

The Spire

SEPTEMBER 13, 2020

THE FIRST SUNDAY RECORD

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First Parish Unitarian Universalist of Arlington, 630 Massachusetts Avenue, Arlington, MA 02476 • Gathered 1733

Welcoming Our New Parish Minister

Rev. Erica Richmond officially joined us in August. A transition group is in place to assist Rev. Erica, as she prefers to be called, as she works alongside our Lead Minister, Rev. Marta Flanagan. This group, the Parish Minister Transition Committee, consists of John Anderson, Lois Fine, Carolyn Hodges, and Tina Silberman.

Rev. Erica is meeting with lay leaders to get acquainted and learn how we function, and the Transition Committee is working on other ways to introduce her to the First Parish community. We are considering the challenges of current conditions and will offer safe opportunities for meeting and greeting. Please watch for opportunities to get to know her throughout the fall.

Do you have ideas or suggestions for the Transition Committee? Please send them along. We can be reached at ParishMinisterTransition@firstparish.info.

— John Anderson, Lois Fine,
Carolyn Hodges, Tina Silberman

members and staff make decisions concerning First Parish maintenance, the use of its facilities, its programs, and its outreach to the community, that they seriously consider environmental factors as well as issues of cost, functionality, and aesthetics.



The result is that decisions in the life of the congregation are made through a “green lens,” a significant shift in the culture of the congregation.

The Task Force worked with an outside consultant to do an energy audit of our meetinghouse, then held a very successful work party involving members of the congregation and other volunteers. We hired SunBug Solar to install solar panels on the Sanctuary roof,

and environmental sustainability was a key goal for the upgrade to our building that was finished in 2015.

To carry forward our Green Sanctuary identity, we encourage First Parish members to continue to use a green lens as they make decisions affecting the life of our faith community.

In December 2017 the Climate Action Working Group kicked off with a deliberate focus on actions that have impacts outside our congregation. We recognize that adequate progress to protect our climate cannot be achieved solely through changes in the activities and choices of individuals, but requires systemic change. We have participated in the Massachusetts legislative process and have led and joined protests and vigils to build power in the

Climate Action

The Climate Action Working Group (CAWG) has been meeting via Zoom since March. This group evolved from the Green Sanctuary/Climate Change Task Force, created by the Social Justice Committee in 2006, which focused on educational programs for its first three years. In 2010 members of First Parish voted nearly unanimously to adopt a Green Sanctuary Policy and seek Green Sanctuary accreditation from the Unitarian Universalist Association. We received accreditation in 2013.

The policy states that we strive to be a congregation whose way of living is grounded in sound environmental policies and practices. We seek to embody a “green way of life” and ask that when

movement for climate justice. Our activities are planned by a steering committee, and we have a list of people to whom we occasionally send e-mail messages about upcoming action opportunities.

In October 2018, Rev. Mariama White-Hammond gave the sermon at our congregation's annual social-justice themed Shinn service and participated in a discussion afterward. She stressed that it is not enough to seek systemic change, but we must also change ourselves. Her message prompted CAWG to reconsider the scope of our current work. We will continue to prioritize outward-focused action, but will also attend to the climate impacts of our meetinghouse and our operations.

This past fall, CAWG members worked with Joan Dyer, the just-retired First Parish office manager, to put in place a composting system for the meetinghouse and to improve our handling of recycling. We are currently gathering information about energy use in our meetinghouse and trying to identify changes we can make to be more economical.

We have been encouraging First Parish people to take advantage of the simple options provided by Arlington and nearby towns and cities to get 50 or 100 percent of their household's electricity from local renewable sources. We plan to work with a Town of Arlington publicity effort to encourage more.

The Massachusetts legislative landscape is always changing, and we will continue to press for a just transition away from reliance on climate-harming fossil fuels and toward a sustainable "green" economy.

If you'd like to get more information about CAWG or to be active with us in any capacity, please contact us at climateaction@firstparish.info.

— Bill Gardiner, Alan Linov
Climate Action Working Group

Support the Food Pantry!

We are not using our church entrances to collect donations to the food pantry, so please drop off donations on Tuesdays from 1 to 4 pm at St. John's Church on Pleasant Street, just around the corner from First Parish. For more information, visit <https://www.arlingtoneats.org/help/how-to-help/>.

Jewels of Justice

Jewels of Justice is our 74-member UU the Vote team that has been fighting for social justice by helping disenfranchised voters reclaim the ability to cast their votes. We've sent out about 6,500 postcards and made at least 400 phone calls to suppressed voters and registered voters of color. UU The Vote has teamed up with Reclaim Our Vote to accomplish most of our mailing and calling.

We started in March, writing to voters in Pitt County, Georgia, warning them that they had been taken off voter-registration rolls. We called Texas voters over 65 to let them know that they would be able to use absentee ballots. We were even able to sign some of these people up to get applications for those ballots. That felt great!

I have never gotten as much satisfaction from political action as I have with UU The Vote. It has been a fabulous distraction when I feel scared about the state of our country and the elections. It's been encouraging to realize that thousands of people like us are doing the same work all over the country. I loved connecting with UUs in different states, and we plan to keep in touch as our work will continue even after the election.

We are wrapping up our postcard program and beginning to focus on phone calls. These calls can make a difference, and they're much easier to make than calls for candidates because we're not trying to persuade — we're just providing information about voting. This information is communicated even if we just leave messages. Several of us have had some great conversations on these calls.

I am offering phone-bank tutorials via Zoom every Monday at 5 pm and Wednesdays at 2 pm. I'll show you how easy it is and make a couple of demonstration calls. No commitment is necessary; contact socialjustice@firstparish.info to get the Zoom link.

Many thanks to our Jewels of Justice team. I'm sure we have helped to beat back voter suppression and re-enfranchise some voters. Theirs just might be the votes that win elections and bring some peace and justice to our country.

— Mary Cummings, Co-Chair
Social Justice Committee

?

How much does
the bell in our
clock tower weigh?

(answer on page 8)

Fighting for Police Reform

Amidst national cries for an end to police brutality, the U.S. Justice Department reported the results of their investigation into the Narcotics Bureau in Springfield, Massachusetts. It found that officers in the Narcotics Unit had a pattern of impulsively using excessive force and inaccurately reporting when force was used. This reminds us that police brutality is not just an issue in other parts of the country, but a problem we need to address in Massachusetts.

To this end, state legislators have been working on vital police-reform laws. On July 14, an expansive bill called the Reform, Shift + Build Act was passed by the State Senate. It was greatly modified and passed by the House ten days later. Since then, a joint conference committee has been trying to draft a compromise between the two versions of the bill.

Although many of the important pieces of the Senate bill (which would hold officers accountable for the kind of practices happening in Springfield) made it into the House version, unfortunately others did not. For example, only the Senate version requires police departments to get civilian approval before acquiring military-grade equipment and fixes the Massachusetts Civil Rights Act by making it not only apply to cases of “threats, intimidation or coercion.” It also is the only version of the bill that specifically prohibits racial profiling and requires racial data to be collected from police stops. However, the House version does expand on some of the provisions in the Senate bill. For example, it universally bans no-knock warrants in houses with kids or elders and prohibits the use of facial-recognition technology in law enforcement.

One key difference between the Senate and the House versions of the bill has to do with something called qualified immunity, which is meant to protect government officials from being sued for unintentionally violating someone’s rights. However, in practice, the doctrine stops victims of police brutality from getting justice by forcing civilians who sue officials to find a previous court case with the exact same facts as their case. This creates a cycle where no new cases are ever looked at, because all the previous cases that were comparable were already thrown out. While the Senate bill limits qualified immunity, the House bill does not. The conference



committee is under a lot of pressure from law enforcement to leave qualified immunity alone.

The American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) strongly supports the Senate bill, but is less hopeful for the impact of the House version. Carol Rose, executive director of the ACLU of Massachusetts, wrote in response to the passing of the House bill that, “unfortunately, this bill does not reflect the fierce urgency that deadly police violence against Black people demands. Instead, it reflects the depth of entrenched opposition to necessary police reform.”

Moreover, activists are frustrated with the lack of momentum and progress since this legislation was written in July. On August 28 the Dorchester based organization Brother’s Building organized a rally at the statehouse to commemorate the 1963 March on Washington and call out legislatures for failing to put in place police reforms at the state level.

The good news is that there are actions we can take to demand police reform be made a top priority in our state, and help shape how effective and powerful this legislation will end up being:

- E-mail or call the legislators representing your area. To find their contact information, go to <https://malegislature.gov/search/findmylegislator> and enter your address. You can find an e-mail template written by Lori Kenschaft at <https://tinyurl.com/yxpz8m8v>.
- Send the same e-mail, or a modified version, to the legislators on the conference committee:
Claire.Cronin@mahouse.gov
Carlos.Gonzalez@mahouse.gov
Timothy.Whelan@mahouse.gov
William.Brounsberger@masenate.gov
Sonia.Chang-Diaz@masenate.gov
Bruce.Tarr@masenate.gov
- Send the ACLU’s automatic e-mail template to Governor Baker at <https://action.aclu.org/send-message/tell-governor-baker-support-racial-justice-and-police-accountability-massachusetts>.

Thank you so much to Lois Fine, for encouraging me to write something for *The Spire*, and to Lori Kenschaft, for providing the e-mail template! If you want more information, I encourage you to start by checking out the ACLU’s website. You can also look at the resources in this document I made with my sister Anna: <https://tinyurl.com/y2e8veml>.

– Becca Bogstad, First Parish Youth Group

Recipe for Techie Stone Soup

In April when we switched to virtual mode, a rallying cry went out to the techies among us. Many answered the call! We worried about security, how to help nontechnical members cope, and how to keep technical aspects from interfering with worship. In a leap of faith that all would, indeed, be well, we started the pot boiling and started adding ingredients.

Prep and cooking time:

Two weeks, at most.

Serving size:

23 Saturday rehearsals and 23 Sunday services, so far.

Divide your portions:

I took on the Sunday services and Anne Quaadgras handled the rest of our many group endeavors. We are each other's backups.

Mix the following ingredients well:

A heaping portion of wisdom:

Rev. Marta put her faith in us, cheered us on, tackled hard changes quickly, faced obstacles and cleared them, and aptly judged the team's ability.

Dashes of spice:

Our hard-working music team, director Jonathan Brennan and pianist Kenneth Seitz, made live recordings of some of the standards of our services, including the ringing of our bell and leading "Amen, Blessed Be." Jonathan also pivoted to learn audio technology, processed audio files, and built us a preliminary library by searching our archives to find beautiful memories of singing together.

A bunch of parsley:

Our intern minister, Chloë Briede, created a backstage order of service, rallied the staff, and communicated regularly with everyone.

A heaping spoonful of sugar:

RE Director Tina Schultz found all kinds of ways to relate to those at home, offered ways to cope with topics that seemed overwhelming, and chopped them up to be manageable by tall and short alike.

A crock of tools:

Administrative Assistant Sara DeLong coordinated, organized, modernized, and cat-herded staff and members to make sure we had working technology in place. Joan Dwyer, our newly retired office manager, stoked the home fires and kept many pieces in order.



Bring ingredients to a simmer and add:

A touch of class:

Amy Anderson, stalwart leader of the Worship Associates, designed our first on-line slides and thought to include a view of the mosaic, a powerful symbol of what holds us all together.

23 cups of music and two dollops of live culture:

Cheri Minton added to Jonathan's work cataloging and categorizing our music, keeping track of all the pieces so we could use them again, and coordinating the musical needs of our summer service leaders. Diane Taraz and Peter Mayer graced us with live singing to encourage us to join in.

18 gallons of ingenuity:

On the day of the service, there are lots of people working behind the scenes:

- A Zoom host who has control of the whole service, spotlights our speakers, mutes folks when needed, and oversees the Zoom technology.
- A Zoom usher who lets people in and does their best to help with muting.
- A person cutting and pasting information such as lyrics and announcements into the chat stream.
- Two people watching the chat stream and our e-mail thread to catch those who need help.
- Someone handling the slides.
- Two people reaching out to welcome newcomers and help with any questions they have.
- A social host who manages the half-hour meeting after the service.

These gallons of ingenuity are created by combining the efforts of Aaron Kitzmiller, Alan Schweitzer,

Amy Anderson, Andee Rubin, Anne Quaadgras, Cheri Minton, Dawn Terkla, Elizabeth Hunter, Frank Snyder Di Cesare, Greg Ruccio, Jo Guthrie, John Anderson, John Hodges, Judy Young, Mary McCartney, P. J. Gardner, Steph Miserlis, and Susan Moore.

20 quarts of summer service leaders and guests:

Thanks to all who brought their talents and stories, sharing personal experiences: Alan Linov, Aly Rodger, Alice Merrill Hunter, Anne Goodwin, Anne Wright, Clarissa Rodriguez, Elizabeth Hunter, Ellen Vliet Cohen, Jason Merrill, Jim Jolley, Lori Kenschaft, Mara Prentiss, Marilyn Downs, Mary P. Breen, Megan Anderson, Melanie Cohn-Hopwood, Peter Mayer, Stephanie Fried, Sue Mapel, and Tracy Walton.

7 sprigs of Lay Ministers:

Al Tosti, Ann Abbot, Ebonie Smith-Cooper, Ellen Faran, Loren Gomez, Lorraine Cooley, and Natalie Tyler worked diligently and were brave about testing the technology.

1 tablespoon of Summer Worship Associate Coordinator:

Jitendra Singh was already leading the summertime efforts long before the virus struck, and he continued to keep track of folks and motivate everyone.

A soupçon of automation:

Thanks to Steph Miserlis we now have automated e-mails to send last-minute information to techies and those participating in the service.



Yield: The soup is fresh, warm, and scented with shared memories. Not a single service was cancelled, even when Zoom had difficulties! Everyone contributed helpful, kind, positive feedback. You may need to give this soup time to cool down, because this team is steaming awesome!

Future versions of this recipe will include slide redesign, new music compilations, welcome facilitators for newcomers, and new worship associates. If there are other ingredients you would like to add, please let us know at techhelp@firstparish.info.

— Jo Guthrie, Volunteer Techie Coordinator

First Alliance Program is October 2

On Friday, October 2 at 7:45 pm the Alliance will present a Zoom program about why the League of Women Voters remains relevant today.

Our speaker, Joan Martin, treasurer of Arlington's League of Women Voters, will outline the League foundation, how it decides what position to take on issues, and its work in promoting registration and voting. Generous time will be provided for questions.

Martin is a lawyer who works as a labor arbitrator. She moved to Arlington 28 years ago and joined the League shortly after. "It seemed to be the best way to meet women who were both intelligent and interested in current events," she recalls. Of her husband, Joe Barinelli, she notes, "Joe has lived in Arlington since age four and tries never to leave town if he can avoid it." Joan's daughter and grandson live in Woburn.

Alliance members and anyone who is interested will gather at 7 pm for our annual meeting, where we will elect officers, hear reports, consider the budget, and look at our three-year giving plan.

Hold these dates for upcoming Alliance gatherings, all Friday evenings: November 13, January 8, March 12, and May 14. Alliance Sunday will be April 11. Program planning is well underway, and specifics will be available soon.

Notices about Alliance gatherings and service opportunities, along with Zoom invitations, will be sent to fpuarl-alliance-notices, a newly formed Google Groups mailing list. Contact alliance@firstparish.info if you'd like to be included on this list, or have any questions about the Alliance.

— Cheri Minton, The Alliance

Church School Update

Your Religious Education team has been meeting over the summer to try to make plans for this fall. Things change on a daily basis, so we are doing our best to stay flexible and creative.

At our next meeting we plan to review some exciting new curriculum materials based on “Soul Matters.” These thematic lessons will tie in with what’s being discussed in adult worship and in small groups during the month. We are especially pleased that many of these lessons will have an anti-racism focus, geared for multiple ages, based on developmentally appropriate stories, current event, and discussion questions. They look inspirational and fun!

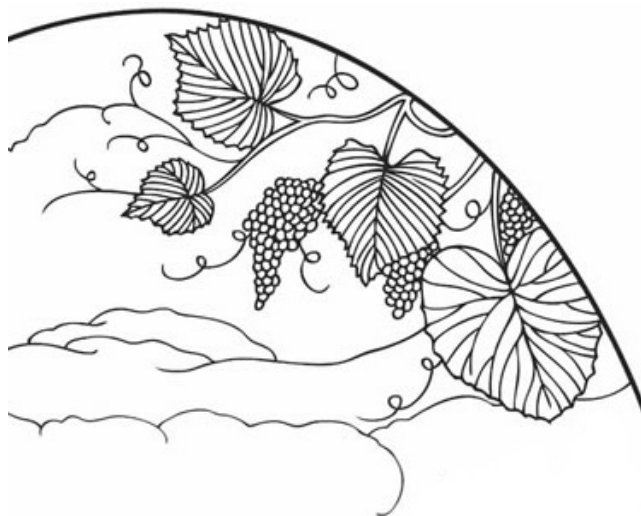
We will also be finalizing a parent survey, which will be sent to all families in our database. We want to learn more from YOU about your children, family participation, interests, and ways to stay connected during these tough times.

Families should watch for e-mails by your child’s grade. If you have not registered your child or children, please reach out to me at Tina@firstparish.info to make sure you will be included in our communications.

Parents of our OWL, Coming of Age, and Youth Group will learn more about these special programs as I talk with the teachers, mentors, and adult advisors, and consult with Rose Sawyer Marsh, our Youth Group Coordinator.

I miss seeing your faces and being on the receiving end of your hugs. Until then, I wish you all the very best. Please stay safe and healthy.

— Tina Schultz
Director of Religious Education



Good Reading Awaits!

Our Racial Justice Library is one year old and now has over 230 books that you can borrow, with a generous return policy for busy people. We also have two timely DVDs about voter suppression, plus the game “Brain Quest: Black History.” The books cover lots of territory: novels and short stories, history, memoirs, biographies and autobiographies, sociology and analysis. There are more than 40 books for children and teens. In these days of ferment, when books about racial justice are topping the best-seller lists and many have long waiting lists at public libraries, our little library just might have the right book to help you learn, reflect, and act for racial justice.

With the help of our wonderful office staff, we are able to retrieve books from the shelves and plan with you for easy pickup or even delivery to your door. The list of library contents is available as a Google Sheets file. To see the list, borrow or donate a book, inquire about specific books, or ask questions about the library, contact racialjustice@firstparish.info.

— Mary Fusoni

Celebrating the Truth

A year ago, the Racial Justice Coordinating Committee put up 10 portraits by Robert Shetterly, from his series Americans Who Tell the Truth. They are at our main entrance, in the Damon Room, and along the back wall of the Vestry. I am delighted to share that we will bring these Americans to you, virtually, in issues of *The Spire* this year!

The portraits we selected are, as Shetterly says, “models of courageous citizenship that can help offer a link between the community of people who struggled for justice in our past and the community of people who are doing it now.”

I love the way he uses these portraits to talk about the necessity of dissent in a democracy, the obligations of citizenship, sustainability, and U.S. history. He asks, how can democracy function if politicians do not tell the truth, if the media does not report it, and if the people do not demand it? Good questions! I also love his “four aspects of truth”:

Foundational Truths: The Declaration of Independence and the Constitution express our ideals of equality and justice, defined truths of our nation.

Truth and Trust: Unless people try to tell each other the truth as they know it, they cannot trust each other. And, obviously, any relationship, personal or public, fails without trust.

True Challenges: Unless we are willing to name the true causes of a problem, we cannot fix it. For instance, if we deny that the burning of fossil fuels plays a role in climate change, we will not be able to avert disaster.

True Knowledge: If we don't teach our true history, its shame as well as its nobility, we cannot know who we are. People who do not know themselves are dangerous to themselves and to others because they act from ignorance and self-serving myths.

Within and outside our walls, we work toward these truths. In my volunteering I have found deep friendships and shared courage as we strive to be Americans living our UU principles. The struggle is hard, but this work gives me great hope for our future.

To learn more about Robert Shetterly, please visit www.americanswhotellthetruth.org/the-artist.

— Clarissa Rodriguez
Racial Justice Coordinating Committee

A Warm Welcome from Membership!

Do you have questions about getting more involved at First Parish? Want to learn more about Unitarian Universalism and our good work in the world? Want to meet other folks who feel new, or “newish,” to our congregation? Want to take a class to learn more about us, meet our ministers and continue the journey that brought you here?

The Membership Committee would love to hear from you! In this crazy year we will, of course, have to settle for virtual contact, but we are learning every day how to make that contact richer and more meaningful.

Contact us at membership@firstparish.info and a member of the committee will get back to you. If e-mail isn't your communication preference, please call the church office at 781-648-3799 and speak with our friendly administrative staff. We will be happy to call you instead.

Already know you want to become a member?

The best way to start this process is sign up for the New UU class, a two-session offering held once in the fall and again in spring (the dates are not yet set). This class is a wonderful way to get to know a smaller group of people, explore your faith journey and hear those of others, learn about Unitarian Universalism, and get answers to questions you may have.

On September 20 the Membership Committee will host a virtual Coffee with the Minister for Newcomers after our Sunday service, at about 11 am. Our new Parish Minister, Rev. Erica Richmond, a newcomer herself, will join us. Ask questions or just chat, and hear more about the New UU class. Please RSVP to membership@firstparish.info to receive the Zoom link.

We hope we have convinced you that we want to hear from you, we want to meet you, we want to help you weave your way into our vibrant, welcoming, engaging community, which is a lifeline for many during these tumultuous times.

Join us! And welcome!

— Bonnie Zimmer
Membership Committee



ParSnips

Our Program Year Begins

After a quiet but relaxing summer, the Parish Committee (ParCom) began meeting in August. Here is some of what we've been up to:

We extended a warm welcome to Sara Hidalgo, our new office manager. We also welcomed Rev. Erica Richmond to her first ParCom meeting, just days after she began her ministry with us.

We unanimously appointed new members to our standing committees. An updated *Workings* booklet with that information and much more about how First Parish will soon be posted on the church website at www.firstparish.info.

A Covid-19 planning committee drafted guidelines for reopening; we will spend the coming months imagining what services will look like when we do.

We decided that First Parish will not hold services in the Sanctuary before February 1. There is still too much uncertainty about the spread of the virus,

particularly with flu season approaching. FoodLink will continue to use the Sanctuary while their building is being renovated, work that is expected to be completed in October or November.

The church office will not be fully open until September 30, and we will monitor the Massachusetts numbers and assess the viability of opening as that date gets closer.

— Celia Wcislo, Clerk

Appreciation for Joan Dyer

Joan Dyer, our long-time office manager, has retired. To send thanks or a fond memory, mail a card to:

Joan Dyer
c/o Maggie Carey
84 Eastbourne Road
Newton MA 02459

Reflections

Keeping on Keeping On

As we begin our church year under strange circumstances, I find myself swinging between calm appreciation of the good things in my life, of which there are many, and gloomy grouching at the unknown horizon for resumption of a normal life.

My cat is a constant inspiration for how to take each moment as it comes without fretting about the future. I wonder if she even *has* a horizon — as long as the kibble bowl is full, birds fly by the window, and stroking happens regularly, life is grand. The occasional fly in the house is a fabulous bonus, and she joyfully crashes about until she catches and crunches it. Not my idea of a good time, but then we all like different things.

In the Silver Lining Department, I no longer have to make sure *The Spire* has an even number of pages. Back when we copied it on paper, an even number avoided the dreaded blank page at the end. Your editor has spent quite a lot of time either trimming or adding enough material to achieve the desired evenness. Now, who cares how many pages there are? This issue has nine!

It's also nice that I don't have to keep removing hyperlinks ensure plain text for copying. Now I add them so readers can click away.

I look forward to seeing you all in your little Zoom boxes as fall comes to New England.

— Diane Shriver, *Spire* Editor



The bell in our clock tower weighs a whopping 2,800 pounds — 1,000 pounds more than the bell in our Sanctuary, which crashed down from the steeple during the fire that destroyed our fourth meetinghouse.

The tower bell bears a dedication to Saint Francis of Assisi, because we got it for a nominal cost from St. Mary's in Winchester, a Catholic church. Saint Francis loved the natural world and all the animals in it, so this dedication aligns well with our UU principles.



Staff and Contact Information

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The Spire

Diane Shriver, Editor

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 Submissions due by Sunday, September 27
Items may be edited for space and clarity.

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 If you do not have e-mail, contact the office.

The Spire generally deals with the big picture.
 Time-sensitive details belong in the
 Weekly E-Bulletin – send to
weekly@firstparish.info by Wednesday at noon.

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