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COUNTIES
CURRENT
CCAO
TEAMWORK FOR A BETTER TOMORROW

August 26, 2024

Thank you to all the commissioners, county executives, and county council members from across the state who attended the 2024 Summer Symposium in Hocking Hills! Read more about the event below!

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ASSOCIATION AND MEMBER NEWS

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2024 CCAO Summer Symposium Recap

Thank you to all the county commissioners, county executives, county council members, and county staff members who attended the 2024 CCAO Summer Symposium! The event was held at the Hocking Hills Lodge and Conference Center in Hocking County, with the theme of *Teamwork for a Better Tomorrow*. The gathering offered attendees the time to interact with a wide array of distinguished experts and learn about issues relevant in every county.

On Wednesday, attendees participated in conversations on management and leadership skills, with presentations by Ashtabula County Commissioner Kathryn Whittington and Clemans Nelson, with optional hikes to Old Man's Cave and a stargazing opportunity at the John Glenn Astronomy Park.

Thursday's sessions included a presentation on emergency management from Ohio EPA Director Anne Vogel, who shared lessons learned from the East Palestine train derailment crisis. Attendees also heard tips on the strategic planning process from Lorain County, updated on critical 9-1-1 and MARCS radio system infrastructure, strategies for improving behavioral health challenges in county jails, and the potential of AI in county governance.

The symposium concluded on Friday with presentations on Ohio's Critical Infrastructure Data System (OCIDS) by Ohio Homeland Security and pharmaceutical trends in healthcare.

You can view the full photo album from the event at CCAO's Facebook page.

Champaign County Commissioner Steven Hess and Athens County Commissioner Lenny Eliason were among the many attendees at this year's Summer Symposium.

Miami County Commissioner Greg Simmons and Ashtabula County Commissioner J.P. Ducro faced off in a cornhole match on the lodge's Grand Terrance.

Logan County Commissioner Joe Antram took advantage of the Wednesday morning hike to Old Man's Cave, one of the most popular sites in Hocking Hills State Park.

Licking County Commissioner Tim Bubb and Lorain County Administrator Jeff Armbruster chatted in between sessions on Thursday.

Henry County Commissioner Glenn Miller visiting with Department of Natural Resources Naturalist Jeff Large and Houdini (left).

Second round of ORBEG grants awarded for broadband projects

Last week, Governor Mike DeWine, Lt. Governor Jon Husted, and Department of Development Director Lydia Mihalik announced the awarding of $94.5 million to provide affordable, high-speed internet to households across the state through the Residential Broadband Expansion Grant Program. The funding will support six projects that will impact 23 counties. The process also secured commitments from internet service providers to independently fund 51 additional projects across 25 counties. You can read more about the projects here.

The projects that received funding are summarized below by internet service provider. The project numbers for Time Warner are only for distinguishing purposes and are not actually a part of the project name.

- **Brightspeed** - $11,358,720
    - Counties: Allen, Ashtabula, Columbiana, Knox, Mahoning, Shelby, and Trumbull
    - Households: 5,053

- **Time Warner Project 1** - $19,635,616
    - Counties: Fulton and Henry
    - Households: 7,275

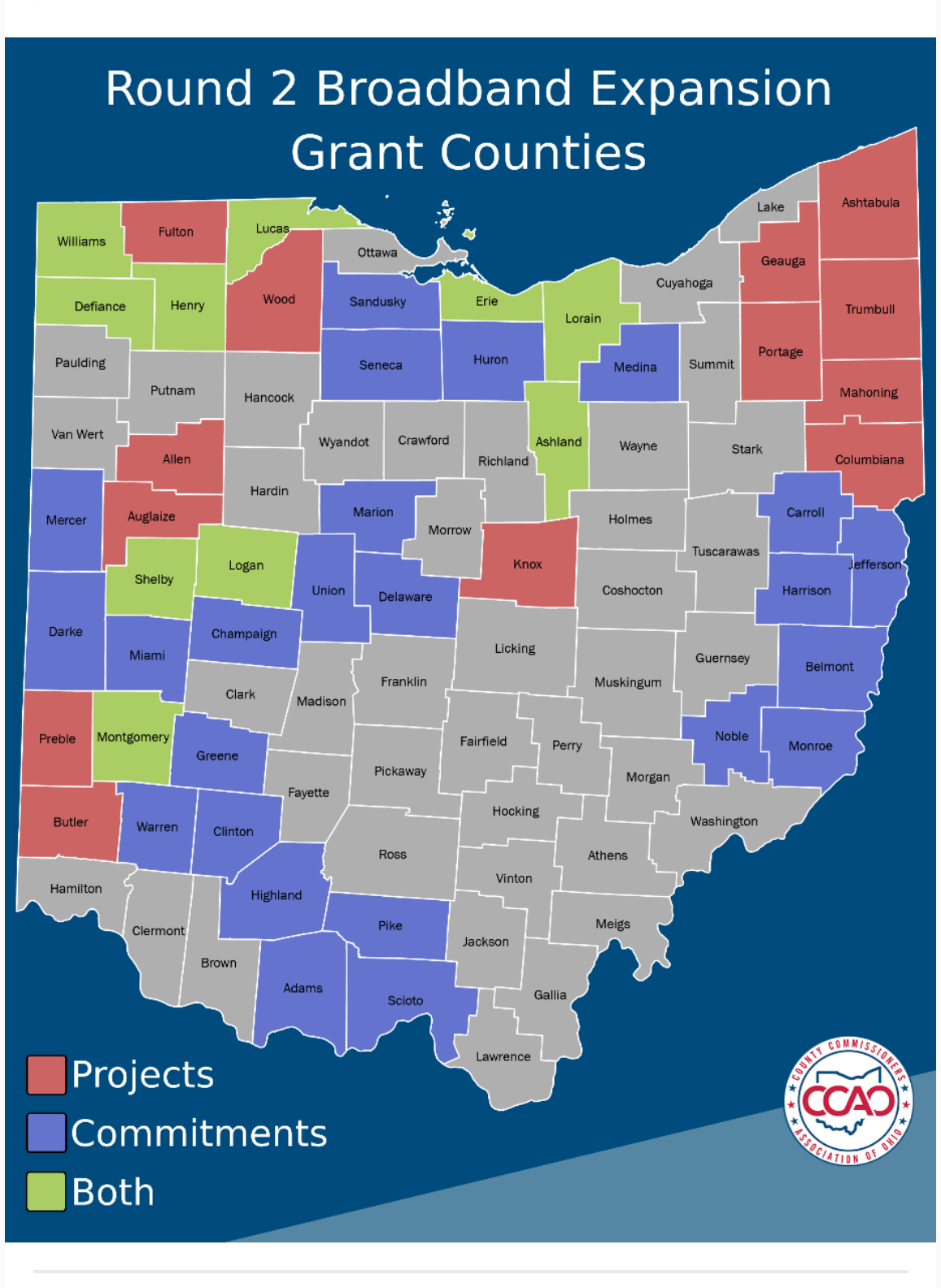
- **Time Warner Project 2** - $17,471,275
    - Counties: Auglaize, Butler, Logan, Montgomery, and Preble
    - Households: 6,645

- **Time Warner Project 3** - $15,287,761
    - Counties: Ashland, Erie, Geauga, Lorain, Lucas, and Wood
    - Households: 5,289

- **Time Warner Project 4** - $13,476,757
    - Counties: Ashtabula, Columbiana, Portage, and Trumbull
    - Households: 5,036

- **Time Warner Project 5** - $17,269,871
    - Counties: Defiance and Williams
    - Households: 6,053

The map below shows the counties the funded projects will serve and those for which self-funded projects are committed.



Summer 2024 issue of County Leader available

CCAO has published the Summer 2024 edition of our e-magazine, County Leader! We have revamped and modernized the look and feel of this online publication.

The 30-page issue features columns from CCAO President and Tuscarawas County Commissioner Chris Abbuhl and CCAO Executive Director Cheryl Subler, features on Clermont County's Veteran's Village initiative and four counties' bicentennial celebrations (Holmes, Lorain, Seneca, and Williams), a spotlight on the Ohio Homebuyer Plus program from Ohio Treasurer of State Robert Sprague, as well as updates from CEBCO, CORSA, the CCAO Service Corp, and much more!

You can read the latest issue here as well as view past issues and other CCAO publications on our website.

Central District Meeting to be held in Champaign County on October 4

On October 4, the CCAO-CEAO Central District will host a meeting in Champaign County.

The meeting will include a tour of the Sutphen Corporation, a company that manufactures and services fire trucks and other fire suppression supplies. **Please note that close-toed shoes must be worn for this tour.**

After the Sutphen tour, the event will conclude with a tour of the Champaign Aviation Museum. The museum is known for its ongoing project of restoring a B-17 Flying Fortress, the primary Allied high-altitude bomber during World War II.

If you are interested in registering for the event, please contact Champaign County Clerk Natalie Ransdell at nrandsdell@co.champaign.oh.us or 937-484-1611. Please register by September 18.

County Advocacy Toolkit available

The CCAO Policy Team is happy to unveil the County Advocacy Toolkit! The Toolkit is the product of work with the CCAO Legislative Advocacy Task Force and is intended to serve as a helpful touchpoint as CCAO members advocate on behalf of their county and the Association with state leaders.

The toolkit provides tips on effectively advocating to your legislators and state officials and provides members with examples and samples of what other members have done to advocate for their counties. The toolkit is split into two parts: the first gives ideas and advice on how to advocate based on what members have found successful in the past, while the second part contains samples of effective advocacy materials. This includes testimony to the General Assembly, resolutions passed by boards of commissioners, social media posts, and more.

The toolkit can be downloaded from the link above or on the State Advocacy page of CCAO's website.

We hope that the resource proves useful!

REMINDER: All county staff must complete fraud reporting training September 28

All county commissioners, executives, council members, other county elected officials and all current county staff are required to complete a new, mandatory fraud reporting training through the Auditor of State's office by **September 28, 2024**. All public employees and elected officials are required to take the training once every 4 years.

Elected officials are unable to delegate this training to another employee and must complete the training themselves.

Any new county employees hired after September 28, 2024, must take the training within 30 days of the first day of employment and all elected officials must take the training within 30 days after taking office. The requirement is ongoing and training must be completed once every four years.

The training is a free, 8-minute video that is available on demand on the Auditor of State's website. Each elected official and county employee will register, watch the video, and then receive a certificate of completion. All certificates should be collected from employees and retained for audit.

The Auditor of State website includes FAQs and sample tools for tracking employee participation.

If you have questions regarding the training, you can contact the Auditor of State's office here.

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STATE AND FEDERAL NEWS

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Ohio Supreme Court makes ruling in Nexus pipeline case about county appeals of Department of Taxation settlements

On Tuesday, the Supreme Court of Ohio ruled in *Snodgrass v. Harris* that the right of counties to appeal Department of Taxation determinations does not apply to arms-length settlement agreements between the department and public utility owners of capitalized infrastructure.

Case Background
The case arose over the valuation of the Nexus Gas Transmission pipeline, a natural gas pipeline running through 12 counties on its way to Detroit and Canada. The Department of Taxation valued the infrastructure at $1.6 billion while the company assessed it at $616 million. The company appealed to the Board of Tax Appeals, but before the BTA decided, the department and company reached a settlement for a valuation of $950 million, with adjusted valuations in subsequent years.

The Lorain County Auditor appealed the settlement to the BTA, arguing that the department didn't follow the proper statutory criteria in reaching its valuation (R.C. 5727.11). The BTA cited a different provision of the Revised Code (R.C. 5703.05) that states that the department has "authority provided by law relative to consenting to the compromise and settlement of tax claims." The Board also rejected the Lorain County Auditor's appeal on procedural grounds based on the auditor not intervening in the company's original appeal.

The Lorain County Auditor then appealed to the Supreme Court.

Supreme Court's Ruling
In a 4-3 decision, the Supreme Court ruled that while county auditors can appeal the result reached through a settlement between the Department of Taxation and a company, it may only do so in claims of "fraud, duress, overreaching, undue influence, or disputes over the meaning or application of the settlement's terms". The substance of the settlement and its terms is not appealable.

The Court upheld the valuation agreement in the settlement. In doing so, the Court held that tax commissioner settlements are an adjudication of last result.

Dissent
The justices in the minority wrote a dissenting opinion (begins at page 11 of the link above) which states that the majority's opinion may have the effect of ending county auditor appeal rights if the Tax Department opts to solely seek unrepealable settlements with companies regarding infrastructure.

The minority also encourages the General Assembly to clarify the appealability of Department of Taxation's valuation settlements.

Franklin County requests Attorney General Opinion on mid-term health plan changes

Attorney General Dave Yost recently accepted an Attorney General Opinion request concerning whether or not an insurance change constitutes an unconstitutional mid-term compensation increase for elected officials.

The request, which comes from Franklin County, centers on the nature of the Franklin County Cooperative, a self-insured health insurance program offered to county offices, agencies, staff, and elected officials. The program offers one medical insurance plan, in which the county sets a cost per covered employee, and the employee pays 12% of the cost, with the employer paying the balance.

Elected officials pay the employee contribution rate in effect when they first take office, regardless of any copay increases or contribution rate changes.

The county requested the opinion to streamline health plan administration since, due to the staggering of elected official terms, the county often has to administer six variations of the same plan simultaneously. The specific question is the legality of permitting elected officials to transition to new health plans while maintaining the same contribution distribution as in their elected year.

The county cites a past Attorney General Opinion and an informal Ethics Commission in the request. The past Attorney General Opinion, AGO 2005-031, found that a change in the number of dollars expended by the county on the elected officer's behalf and an increase in the benefits received by the officer is not prohibited if it is not due to a mid-term legislative change in the formula determining compensation. Since Franklin County does not change the 12%-88% split, the county asks if its circumstances meet the allowable change.

Similarly, the Informal Ethics Commission Opinion, 2011-INF-1216, suggested that certain changes to health plans do not inherently constitute an illegal mid-term compensation increase.

CCAO will monitor the Attorney General's action on this request and share it with the membership.

Department of Aging to host Assisted Living Feedback forums across the state

Over the next month, the Department of Aging will be hosting eight Assisted Living Feedback Forums to foster communication between local leaders and community members regarding assisted living. The forums are structured in a similar way as the Nursing Home Quality and Accountability Task Force's listening sessions were, held last year. These forums will focus on another option for long-term care.

You can register for any of the remaining events through this link.

The schedule of remaining events with addresses is below:

Youngstown
Thursday, August 29, 2024
1:00 p.m. - 3:00 p.m.
Youngstown State University
Kilcawley Center – Chestnut Room
117 Tressel Way, Youngstown, Ohio 44555

Cleveland
Thursday, Sept. 5, 2024
1:00 p.m. - 3:00 p.m.
The Conference Center at Benjamin Rose Institute on Aging
11890 Fairhill Road, Cleveland, Ohio 44120

EDUCATION AND GRANTS

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Visit the Grants and Funding Opportunities page on the CCAO website for a detailed listing of open grant programs.

THURSDAY: CCAO to hold Public Works Commission webinar on August 29

This Thursday, CCAO will host a webinar focusing on the Ohio Public Works Commission. The webinar will provide an overview of OPWC's infrastructure bond program, a grant and loan program that has been benefiting Ohio's local governments since 1988. The program's funding source must be reauthorized by voters every ten years, and the current reauthorization period is coming to an end. The presentation will examine the history of reauthorization and the required process to put the issue on a forthcoming statewide ballot.

Linda Bailiff, Executive Director of OPWC, will give the presentation and be available to answer questions.

You can register for the webinar here. If you encounter issues registering with the link, please contact Nedra Benson, CCAO Administrative Professional, at nbenson@ccao.org or call 614-221-5627, and provide her with your email address.

WEDNESDAY: Firm to host ARPA funds webinar

This Wednesday, Witt O'Brien's, a crisis and emergency management consulting firm, is hosting a webinar concerning obligation strategies for remaining ARPA State and Local Fiscal Recovery Funds. Since these funds must be obligated by December 31, the webinar will discuss guidance on maximizing the use of these funds and on ensuring compliance with US Treasury regulations.

Registration for the webinar is free and can be completed here.

NACo launches course to develop artificial intelligence knowledge among county leaders

The NACo AI Leadership Academy is an innovative, completely online 6-week program created to equip frontline county government leaders with the knowledge and tools they need to understand and utilize AI to create higher levels of operational efficiency, organizational effectiveness and value for those they serve.

This robust curriculum, developed by the Professional Development Academy in partnership with NACo, provides lessons and insights from highly effective government leaders, proven industry executives, researchers and professors from top universities and subject matter experts. These professionals, along with an online Leadership Coach, address pressing issues facing county leaders today: understanding the power of AI, mitigating the risk of AI and navigating the complexity of cascading change occurring because of AI.

The leadership coaches facilitating this program will demystify AI with practical, relevant and immediately actionable cases, frameworks and tools for existing and emerging leaders in government. The work of government leaders has never been more challenging. This program addresses the challenge head-on and provides participants with engaging content that will increase confidence to lead with AI for good governance.

The course costs $595 for member counties, but discounts and scholarships may be available. The course will run from November 4 to December 20.

If you are interested in signing up yourself or staff members, you can do so by requesting more information here.

Local government cybersecurity grants available

CyberOhio, an initiative by the state to bolster cybersecurity in Ohio, has two grant opportunities for local governments open.

First, the Cybersecurity Software and Services Grant is intended to assist local governments in acquiring security software and services. Examples include implementing multi-factor authentication, server protection programs, and more. Grants can be up to $20,000.

The second program is the .gov Migration Grant. This grant program is intended to assist local governments transition their websites and emails to the ".gov" type. This domain type is only available to U.S.-based government entities, allowing users to have more confidence that they are receiving genuine information and that the emails they may receive from government entities are legitimate. Grants under this program may be up to $9,500.

Applications for both programs are open until September 16. CCAO encourages counties to consider applying for these funds as the threat of cyber attacks will only increase going forward.

COUNTY NEWS

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Each week Counties Current highlights the happenings in our counties in the words of their local media. One story from each of the CCAO's five districts is highlighted, and on occasion other stories may be highlighted as well.

Northwest District
Hardin County Sheriff's Office and Hardin County Commissioners Donate Retired Cruiser to Rhodes State College
WKTN, August 22, 2024
A Hardin County Sheriff's Office retired cruiser has been donated to Rhodes State College.

The keys to the cruiser were presented Wednesday to Angela Heaton, the Dean of the School of Health Sciences and Public Service.

It was donated to the school by the Sheriff's Office and Hardin County Commissioners.

It will be placed into service at the Rhodes State Police Academy to assist in the training of law enforcement cadets.

Northeast District
Medina County commissioners pass resolution of support for Western Reserve Land Conservancy project
The Gazette, August 22, 2024
The Medina County Board of Commissioners passed a resolution of support Tuesday morning regarding Western Reserve Land Conservancy's acquisition of a property in Sharon Township.

The unanimously passed resolution supports the Natural Areas Land Conservancy's application efforts to secure Clean Ohio Green Space Conservation funding to purchase the Sharon Township land.

According to the Western Reserve Land Conservancy, the Natural Areas Land Conservancy is an Ohio nonprofit corporation formed to support the Western Reserve Land Conservancy in the advancement of its charitable mission and purpose.

The Medina County commissioners' passed resolution follows several weeks of discussions with the commissioners, the Western Reserve Land Conservancy and other affected parties.

Central District
Letter: More natural-gas power plants needed
Delaware Gazette, August 21, 2024
(By Delaware County Commissioner Jeff Benton)
As a Delaware County commissioner, I am writing to urge your engagement and action that will produce the electricity needed to facilitate continued economic development here in Delaware County and throughout all of central Ohio. Economic growth in our dynamic community has been fueled by the construction of data centers as well as by continued growth in the technology and manufacturing sectors. This growth has, in turn, driven the demand for electricity to unprecedented levels.

Unfortunately, the availability of reliable, affordable electricity is not keeping pace with the growth we are experiencing. While we need an "all of the above" renewable energy strategy that includes sources such as solar, current resources alone cannot meet the enormous power needs of the industries that are locating here. At the same time, the retirements of coal-fired power plants are causing further strain on the supply of electricity. But there is a solution: natural gas.

Natural-gas power plants would be a good, steady source of additional energy. Plus, natural gas is a plentiful resource in Ohio and in the U.S.

Natural-gas power plants can operate continuously, providing the consistent baseload of electricity that is essential for maintaining grid stability and preventing blackouts. Advancements in the generation of natural gas have also made these power plants cleaner, more efficient, and a key driver of lower emissions in the U.S.

Southwest District
MC Commissioners OK childcare center funds
Miami Valley Today, August 19, 2024
The Miami County Commissioners awarded a one-time contribution of $257,392.71 to the Miami County Land Reutilization Corporation (aka CIC) during their meeting on Thursday, Aug. 15.

The economic development and funding contribution will provide childcare centers of communities impacted within Miami County, to assist workers with children to obtain gainful employment by providing increased opportunities for childcare, and the provision of funding to small businesses impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Kelly Fackel, director of development for Miami County, talked to the commissioners during the meeting.

"This allocation will go to support childcare funding," Fackel said. "We have three projects in the pipeline to award allocations. There is a project in Milton Union, an early childcare center; a Tipp City preschool learning center; and a Troy kids preschool."

Southeast District
Harrison County approves $268,000 for guardrail upgrades
WTOV9, August 21, 2024
Commissioners in Harrison County approved funding Wednesday for a construction project that will replace older and damaged guardrails throughout the county.

"It's going to be approximately $268,000 of work this is phase III, so we've been doing this in pieces over the last few years," Commissioner Paul Coffland said.

"The engineer's office goes through, vets this, bids it. It will have to be ODOT-approved, but again, I don't see any issue there. We've been doing this for a number of years now."

DATES TO REMEMBER

Please view the CCAO Calendar for a comprehensive list of events to note.

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AUGUST 29
CCAO Webinar: Public Works Commission Update

SEPTEMBER 2
Labor Day

SEPTEMBER 13
CORSA Annual Meeting

BY SEPTEMBER 28
County elected officials and employees must take Fraud Reporting training

OCTOBER 4
Central District Meeting - Champaign County

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