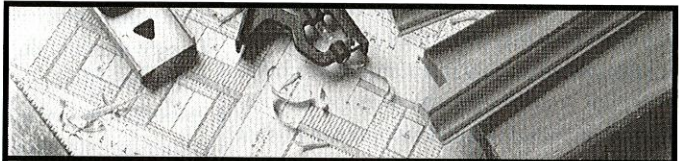
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in part, demolishing 770 public housing units and replacing them with mixed-income housing. Because the Sumner-Olson neighborhood has become an isolated pocket of dilapidated housing, other major design solutions are under consideration: adding a lake or revealing underground Bassetts Creek to the light of day; linking Sumner-Olson to the Grand Rounds parks and trail system; and constructing a boulevard with access to downtown.

Cooperation

Minneapolis has benefited from a rare combination of people and events that has made HCW possible. For example, the state's fiscal disparities act has long mandated revenue sharing among different areas of the state. (Minnesota State Representative Myron Orfield's new book, *Metropolitics: A Regional Agenda for Community and Stability*, advocates this tax-sharing model for other major metropolitan areas.) The neighborhood revitalization program in Minneapolis is an example of a similar concept on a local scale. Such policies promote interjurisdictional cooperation.

Other cities also are playing renditions of the "more-bigger-better" theme. The Cultural

Arts Council of Houston/Harris County recently inaugurated the Houston Framework, using the city's bayous as design building blocks. Houston also will consider every new bridge or overpass, every park and building as an opportunity to make the area more appealing. A Rio Salado river restoration effort in the Phoenix-Tempe area will address stormwater problems, recreation, economic development, and habitat restoration. Indeed, the interdisciplinary rhetoric of ISTEA goes a long way toward promoting multifunctional, multijurisdictional approaches to infrastructure development.

Counseling other metro areas, Opat picks five points: "Think big. Don't let scale frighten you. Talk to partners informally before you try to do something formally. Make sure you have equity in a location. Keep a diary and refer to it often." Andrew describes HCW as a "front-end-loaded concept." It takes time to bring policy makers together to hash out principles, structure, and funding, but once done, it does not have to be done again. Morrish notes that the normal process of infrastructure development is to make simple decisions and produce products. "The language of sustainability is difficult to implement because it

cuts across the grain of traditional methods of implementation."

Some cities let neighborhoods deteriorate and call it affordable housing. Others segregate wealthy from poor areas. Some cities shred the same street three different times as each department does its piece of work. Still others let their first-ring suburbs rot. Minneapolis, on the other hand, is making connections—among people, agencies, neighborhoods, transportation modes and routes, art and safety, parks and economic development, and infrastructure and community. Andrew puts it this way: "If you create an environment in which good things can happen, then good things will happen." ■

REBECCA BRYANT IS A WRITER AND PLANNING CONSULTANT BASED IN FAYETTEVILLE, ARKANSAS.

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