



CENTRAL SQUARE ADVISORY COMMITTEE

WALKING TOUR

~ MINUTES ~

Wednesday, November 1, 2017

5:30 – 7:00 PM

Central Square – Cambridge, MA

Overview

The Central Square Advisory Committee, as part of its charge to monitor the progress of the non-zoning recommendations of the 2013 Central Square Study (the “Study”), met for a walking tour of Central Square (the “Square”) on the topic of improving and enhancing public spaces through various methods and strategies, and innovative partnerships and programming. This tour included updates and discussions on current public realm improvement projects.

1. Walking Tour Handout

I. Sidewalk Improvement & Furniture

As part of its ongoing [“Five Year Sidewalk and Street Reconstruction Plan”](#), the Department of Public Works (DPW) has engaged in “heavy maintenance” of the City’s sidewalks and public ways, the scope of which has included significant repair work for and/or installment of brick and paved surfaces, as well as tree plantings (Flexi Pave or water bags) and landscaping, light fixtures and utilities, raised crosswalks, and curb extensions and ramps accessibility. Recent examples of this work include the Post Office Plaza and the stretch of Mass Ave between Prospect St and Pearl Street. The City, in collaboration with property owners, has also installed 90 hanging baskets in Central Square - extending from City Hall to Lafayette Square - to further improve the Mass Ave streetscape.

The conversation on the improvement of existing public spaces has also included the installment of sidewalk seating and furniture, either loose or fixed, as a means of activating wider spaces. Currently, it is up to business owners to take advantage of those spaces and activate them as an extension of their businesses. It is also worth mentioning that there is always a need for balance on sidewalks - particularly in a place such as Central Square - between bicycle racks, newspaper kiosks, trees, furniture, and pedestrians.

Finally, there is work being done in the Square to improve the structural integrity of sidewalks that currently cover areaways - below-grade, excavated spaces around the walls of a building - as these “hollow sidewalks” can present a public safety issue. Recent examples of this work include the sidewalks in front of Citizens Bank (Mass Ave and Temple Street) and Teddy Shoes.

II. Central Square Public Toilet

One of the winning projects from 2015 Participatory Budgeting (\$320,000 in FY16), the Central Square Public Toilet addresses a significant need in the Square. This public toilet - identical to the one located in Harvard Square on Church Street - is clean, safe, and environmentally-friendly, free to the public, and accessible 24-hours a day. The City worked with community groups to identify potential locations based on available space (above and below ground), access to utilities, visibility to ensure that the facility can be easily monitored, and proximity to restaurants, transit and pedestrian traffic. Committee members in attendance spoke favorably about the public toilet, specifically on its accessibility and location within the Square.

III. Carl Barron Plaza

The reimagining and redesign of Carl Barron Plaza is expected to be part of the River Street Reconstruction Project. The scope of the work will be similar to the Western Avenue Project, including landscaping and open spaces, raised bike facilities and crosswalks, tree lighting, and a new design for plaza itself. The community process for this project is expected to begin within the next year.

IV. Stormwater Management

To address flooding and water quality challenges, the City is creating a stormwater facility at Parking Lot 6 as part of The Port Infrastructure Project. While there are currently no development plans for the site, the underground tank will be sited in a manner so as not to preclude the possibility of housing in the future.

V. Committee Member Questions & Comments

- *Does one have to be an owner of a restaurant to bring tables and chairs into the public realm?*
 - No. The [Sidewalk Business Use](#) permit is open to all business owners and DPW has published [guidelines for outdoor dining](#).
- *We should have bulletin board in the Square where the public can display information. Currently, people simply place signs on poles and, while it does add a certain quality to the Square, it may not be the best use of space. One of the recommendations from the Study for streetscapes and active edge improvements was for the use of technology-based ideas for signage, wayfinding, and providing information for events and transit information. So, why not even have a digital bulletin board?*
- *When can the expansion of the Green Street Garage become more actual than conceptual? This could increase the possibility of affordable housing on those parcels currently used as parking lots in the Square.*

VI. Questions & Comments from the Public

- *Much of the space in Target (located on the corner of Mass Ave and Pearl Street) is devoted to food goods, where residents may be looking for general merchandise goods. Did the City have any say in Target's stock? Is there any language in the Zoning Ordinance that would regulate this?*
 - No, the City did not have a say in what the Central Square Target would or could carry nor is there any zoning language that would support this. However, it is possible for residents to lobby for goods of a certain category or that meet certain needs. Some businesses tend to respond to a tailor their inventory to the needs of their patrons.

VII. Next Meeting & Next Steps

The Committee will continue to be involved in development efforts in the Central Square Overlay District as those opportunities present themselves. The Committee's next meeting will take place in December 2017 or January 2018 and will focus on an update of the traffic and transit section of the non-zoning recommendations.

Committee Members Present

- Melissa Greene, Chair
- Esther Hanig
- Drew Kane

- Tahir Kapoor
- Christopher Sol Gully
- Robert Winters

Committee Members not in Attendance

- Joel Altstein
- Michael Monestime

Guest Speaker/Presenter

- Kathy Watkins, *City Engineer, Department of Public Works*

Committee Staff

- Stuart Dash
- Wendell Joseph

There were two (2) members of the public in attendance.



Central Square Advisory Committee

Walking Tour

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Overview

The 2013 Central Square Study resulted in a series of zoning and non-zoning recommendations designed to achieve the vision and goals set forth by the C2 Committee and the preceding Red Ribbon Commission on the Delights and Concerns of Central Square. As part of the implementation of the non-zoning recommendations, the charge of the standing Central Square Advisory Committee (*Zoning Ordinance, Section 20.304.1*) includes working with the City to review and discuss the appropriate direction of contemplated actions. The targeted actions and associated timeframes for addressing each issue are detailed in the attached charts.

These non-zoning recommendations are intended to be implemented through a combination of the work and programs of relevant City departments partnering with the Central Square Business Association (CSBA), local businesses, and residents over several years. Based on scope and complexity, action items span the range from short term (0-2 years), to medium term (2-6 years), to long term (6-10 years). Recommendations designated as “ongoing” or “in process” have no specific timeframe at the publication of this update.

This walking tour of Central Square focuses on the improvement and enhancement of public spaces through various methods – parklets and plazas, innovative partnerships and programming – and will include discussions on current public realm improvement projects.

Possible stops and items of discussion may include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Post Office Plaza
- Citizens Bank Sidewalk Improvement
- Central Square Public Toilet
- Carl Barron Plaza
- CVS Sidewalk Improvement
- Lafayette Square and Jill Brown-Rhone Park (Mass + Main & 907 Main Street Sites)
- Sidewalk Dining and Furniture

Completed Projects

Public Space

Issue	Recommendation – 2013	Progress – 2016-2017	Status
<p>Improving existing public spaces through enhanced programming and adjacent uses, and physical improvements, if needed.</p>	<p>University Park Commons Enhance perception of public access through such means as removing perimeter fencing, adding programming for children, and continuing to host public and neighborhood events</p>	<p>University Park Commons Over the past few years, there has been an increase in public access and enjoyment of this privately owned/publicly beneficial open space through the removal of the perimeter fence, the addition of programming for children, and the continuous hosting of public and neighborhood events (i.e. the Cambridge River Festival of 2015).</p>	<p>COMPLETED <i>(ongoing)</i></p>
	<p>Jill Brown-Rhone Park & Lafayette Square Introduce more active ground floor retail and residents near the park to take advantage of expanded programming opportunity.</p>	<p>Jill Brown-Rhone Park & Lafayette Square The rezoning process for Mass + Main included numerous discussions of the potential positive impacts on Jill Brown-Rhone Park and Lafayette Square. The Special Permit for Mass + Main has been approved with numerous open space improvements included in the conditions to enhance the importance of this space in the public life of Central Square.</p>	<p>COMPLETED <i>(ongoing)</i></p>
<p>Create new outdoor public spaces in conjunction with (re)development</p>	<p>Small Plazas/Pocket Parks a) Create one or more pocket parks along Bishop Allen Drive through conversion of current city parking lots. Alternative program concepts for further exploration may include a pedestrian court connecting Bishop Allen and Mass Ave, passive lawn space, and/or children's play space b) Create one to two small plazas along the north side of Mass Ave in conjunction with redevelopment projects. Emphasize opportunities for outdoor dining and seating, taking advantage of good access to direct sun. c) A near-term small plaza at Bishop Allen and Main, and a publicly accessible courtyard at the Novartis development</p>	<p>Small Plazas/Pocket Parks a) a small plaza was established in 2014 at the edge of Parking Lot 5 as part of the H-Mart renovations b) renovations were completed in 2015 on the small plaza at Bishop Allen Dr. and Main St., including new artwork/seating that add important elements of comfort, whimsy, and place c) as part of the recently completed Novartis development, a courtyard was completed and is open to the public during work hours</p>	<p>COMPLETED</p>
	<p>Western Ave/River St Improvements Planned improvements to the Western Ave and River St park spaces have been completed for coherence and usability.</p>		<p>COMPLETED</p>
<p>Priority Streetscape and Active Edge Improvements</p>	<p>Consider installing street trees and/or ornamental plantings in planters along Mass Ave between Prospect and Essex and</p>	<p>Working with property owners (Colliers Int. Real Estate and MIT), the City has installed 90 hanging baskets in Central</p>	<p>COMPLETED <i>(ongoing)</i></p>

Communication: Walking Tour Handout (Overview)

	Magazine and Pearl where below-grade obstructions prevent in-ground trees.	Square – extending from City Hall to Lafayette Square – providing plantings in Central Square.	
Priority Streetscape and Active Edge Improvements (continued)	Continue to explore the potential for siting a City public toilet in appropriate public locations in Central Square. Note: Site work began in Spring '17. Below grade utilities to be installed in July.		COMPLETED (ongoing)

Projects in Progress

Public Space

Issue	Recommendation – 2013	Progress – 2016-2017	Status
1) Improving existing public spaces through enhanced programming and adjacent uses, and physical improvements, if needed.	University Park Commons The improvement of wayfinding and signage to connect University Park Commons to Mass Ave continues to be a goal for both Forest City and the Central Square Business Association.		ONGOING
	Carl Barron Plaza <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Working with the Central Square Business Association (CSBA), businesses, and adjacent property owners, introduce more event programming, beginning with quickly-implemented smaller events and if appropriate, building toward larger events. Consider redesign of Carl Barron Plaza to organize the space to better separate circulation from seating, create improved spaces for people to linger, and to accommodate the possibility of programming such as music performances and buskers. Connect with adjacent property owner to tenant vacant space to a use that would help animate the plaza. 	Carl Barron Plaza The upcoming renovation of River Street (FY19 Design/FY20 Construction) includes the redesign of Carl Barron Plaza in its scope. The goal is to organize the space to better separate circulation from seating, create improved spaces for people to linger, and to accommodate the possibility of programming such as music performances and buskers. Note: The bulk of construction will be in FY20-21.	MEDIUM (in process)
	Post Office Sidewalk (as an extension of City Hall Sq.) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> City Hall lawn offers a wonderful public space for passive use, particularly in summer. There is potential to similarly activate the wide sidewalk space across Massachusetts Avenue, along the Post Office building, through creation of a parklet to make this a useable and recognizable space. 	Post Office Sidewalk (as an extension of City Hall Sq.) Take advantage of the wide sidewalk space, in front of the building along Mass Ave, and activate it for public activities, both small and large.	MEDIUM (in process)

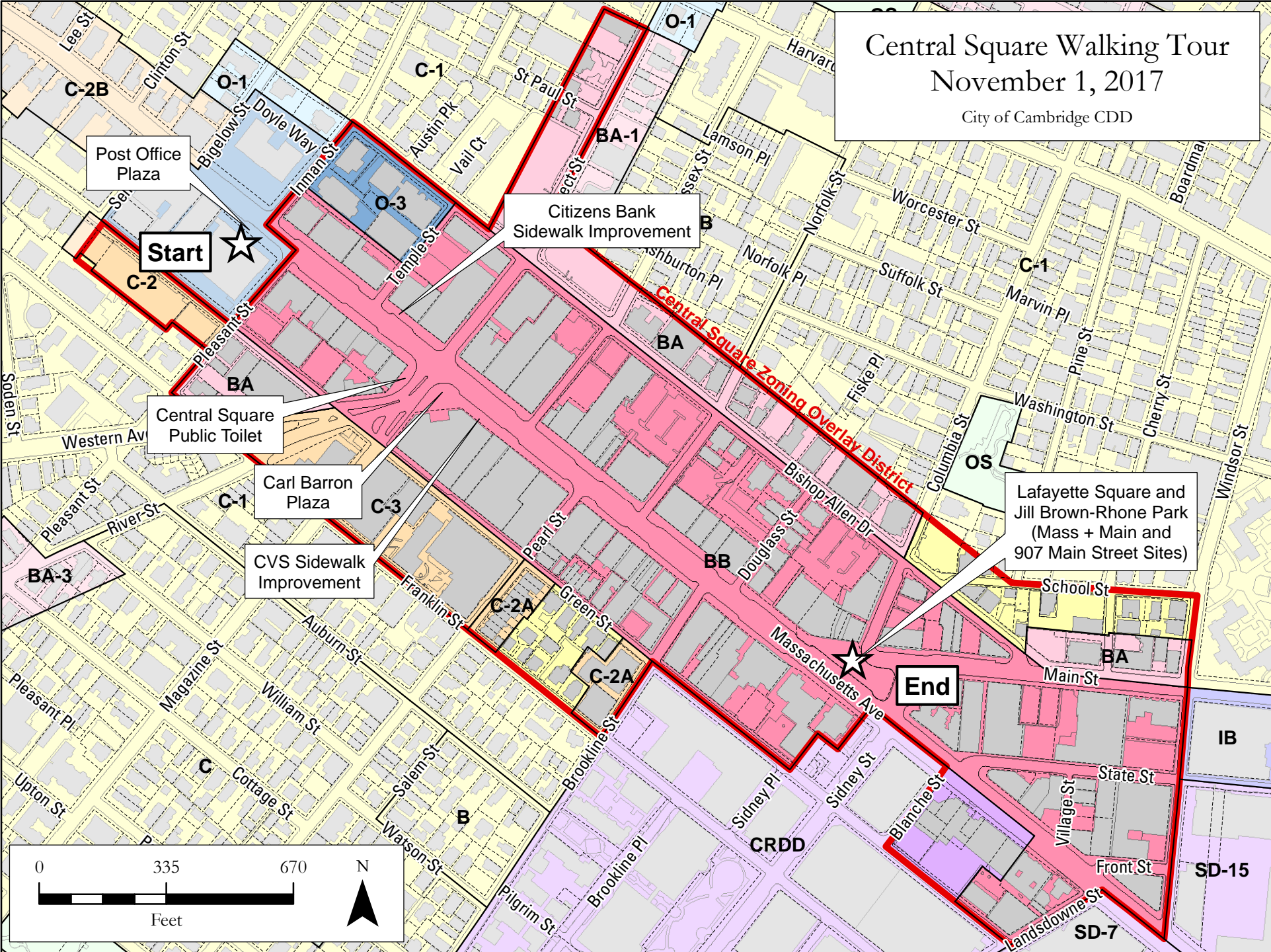
Communication: Walking Tour Handout (Overview)

Issue	Recommendation – 2013	Progress – 2016-2017	Status
<p><i>1) Improving existing public spaces through enhanced programming and adjacent uses, and physical improvements, if needed. (continued)</i></p>	<p>Massachusetts Avenue</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Enhance existing public spaces, create new public space interventions and introduce public art and performances to support the Central Square Cultural District and transform Massachusetts Avenue into a great street that serves as an important public space for Central Square. 	<p>Massachusetts Avenue</p> <p>Enhance existing public spaces, create new public space interventions and amenities, and introduce public art and performances to support the Central Square Cultural District.</p>	<p>MEDIUM <i>(in process)</i></p>
<p>2) Create new outdoor public spaces in conjunction with (re)development</p>	<p>Small Plazas/Pocket Parks</p> <p>Create a pocket park at Green and Blanche Streets as part of any adjacent redevelopment. Ensure new development includes occupied ground floor spaces facing park</p>	<p>Small Plazas/Pocket Parks</p> <p>The redevelopment of the Manning Apartments will result in the creation of a pocket park at Green Street between Pearl Street and Magazine Street.</p>	<p>SHORT</p>
		<p>In conjunction with redevelopment of the former Quest Diagnostics properties, the Mass + Main project committed to create one to two small plazas along the north side of Mass Ave.</p>	<p>MEDIUM</p>
	<p>New Connections in the Osborn Triangle</p> <p>Incorporate green elements into any new street/access connection between Main and Mass Ave enabled by redevelopment. Consider incorporating ground floor retail, visible from Massachusetts Avenue and/or Main Street, as part of this connection. Consider opportunity for permanent or periodic pedestrian streets in the Osborn Triangle (e.g. portions of Front, State and/or Village Street).</p>		<p>MEDIUM</p>
<p>3) Parklets</p>	<p>Parklets offer important short- to medium-term opportunities for high-impact, low-investment public spaces involving business/property owner/organizational program partners on underutilized sidewalk areas. Possible locations include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) <i>Post Office Plaza</i> (consider USPS and/or Cambridge Senior Center as partner). Coordinate with adjacent Hubway station. b) <i>Carl Barron Plaza and/or Western Ave opposite the Plaza</i> (consider interactive information/arts theme including real-time transit information; with MIT Media Lab, CAC). c) <i>Mass Ave opposite Norfolk Street</i> (consider Dance Complex, with dance/healthy play theme, as partner). d) <i>Mass Ave opposite Jill Brown-Rhone Park</i> (consider Nora Theater, CCTV, Salvation Army, Forest City and/or Cambridge Fire Department as partner). 		<p>MEDIUM</p>
<p>4) Indoor Public Spaces</p>	<p>Indoor Public Gathering Space</p> <p>Encourage establishment of a ‘Public Room’ and/or public market in association with property redevelopment or adaptive reuse, especially of a public building or parking lot. To ensure retail marketability and significant public use, locate the facility near areas of heavy pedestrian traffic such as the Red Line station. Prime locations to consider include redevelopment sites of one acre or more.</p>	<p>MEDIUM</p>	
	<p>Central Square Branch Library</p> <p>Consider an alternative location and focus for the Central Square branch library that is located on Massachusetts Ave and focuses on technology, art, and culture.</p>	<p>MEDIUM</p>	

Issue	Recommendation – 2013	Progress – 2016-2017	Status
5) Programming	<p>Farmers Market In the event of redevelopment of current city parking lot, accommodate the Central Square Farmer’s Market at or near its current site (improved), Jill Brown-Rhone Park or other suitable location.</p>		MEDIUM
	<p>Partnerships Work with any interested business or organization to enable their assistance in programming appropriate use of public spaces. Assistance may include design, funding and management.</p>		ONGOING
6) Priority Streetscape and Active Edge Improvements	<p>A. Develop/adapt buildings to include active ground floor uses. Key Locations:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • East side of Sidney Street at Lafayette Square (e.g. through replacement of the existing frame residential building. Retain historically/culturally significant structures). 		LONG
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • One or both sides of Sidney Street from Mass Ave to and along University Park Commons. 		MEDIUM
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • City parking lot edges, and other large parking lot frontage along streets/sidewalks. 		LONG
	<p>B. Install green “biowalls” or public art where parking structure walls abut sidewalks, in particular along south-facing portions of the Green Street and Quest parking structures.</p>		MEDIUM
<p>C. Encourage the use of technology-based ideas for signage, wayfinding, and providing information for events and transit information.</p>		ONGOING	

Central Square Walking Tour November 1, 2017

City of Cambridge CDD



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