



Planning & Development Services

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Public Comments on Draft Capital Facilities Element

Count	Last Name	First Name	Organization/ Address	Comment Method	Date Received
1	Friebel	Jenna	Skagit Drainage & Irrigation Consortium	Email	10/21/2024
2	Doran	Molly	Skagit Land Trust	Email	10/22/2024
3	Krueger	Morgan	WDFW	Email	10/23/2024



October 21, 2024

Skagit County Planning & Development Services
1800 Continental Place
Mount Vernon, WA 98273

RE: Comments "Draft Policies to the Comprehensive Plan Period Update: Capital Facilities Element"

Dear Planning Department,

The Skagit Drainage and Irrigation Districts Consortium LLC (Consortium) submits the following comments on the Draft Policies to the Comprehensive Plan Element: Capital Facilities and Utilities.

Policy 9A-8.9 (275)

The Consortium suggests the following revisions to the existing policy:

"The Coordinated Water Systems Plan should be ~~reviewed~~ [updated to include an element address improved and uninterrupted irrigation water supply](#) to ensure [land zoned for agricultural remain viable as consistency](#) with the adopted Comprehensive Plan"

Policy 9B-1.6 (276)

The Consortium suggests the following revisions to the existing policy:

~~"NEW~~ Structural Flood Protection: Dikes, levees, and other structural flood protection facilities should be designed to allow fish passage, protect flows in riparian zones, and complement or enhance the surrounding landscape ~~were feasible"~~ [Any design modifications such as improvements to existing structural flood protection facilities or setbacks of existing structural flood protection facilities should be consistent with flood protection and drainage functions as defined by the diking districts.](#)

Policy 9B-1.7 (276)

The Consortium suggests deleting the existing policy as this should not apply to existing flood protection infrastructure:

~~Habitat: Flood protection measures should not result in a long-term net loss of, or damage to, fish and wildlife resources, and wherever possible, should result in increased diversity of habitat.~~

Thank you for this early opportunity to be involved in the planning process, we recognize that this is will be a long process and we welcome additional opportunities to be involved in this and other key elements of the Comprehensive Plan Update.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Jenna Friebel". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Jenna Friebel

Executive Director. Skagit County Drainage and Irrigation Districts Consortium LLC

jfriebel@skagitdidc.org

Tara Satushek

From: Molly Doran <mollyd@skagitlandtrust.org>
Sent: Tuesday, October 22, 2024 5:24 PM
To: PDS comments
Subject: Skagit County's 2025 Comprehensive Plan Draft Policies- Utilities, Capital Facilities and Transportation Elements

Skagit Land Trust Comments to Skagit County on Utilities, Capital Facilities and Transportation Elements

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on preliminary policy revisions to the Skagit County Comprehensive Plan Utilities, Capital Facilities and Transportation Elements.

Skagit Land Trust conserves wildlife habitat, agricultural and forest lands, scenic open space, wetlands, and shorelines for the benefit of our community and as a legacy for future generations. Our organization has over 1,700 family and business supporters (members) and 500 active volunteers who work to protect the most important and beloved places in Skagit County. Today, the Trust protects more than 10,000 acres, including more than 50 miles of shoreline. Our comments draw from this mission and seek to ensure that the Skagit County Comprehensive Plan works to maintain the resilience of Skagit County's natural environment in the face of population growth and the impacts of climate change.

Comments Regarding Utilities and Capital Facilities Elements

Establish a Broad Green Energy Strategy

Skagit Land Trust asks that you recognize that as our county shifts to renewable energy sources **we need a broader green energy strategy** that takes into consideration a panoply of safety, natural resource and environmental considerations. The Goldeneye BESS application put Skagit County on notice that it should study all types of renewable energy facilities (BESS, industrial scale wind and solar etc.) and evaluate carefully where they should best be sited, considering not just what our valley looks like now but what it will look like in 80 or 100 years as climate change alters our landscape with increased flooding, storm surges, wildfires, drought, and other climate intensified consequences. We ask the County to map and write Comprehensive Plan policies and development regulations for where they **don't belong**, as well as mapping and regulations for where they **can be sited** with the least conflict. Areas zoned industrial and out of the floodplain are good examples of possible "least conflict" sites.

The County should be proactive, mapping and developing policy and code now so that the County, not the developers, remains in charge. The County should clearly state, "Here are the places we will entertain allowing your facility to be built", rather than just responding to the developers' proposals.

We would also like to see a new policy added to the Utilities Element concerning the **siting of hazardous energy facilities**.

Carefully Site Hazardous Energy Facilities

New energy infrastructure facilities, such as substations and Battery Energy Storage Systems, should only be allowed in climate resilient locations. These facilities should not be built in floodplains (or areas likely to become floodplains over time due to climate change), where spills or fires could contaminate waterways, nor close to forests to which fire could spread. They also should not be built close to residential areas where people would be

in jeopardy from toxic gases and possibly be affected by prolonged loud noise from the fans needed to continuously cool the lithium-ion batteries.

BESSs will be increasingly important as we rely more on wind and solar power. Unfortunately, siting them is challenging. Commercial and industrial areas out of the floodplain and away from residential areas would seem to be best. They do need to be near large substations, which severely limits the choices. But rather than building very expensive new energy facilities next to existing substations in high-risk locations, there should be planning to move substations or build new substations in more suitable locations that carry fewer risks to human and environmental health.

Support Community Solar

Consider a policy or policies encouraging community solar installations such as currently exist in several places in Anacortes to allow individuals who would like solar but can't afford it or whose property isn't solar appropriate to invest in solar arrays on public buildings and then get a share of the electricity. Community solar allows for smaller arrays than large solar farms, which would take up farmland. County-owned buildings and parking lots are examples of locations appropriate for community solar.

Comments Regarding the Transportation Element

Expand Electrical Vehicle Charging

We suggest a policy supporting the expansion of electrical vehicle charging infrastructure throughout Skagit County. There are no public electric vehicle (EV) charging stations east of Interstate 5. We conduct a lot of work upriver and have an EV truck. The absence of charging stations limits when and where we can work, and no doubt creates a significant disincentive to others buying and using EVs.

Support Multi-Modal Transportation System

We strongly support revised and newly proposed policies included in the draft Transportation Element calling for the expansion of public transportation and multimodal transportation options such as bike lanes, sidewalks and trails. As pointed out in the Kimberly Horn memo dated September 13, 2024, to the Planning Department: "Transportation element requirements have changed from auto-oriented to multimodal with an emphasis on active/human-powered modes, such as walking, biking, and rolling (wheelchairs, mobility devices, etc.). The GMA now requires policies to address: • ADA Transition Plans • Multimodal Level of Service (MMLoS) • Active transportation networks • Complete Streets for County roads and State highways • Safety for Vulnerable Road Users • Equity in transportation investments • Transportation/Land Use integration • Reduction of Vehicle Miles Traveled (VMT) • Reduction of Greenhouse Gas (GHG) emissions."

While the specific revised/new policies in the Transportation Element are too numerous to mention, these are all positive additions.

Update Skagit County Open Space Concept Plan

Multi-use trails that connect cities and towns and green space around them are included in Skagit County's 2009 Open Space Concept Plan. We believe this plan should be updated with climate change in mind. The plan helps focus ours and others' conservation work around these cities and towns.

- A considerable amount of greenbelt and open space in the County's current Open Space Concept Plan has been accomplished by the County, conservation organizations such as Skagit Land Trust, cities, Port, agencies, Tribes etc. However, the green space/open space elements of the plan need to be updated to include key unprotected areas for fish and wildlife habitat particularly for at-risk species, increased storm water runoff and floodwater storage, natural heat sinks near cities and towns, nature parks near growing populations centers, access points to water etc.
- The trails section of the Open Space Concept Plan has not seen as much accomplished and needs to be updated with denser cities in mind. Right now it is very unsafe to bike to cities from a rural area or between cities and towns. It is not easy to get to rural areas for recreation by foot or bike. Trails encourage people to walk, use bikes, etc. rather than cars. More people will chose to live in cities if they know they can easily

visit rural areas without getting in car. The County needs to understand where multi-use trails should be located to assist with emission reductions.

- Make completing the Centennial Trail from Snohomish County to Whatcom County a priority.
- Develop a bike path from Edison to Burlington. The Samish Flats are a tourism site needing safer passage for bikers and walkers.
- Map and identify roads that are currently dangerous for cyclists and develop plans to make them safer. Example: Bike safety on bridges. The Fir Island Road bridge over the North Fork of the Skagit River is old, has no shoulders, and is used regularly by semi-trucks. Cyclists routinely use it as they pedal from Conway to the Skagit Flats and La Conner, especially during the Tulip Festival. The Highway 536 bridge from downtown Mount Vernon to West Mount Vernon and the Highway 9 bridge near Sedro-Woolley are also dangerous. Plan now for adding shoulders or specific bike lanes when replacing those bridges.
- Recognize the rise of e-bikes, their potential use for commuting, and make chargers and safe routes available.

Additionally, we would like to see new policies supporting the following:

- Develop ways to open more public access trails on dikes. Develop incentives and protections for dike districts and adjacent landowners.
- Develop additional trails to attract recreationists and eco-tourists (such as birders) increasing the county's tourist economy without increasing the carbon footprint. Eco-tourism contributes over \$20 billion to Washington's GDP and is growing. Skagit County is uniquely positioned to capitalize on this trend with more tourist infrastructure such as trails and wildlife viewing sites.

Submitted by Skagit Land Trust
Executive Director, Molly Doran
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State of Washington

Department of Fish and Wildlife, Region 4

Region 4 information: 16018 Mill Creek Blvd, Mill Creek, WA 98012 | phone: (425)-775-1311

October 23, 2024

Robby Eckroth, Senior Planner
1800 Continental Pl
Mount Vernon, WA 98273

RE: Case # 2022-C-307, WDFW comments for Skagit County’s draft Capital Facilities, Utilities, and Transportation Comprehensive Plan elements

Dear Mr. Eckroth,

On behalf of the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW), thank you for the opportunity to comment on draft elements of Skagit County’s Comprehensive Plan as part of the current periodic update. Within the State of Washington’s land use decision-making framework, WDFW is considered a technical advisor for the habitat needs of fish and wildlife and routinely provides input into the implications of land use decisions. We provide these comments and recommendations in keeping with our legislative mandate to preserve, protect, and perpetuate fish and wildlife and their habitats for the benefit of future generations – a mission we can only accomplish in partnership with local jurisdictions.

Table 1. Recommended changes to proposed policy language.

Policy Number	Policy Language (with WDFW suggestions in red)	WDFW Comment
Capital Facilities and Utilities Element (this version: link)		
Goal 9A	Ensure the provision of high quality, cost effective and environmentally sensitive utility services in cooperation with public and private providers.	We encourage the county to incorporate ecosystem services under goal 9A. An example policy might include: Ensure that the planning, design, and maintenance of utilities and capital facilities reflect the value of ecosystem services. This includes integrating natural processes, such as tree canopies for passive heating and cooling, wetlands for stormwater management, and native vegetation for energy efficiency. By protecting ecosystem services, the County can make informed

		<p>decisions that reduce infrastructure costs, enhance resilience, and contribute to long-term environmental and community sustainability.</p> <p>Capital facility and utility plans should incorporate ecosystem services provided by natural environmental processes. Tree canopies help cool buildings, reduce the need for air conditioning, and provide wind protection that lowers heating demands. Retained vegetation also enhances energy efficiency by optimizing passive solar heating and improving insulation. Additionally, vegetation helps manage stormwater flow and filtration, reducing reliance on energy-intensive systems. Protecting and restoring natural assets is often more cost-effective than engineered solutions. See FEMA’s guide Building Community Resilience with Nature-based Solutions, as well as software to track these resources from Natural Capital Project. Furthermore, see Kitsap County’s approach to quantifying ecosystem services through their Kitsap Natural Resource Asset Management Project.</p>
Policy 9A-5.3	Technology Solutions - Residential, commercial, and industrial development shall be encouraged and incentivized to use energy-efficient, cost-effective, and environmentally sensitive technologies and resources in new construction.	We encourage Skagit County to participate in the effort to address environmentally sustainable development by utilizing incentives. See Shoreline’s deep green incentive program which outlines how green development can participate in expedited review as well as fee waivers and/or reductions. The Sustainable Development Code website is also a great resource in outlining how to remove code barriers, create incentives, and fill regulatory gaps in pursuit of this policy’s goals. See also the city of Issaquah and Bellevue’s clean building incentive programs that aim to assist applicants in reaching energy efficiency standards.
Goal 9B	Protect and enhance natural hydrologic features and functions by: maintaining water quality and fish and wildlife habitat; incorporating natural drainage patterns into measures to protect the public from health and safety hazards and property damage;	Quantifying ecosystem services in monetary terms provides a tangible, measurable framework that allows stakeholders to better understand the cost-saving and environmental benefits of protecting natural hydrologic features. When these benefits—such as improved water quality, flood mitigation, and groundwater recharge—are translated into economic terms, they become more relatable and

	<p>maintaining a sustainable groundwater discharge/recharge budget; and by promoting beneficial uses as well as water resource education and planning efforts. Additionally, prioritize the quantification of ecosystem services as a metric for cost-saving and environmental sustainability to better inform and optimize resource management and infrastructure investments.</p>	<p>compelling for decision-makers, enabling informed choices that consider both immediate and long-term savings. By integrating this approach into policy, Skagit County can demonstrate how sustainable management of natural resources supports infrastructure resilience, reduces public expenditures on traditional “gray” infrastructure, and fosters community well-being, making it easier for stakeholders to prioritize and invest in sustainable development. See resources in relation to comments given for Goal 9A above. Additionally, see the USGS’s Ecosystem Services Assessment and Valuation tools, as well as i-Tree.</p>
Policy 9B-1.9	<p>Coordination of Regulations: The county shall work with other jurisdictions and agencies toward standardization and monitoring of regulations that affect storm water management. Additionally, should stormwater management goals not be met, an adaptive management plan shall be implemented to assess, adjust, and improve strategies to ensure the continued protection of citizen and ecosystem health.</p>	<p>This addition reflects the importance of adaptive management in tracking the effectiveness of stormwater regulations. It ensures that, if goals are not achieved, there will be a responsive approach to modifying practices.</p>
Goal 10A	<p>Ensure that adequate public facilities are provided to accommodate the needs of Skagit County citizens for the next 20 years by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • maintaining level of service standards for capital facilities; • providing consistency among functional plans; • ensuring compatibility of development adjacent to public facilities; • ensuring timely provision and financing of facility improvements; 	<p>Given that public facilities represent significant public investments, it is prudent to ensure that facilities are designed and sited to be resilient to climate impacts. Local governments should review their Capital Facilities Plans in the context of climate change projections to ensure that planned facilities will be resilient throughout their intended lifespan and make changes as needed. See Climate Mapping for a Resilient Washington, as well as FEMA’s Resilience Analysis and Planning Tool (RAPT) to visualize these hazard areas.</p>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Siting public facilities with climate-related hazards in mind, such as flooding, sea-level rise, and extreme weather, to enhance community resilience and reduce future risks and • taking advantage of revenue sources such as impact mitigation, grants, and loans. 	
<p>Policy 10A-1.7</p>	<p>Prioritizing Improvements - Capital improvement decisions shall be based on the following criteria:</p> <p>(a) Safety – elimination of hazards;</p> <p>(b) Efficiency – reduction of operational costs;</p> <p>(c) LOS – achievement of adopted or desired standards;</p> <p>(d) Community – satisfaction of expressed desires; and</p> <p>(e) Funding – use of non-county funds; and</p> <p>(f) Environmental Impact – minimization of environmental harm and support for sustainable practices</p>	<p>Adding ‘Environmental Impact’ as a criterion for capital improvement decisions is crucial for Skagit County, given its valuable natural resources like salmon-bearing streams, agricultural lands, and sensitive shorelines. Prioritizing environmental considerations helps protect these assets, supports long-term sustainability, and strengthens resilience against climate-related hazards such as flooding, ensuring that infrastructure investments align with the County’s commitment to preserving its unique landscapes and quality of life.</p>
<p>Policy Suggestion</p>	<p>Allocate funding in the Capital Facilities Plan for stormwater retrofits and culvert upgrades, prioritizing projects that enhance fish passage, connect wildlife habitat corridors, anticipate future climate-related high flow conditions, and prevent pollutants from entering the Sound.</p>	<p>Investing in stormwater retrofits and culvert upgrades allows Skagit County to address salmon recovery, habitat connectivity, and future flood risks in tandem, particularly within key habitats in WRIAs 3 and 4, which support threatened species like Chinook, steelhead, and bull trout. Larger culverts and underpasses can facilitate habitat connections, allowing for safe wildlife movement and reducing fragmentation. Prioritizing these projects in the Capital Facilities Plan not only aligns with regional salmon recovery efforts (Skagit Watershed Salmon Recovery Plan, Puget Sound Partnership Action Agenda, and the NOAA Chinook Recovery Plan) but also enhances climate</p>

		<p>resilience by improving flood capacity and reducing the risk of future flood damage. Addressing flood capacity needs now helps avoid costly emergency repairs and infrastructure upgrades in the future, saving the County money and providing a proactive approach to community safety. By integrating these investments, Skagit County can promote sustainable infrastructure that protects both ecosystems and residents for years to come.</p> <p>Please see WDFW's climate-change-resilient culvert webpage and Incorporating Climate Change into the Design of Water Crossing Structures: Final Project Report (2017) for resources on how to incorporate climate-resiliency into culvert designs. See WDFW's Fish Passage Map for location data of fish barriers.</p>
<p>Transportation Element (this version: link)</p>		
<p>Goal 8A</p>	<p>Plan and maintain a safe and efficient regional transportation system for the movement of people, wildlife, and goods in partnership, where appropriate, with cities, tribes, transit agencies, and the Skagit Council of Governments.</p>	<p>Inserting "wildlife" into this policy is crucial for Skagit County as it balances rural character with rapid development and increasing population density. As the County grows, the expansion of transportation infrastructure risks fragmenting essential wildlife habitats, which can disrupt migration corridors, reduce biodiversity, and increase conflicts between wildlife and human activities. By explicitly including wildlife in the policy, Skagit County can plan and maintain a transportation system that prioritizes wildlife connectivity, ensuring that critical habitats remain intact and accessible. This focus not only protects local ecosystems but also enhances motorist safety by reducing the likelihood of wildlife-vehicle collisions, ultimately supporting a transportation network that meets the needs of people and wildlife alike. For resources, see The Washington Wildlife Habitat Connectivity Working Group, WSDOT's Reducing the risk of wildlife collisions website as well as Wildlife Habitat Connectivity Consideration in Fish Barrier Removal Projects, Montana Fish, Wildlife, and Parks' How to Build Fence with Wildlife in Mind, and WDFW's website.</p>

<p>Policy 8A-1</p>	<p>Maintain and improve the County roadway system consistent with the growth management strategies of the Land Use Element, and respect the unique environmental and economic character of the area, including the transportation needs of the agriculture and forest products industries and the importance of preserving wildlife movement corridors.</p>	<p>See comment above.</p>
<p>Policy 8A-1.5</p>	<p>Skagit River - The County supports improving the flow of traffic over the Skagit River, including new bridge construction, with a commitment to minimizing environmental impacts by incorporating wildlife connectivity, preserving water quality, and enhancing flood resilience.</p>	<p>Adding environmental provisions to the Skagit River bridge policy supports infrastructure resilience by addressing climate-related impacts such as increased storm intensity and flood risks. Designing new water crossing structures with these challenges in mind ensures that bridges accommodate changing flow patterns, protecting both the river ecosystem and nearby communities from flood damage. Additionally, considering climate-resilient features enhances the bridge’s durability over time, reduces long-term maintenance costs, and improves wildlife connectivity, ultimately aligning with Skagit County’s goals for sustainable growth, environmental protection, and infrastructure longevity. See resources in response to Goal 8A above.</p>
<p>Policy 8A-6.2</p>	<p>The County’s Active Transportation Plan identifies County needs, priorities, and potential non-motorized projects.</p>	<p>We strongly recommend that the County’s Active Transportation Plan take into account the multi-benefit outcomes of addressing both recreational needs and wildlife habitat corridor needs simultaneously. By incorporating pathways and green spaces that are designed to support human activity as well as wildlife movement, the County can create a network of connected spaces that enhance public recreational opportunities while connecting and preserving critical habitats. This approach promotes biodiversity by maintaining habitat connectivity, reduces habitat fragmentation caused by infrastructure, and</p>

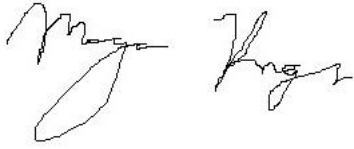
		supports outdoor recreation opportunities that contribute to community health and well-being.
Policy 8A-6.11	Community and subarea plans should be coordinated between state and local governments and private enterprises to identify and address the implementation of multimodal facilities that provide recreational transportation opportunities, support wildlife movement, and ensure as well as safe, efficient and convenient access to residential neighborhoods, schools, parks and recreation facilities, commercial districts, activity centers, tourist areas and established or planned multi-use trails.	See comments and resources above. As rural areas grow and develop, planning for safe wildlife movement now will help preserve natural pathways, which reduces habitat fragmentation and minimizes human-wildlife conflicts in the future. By ensuring that wildlife can safely move across the landscape, the County can avoid issues such as increased road crossings by animals, property damage, and potential safety risks for motorists.
Policy 8A-9.1	Scenic Roads Program – Encourage the state and federal Scenic Highways and Scenic Byways programs to ensure the preservation of scenic resources and wildlife habitat corridors along designated highways.	See comments above.
Policy 8A-11.4	Maintain a program for addressing traffic safety problems through monitoring of high incident conditions.	We recommend adding a policy in this section that emphasizes the need to track wildlife collision incidents to better inform traffic safety measures and future transportation development or redevelopment. An example policy might include: Implement a system to track and monitor incidents of wildlife collisions on County roads, using this data to inform and improve traffic safety measures, prioritize mitigation efforts, and reduce risks to both wildlife and motorists.
Policy Section 8A Land Use and Development	Prioritize the use of Low Impact Development (LID) techniques in all transportation projects to mitigate the harmful impacts of roadway runoff on critical salmon habitats. By incorporating	This policy is essential for Skagit County due to the significant role that roadway runoff plays in degrading water quality and impacting salmon populations. Chemicals like 6PPD-quinone, commonly found in tire wear, are highly toxic to salmon, and runoff from transportation projects

Suggested Policy	<p>permeable pavements, biofiltration swales, and rain gardens, the County can reduce the presence of toxic chemicals, such as 6PPD-quinone, which has been linked to salmon mortality. As a county with highly significant salmon populations, including threatened Chinook, Skagit County is committed to implementing LID practices that protect water quality, support salmon recovery efforts, and enhance overall watershed health.</p>	<p>can quickly carry these pollutants into waterways. By prioritizing Low Impact Development (LID) techniques, Skagit County can effectively filter and reduce harmful runoff, directly supporting salmon recovery efforts and preserving critical habitats. This proactive approach not only enhances water quality but also aligns with the County’s commitment to environmental stewardship and sustainable development.</p>
Policy section 8C Capital Improvements	<p>All transportation capital improvements shall incorporate removal of barriers to fish passage, where applicable. These projects will also consider wildlife habitat connection opportunities, pedestrian recreational connection opportunities, and climate-related adaptation potential.</p>	<p>We greatly appreciate this policy addition and suggest the adjacent edits in order to highlight the multi-benefit opportunities these types of projects present. For example, redeveloping culverts into larger underpasses offers Skagit County multiple benefits: it enhances habitat connectivity, provides an opportunity for pedestrian linkages, and prepares infrastructure for increased climate-related flow conditions. By planning for these integrated outcomes, the County can create resilient and multi-functional infrastructure that may qualify for unique funding sources targeting climate adaptation, habitat restoration, and multimodal transportation projects. See resources related to our comments for sections 10A and 8A above.</p>

Please see the [Sound Choices Checklist](#) for additional guidance for all elements of the Comprehensive Plan.

Thank you for taking the time to consider our recommendations to better reflect the best available science for fish and wildlife habitats and ecosystems. We value the relationship we have with your jurisdiction and the opportunity to work collaboratively with you throughout this periodic update cycle. If you have any questions or need our technical assistance or resources at any time during this process, please don’t hesitate to contact me.

Sincerely,



Morgan Krueger, Regional Land Use Lead
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CC:

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