

# a river runs through them

By Thomas Corcoran, Anthony Perno, III, and Jenny Greenberg

Credit: Cooper's Ferry Partnership



Visitors disembark from the RiverLink Ferry on the Camden Waterfront. The RiverLink provides a fun and scenic way to travel between the two sides of Philadelphia and Camden's growing regional waterfront destination.

**T**he cities of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, and Camden, New Jersey, are two distinct municipalities in two different states. Yet, one can stand at Penn's Landing on Philadelphia's Central Delaware Waterfront and see visitors at the Camden Waterfront, a mere 2,200 feet away, across the Delaware River.

Both cities are engaged in dramatic transformations of their downtown waterfronts from post-industrial abandonment to an era of revival through which the riverfront is once again becoming a center for commercial and cultural activity. Just as Philadelphia and Camden's waterfronts were interconnected through trade for over two centuries, there is an opportunity to re-integrate the two sides of the riverfront as a single signature waterfront destination in the Philadelphia metropolitan area.

Inspired by the highly successful model of Baltimore's Inner Harbor, since the 1970s, Philadelphia and Camden

have worked to re-invent their downtown waterfronts as regional destinations offering a mix of large-scale family entertainment attractions, public events, festivals, concerts, and fireworks displays.

Today, the master plans for Philadelphia and Camden include significant low-to-mid-rise housing components, integrated with retail and restaurants along with public amenities including parks and trails. Philadelphia and Camden have come to view their downtown waterfronts as assets that must be leveraged to serve residents of the city and region, as well as visitors.

Today, employment in education and the health services sector has replaced industrial activity as the principal driver in Philadelphia and Camden. The "eds and meds" account for 43 percent of employment in Camden and 37 percent in Philadelphia. (*The Camden Higher Education and Healthcare Task Force: A Winning Investment for the City of Camden*, 2012) In both cities, educational and medical institutions attract knowledge workers who are seeking amenities including vibrant waterfronts. Both cities have the opportunity to provide housing as well as a diverse mix of commercial activity, cultural attractions, and recreational opportunities to attract and retain these knowledge workers.

This article will tell the stories of Camden and Philadelphia's downtown waterfront revival efforts. Both cities were faced with hundreds of acres of vacant and underutilized land along the Delaware Riverfront in the post-industrial era. Weak market conditions along with fragmented land ownership, environmental contamination, and inadequate and aged infrastructure have made redevelopment of these orphaned sites a slow and complex process that has required a combination of big vision, detail-oriented tenacity, and creativity around leveraging and packaging private and public resources.

In this vein, Philadelphia and Camden are now working together across state lines, with the recognition that physical transportation linkages and programmatic synergy between the two waterfronts will make them greater than the sum of their parts.

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## THE STORY OF PHILADELPHIA AND CAMDEN'S DOWNTOWN WATERFRONT REVIVALS

Camden and Philadelphia's downtown waterfronts are in a process of transformation, from disconnected and underutilized assets into a single world-class waterfront destination for the Philadelphia region.



Credit: Camden Riversharks

Camden Riversharks fans cheer for the home team at Campbell's Field. Views of the Ben Franklin Bridge and Philadelphia skyline offer a stunning backdrop.

### THE CAMDEN WATERFRONT

The city of Camden originated from small settlements along the Delaware River in the 17th century that were reliant on trade and connected by ferry to the city of Philadelphia. At their peak, in 1925, eight steam ferries operated by Pennsylvania Railroad travelled back and forth across the river between Camden and Philadelphia.

In the late 19th and early 20th century, the city of Camden grew to an economic and transportation hub and was the civic and cultural center of Southern New Jersey with major employers including Campbell Soup Company, Victor Talking Machine Company (later RCA Victor), and New York Shipbuilding Corporation.

In the second half of the 20th century, an extreme loss of industry and coinciding suburban development led to large population declines. Camden went from roughly 125,000 residents in 1950, to just over 77,000 by 2010. (U.S. Census) While the city continued to serve as the county seat and retained corporate and institutional employers including Campbell Soup Company's World Headquarters, Rutgers University Camden campus, and Cooper Hospital, there was a dramatic decentralization of population, business and civic infrastructure away from the city of Camden into the Southern New Jersey suburbs.

In 1980, city and corporate leaders began an initiative to capitalize on Camden's downtown waterfront as an underutilized asset that could be redeveloped to breathe new economic vitality into the city. By the late 1980s, the infrastructure of an obsolete rail yard and ferry system was cleared away, and the remaining heavy industrial facilities had reached the end of their productive lives.

In 1984, the three principal owners of the waterfront land – the city of Camden, Campbell Soup Company, and RCA – jointly commissioned a planning study to evaluate the development potential of their collective holdings of roughly 120 acres of waterfront land located between the Ben Franklin Bridge and the South

Jersey Port. The study determined that the waterfront could support a carefully planned, mixed-use development of family entertainment, recreational, and cultural attractions.

As a result of this cooperative effort, Cooper's Ferry Development Association was founded as a private, nonprofit corporation dedicated to creating and implementing a vision for Camden's downtown waterfront. Known today as Cooper's Ferry Partnership (CFP) after a strategic merger with Camden's downtown special services district in 2011, this organization has provided consistent leadership for the downtown waterfront for nearly 30 years, serving as overall planner, promoter, and master developer.

An organization of 14 staff, CFP is funded through foundation and corporate contributions, along with the management fees that it generates on public infrastructure and other development projects. Working in cooperation with local, state, and federal public sector partners, as well as the private sector, CFP has been able to put into place the building blocks for a vibrant, mixed-use waterfront community anchored by family entertainment attractions.

CFP has coordinated more than \$75 million of infrastructure development, which was implemented in successive phases over 25 years to create a framework for new private development. This included extending the downtown street and utility grid to the waterfront, creating a linear park along the river to permanently preserve public access, and implementing streetscape enhancements throughout much of downtown Camden.

Recognizing the importance of establishing Camden as a transportation hub, CFP played an active role in establishing the alignment of the New Jersey Transit RiverLINE through downtown Camden to the waterfront. The Camden to Trenton line connects the city into Amtrak's Northeast corridor service. CFP is also advocating for the extension of rail service south to Rowan University's main campus in Woodbury, New Jersey. In 1991, CFP also established the RiverLink, offering ferry service between Camden and Philadelphia's Penn's Landing for the first time in 40 years. CFP is also currently developing a regional bicycle trail network that emanates from Camden.

These investments in public infrastructure and transportation have leveraged a critical mass of development projects. On the Camden Waterfront, 5 percent of the city's total land mass is generating 18 percent of tax revenue collected by the city. These developments have established a new center of economic activity in Camden, creating job opportunities and improving the city's image as a place to live, work, and invest.

Development projects include key family entertainment anchors: New Jersey State Aquarium (1992); Susquehanna Bank Center, a 25,000-seat outdoor/indoor concert venue operated by Live Nation (1995); the Camden Children's Garden (1999); Campbell's Field, home of the minor league baseball team, the Camden

Riversharks (2001); Battleship New Jersey Memorial and Museum (2001); and the Adventure Aquarium (2005 expansion and privatization of the NJ State Aquarium).

Office developments have included Camden Aerospace Center, leased to L-3 Communications (1992); One Port Center, headquarters of the Delaware River Port Authority (1997); New Jersey Economic Development Authority High Tech Center (2006), site of high tech companies and a business incubator; and Ferry Terminal Office Building (2007), home to Susquehanna Bank's corporate headquarters, the first privately financed office building built on spec on the waterfront.

In 2005, the former RCA "Nipper Building" was converted by developer Dranoff Properties into 340 luxury waterfront apartments, the first new housing on the waterfront and first market rate housing in the city in 30 years. Environmental remediation is underway on the conversion of a second RCA building into 80 condominiums. The redevelopment of the waterfront has also spurred a renaissance in the adjacent historic Cooper-Grant neighborhood, where Pennrose Properties recently developed 30 infill townhouses. Housing values in Cooper Grant have doubled since 2000 and maintained their value after the recent national housing market collapse.

While retail and restaurant development has been slower to take root, there are five successful ground floor retail food establishments on the waterfront as well as a bank branch.

In 2006, Camden Town Center, a private development group, which was responsible for the privatization and expansion of the Adventure Aquarium, announced a partnership with Dranoff Properties to develop the balance of the master plan. The overall master plan calls for the phased development program of 1,200 new units of market rate housing; 500,000 square feet of Class A commercial office; 100,000 square feet of retail, dining, and entertainment; and a hotel conference center.

While the pace of development has slowed with recent weak economic times, the waterfront is positioned for the next upswing in the economy and is currently building out the remaining \$4 million of public infrastructure improvements.

Today, the Camden Waterfront attracts close to three million visitors a year. The waterfront has retained and generated in excess of 2,200 full time jobs and 1,000 seasonal positions. New development contributes about \$3 million to the city's tax base, mostly in the form of Payments in Lieu of Tax (PILOTS) and has generated in excess of \$2.3 million in sales tax revenues from parking, ticketing, and food and beverage sales.

The Camden Waterfront has also served as a catalyst for downtown redevelopment by playing a pivotal role in overcoming suburban fears about coming into Camden. As a result of media portrayals of urban decay and crime, in the 1990s, there was a significant psychological barrier to overcome to attract visitors to the waterfront.

By establishing a critical mass of high-quality family entertainment anchors, investing in infrastructure and public transportation, as well as marketing and programming of public spaces, today the Camden Waterfront is perceived as welcoming, safe, and easy to access. The Camden Waterfront has had increasing success attracting high-profile touring events including RedBull Flugtag and Cirque de Soleil. This has been pivotal in changing the public image of Camden and fostering optimism about its future.

This shift is reflected in the massive investments that have been made by Camden's anchor downtown institutions in the educational and medical services sector. In 2012, Rutgers University opened a \$55 million graduate student dormitory with ground floor retail. Cooper

Credit: Cooper's Ferry Partnership



An aerial view of the Camden Waterfront.

Medical School of Rowan University began its inaugural class of medical students in its new \$139 million facility. Cooper University Hospital broke ground on a new \$100 million Cancer Institute and in the past five years has made significant investments in new housing, enhanced public spaces and programming in Cooper Plaza, near the hospital. Despite the national economic downturn, the educational

and medical services sector in Camden saw a 4.4 percent increase in employment from 2002 to 2012. (*The Camden Higher Education and Healthcare Task Force: A Winning Investment for the City of Camden*, CAMConnect, 2012.)

The Camden Waterfront is positioned to provide the housing, restaurants, and entertainment and recreational amenities that will help Camden's educational and medical anchor institutions to attract and retain students and workers, driving Camden's emergence as an integral part of a regional knowledge center as well as a tourism destination.

## PHILADELPHIA'S CENTRAL DELAWARE WATERFRONT

In Camden, development success on the waterfront has helped to build confidence and momentum for new investment in the downtown. Across the river, the dynamics are different. Philadelphia has developed strategies to draw residents, workers, and visitors from its thriving Center City down to the waterfront.



With spectacular views and a dramatic ramp rising 12 feet into the air along the north face of the Benjamin Franklin Bridge, the new Race Street Pier has quickly become a favorite spot on Philadelphia's Central Delaware Waterfront.

Center City Philadelphia and adjacent residential communities have seen dramatic residential and business reinvestment in recent years. According to Philadelphia's Center City District, the downtown residential population grew 27 percent in the past two decades to 93,000, making it the third largest in the United States. Center City also has the third largest downtown employment center in the country. Street life is flourishing in this highly walkable city where there are hundreds of new sidewalk cafes and fine dining restaurants have increased 328 percent in ten years. (*State of Center City Philadelphia 2011*, Center City District) Unfortunately, this vitality and economic growth has not extended down to the Central Delaware Waterfront.

Philadelphia recently completed a new master plan, which set forth a roadmap for breathing life back into the waterfront that was once the center of Philadelphia's economy and an international hub for manufacturing and shipping.

In the 1970s and 80s, Philadelphia built Penn's Landing between Market Street and Lombard Street which is home to the Independence Seaport Museum, the Great Plaza, a large-scale civic space for large public events, a promenade, and marina, where a collection of historic ships are berthed. The popular Independence Blue Cross RiverRink and Festival Pier were developed in the 1990s.

Despite the popularity of these attractions, Penn's Landing does not have the vibrant environment and commercial activity that would draw the public from Center City down to the waterfront in number. For several decades, large-scale private redevelopment proposals for Penn's Landing emerged and failed to come to fruition.

One major challenge for the redevelopment of the Central Delaware Waterfront is the infrastructure of I-95, which runs along the waterfront creating a psychological and physical barrier between the waterfront and Center City.

To the north and south of Penn's Landing, the waterfront is almost completely inaccessible, with vacant

land and decaying piers, effectively cutting vital neighborhoods off from the river. Until recently, weak land use controls and the lack of a current, compelling master plan allowed for ad-hoc development to take place in an uncoordinated manner.

Finally, in 2006, two pending waterfront casinos galvanized public concerns that without a coherent plan and coordinated redevelopment approach, Philadelphia would squander its opportunity to create a world-class waterfront. With support from the William Penn Foundation, PennPraxis, the applied research arm at the School of Design at the University of Pennsylvania spearheaded a citizen-engagement and visioning process, which generated *A Civic Vision for the Central Delaware*. This vision called for a balance of the public access, open space, and quality urban development for the waterfront.

Building on the momentum from the *Civic Vision*, in 2009, Mayor Michael Nutter turned a fresh page in the history of Philadelphia's Central Waterfront by establishing the Delaware River Waterfront Corporation (DRWC), a new 501(c)3 nonprofit corporation. DRWC was established to act as the steward of the waterfront and to transform it into a vibrant destination for recreational, cultural, and commercial activities that would benefit all citizens and visitors to Philadelphia.

DRWC has a staff of 15 full time people who work on planning, development and public programming. The organization is funded by a combination of tenant leases and revenues from parking and other concessions. DRWC serves as a catalyst for high quality investment in public parks, trails, maritime, residential, retail, hotel, and other improvements that create a vibrant amenity, extending Philadelphia to the river's edge.

Unlike its successor organization, the Penn's Landing Corporation, which operated from 1972 to 2009 and focused solely on the waterfront adjacent to Center City, DRWC's geographic scope was broadened to include the entire Central Delaware Waterfront from Allegheny Avenue in the north to Oregon Avenue in the south. The project area encompasses almost six linear miles of waterfront and over 1,100 acres of property.

DRWC was charged with looking comprehensively at this area through a citizen-driven master planning process in order to provide an implementable long-range plan to transform the Central Delaware Waterfront. This plan was to provide strategies that would both create regional amenities and reconnect the city's residents and visitors to the waterfront.

DRWC completed the *Master Plan for the Central Delaware* in October 2011 through an 18-month process with a multi-disciplinary design team, led by Cooper, Robertson & Partners, with OLIN, Kieran Timberlake, and HR&A Advisors. DRWC worked with governmental, nonprofit, and civic organizations; property owners; and other stakeholders to develop a detailed framework of open space, cultural and environmental resources, transportation, and economic development.

The Master Plan has been widely embraced and was adopted by the Philadelphia Planning Commission as well as receiving a 2012 American Institute of Architects' (AIA) Honor Award.

For the heart of the Central Waterfront, the Master Plan calls for a mixture of residential, entertainment, and retail uses organized around a network of high-quality open spaces and served by an improved transportation system. The Master Plan provides strategies to extend the vibrant environment of Center City and adjacent communities to the waterfront by creating nodes of low-to-mid-rise housing with supporting service retail, cafes, restaurants, and entertainment that will establish a year-round destination and serve both existing and new residential communities.

The Master Plan emphasizes the importance of the public realm, composed of regularly spaced public and civic spaces, and a waterfront trail to connect these parks and frame private development. Waterfront parks will incorporate best practices in sustainability to restore ecological health to the river.

The Master Plan identifies three priority sites – Washington Avenue, Penn's Landing, and Spring Garden Street – where strategic public investment should be focused first. Public sector investments should be targeted here first to catalyze short and mid-term investments.

In addition to parks, the Master Plan calls for public investment focused on improving transportation connections. While for the most part, the Master Plan's approach to confronting the challenge presented by I-95 is to improve the existing connector streets that cross under the highway, making these routes more welcoming and safe. The one exception is the block between Chestnut and Walnut Streets where the plan recommends a new park constructed from the riverfront, capping over I-95 and Columbus Boulevard into Old City.

Even while the plan was in development, DRWC focused on early implementation projects to get the public to the waterfront to increase public access and stewardship of the riverfront. In 2011, DRWC completed the widely acclaimed Race Street Pier park and is working to develop additional pier parks, with boardwalks and fishing piers, as well as a multi-use waterfront trail that will extend along the length of the project area. DRWC is also creating new programming that will get the public out onto the water, including a kayak and swan boat rental program.

DRWC has begun to implement connector street enhancement projects using intensive streetscaping, lighting, and artistic treatments as well as traffic calming measures to improve pedestrian and bicycle safety and to draw the public down to the waterfront. The Race Street Connector was completed in 2011, transforming the connection between the Old City neighborhood and the new Race Street Pier.

DRWC is also working to animate the public spaces on the riverfront, using creative placemaking strategies

that put the arts at the center of its efforts to draw the public to the waterfront, and to demonstrate to the business community a growing dynamism. DRWC is working with many partners to bring the vitality of Philadelphia's burgeoning arts scene down to the waterfront.

These efforts are gaining momentum. DRWC is attracting visitors from the art galleries in Old City on First Fridays, down to the Race Street Pier for live music and where it also hosts the Art Star Craft Bazaar. Philadelphia's Office of Arts, Culture and the Creative Economy is working with DRWC to create a large-scale interactive art installation by Numen/For Use, a Croatian-Austrian design collective at the Race Street Pier Park. Across the street from the Pier, the Philadelphia Live Arts Festival and Philly Fringe is transforming a former fire hydrant pumping station into a new highly synergistic performing arts center.



*A capacity crowd enjoys a summer concert on the Great Plaza at Penn's Landing.*

Credit: Ed Seraia

## **GREATER THAN THE SUM OF THEIR PARTS**

While engaged in their unique redevelopment initiatives, Camden and Philadelphia are also looking across the water for partnership on the implementation of a strategy of key importance for the success of both cities. Although a river, state, and municipal boundaries divide them, the cities of Philadelphia and Camden correctly see themselves as sharing one waterfront. By tying together their redevelopment efforts with marketing, programmatic, and transportation linkages, they can begin forming a single destination. Camden and Philadelphia's unified waterfronts will continue to grow in visitorship, private investment, and economic impact for their respective cities and states.

Together, the Greater Philadelphia Waterfront receives roughly 3.5 million visitors a year. With 28 million people living within 100 miles of Philadelphia, it is clear that there is untapped potential. Through packaging of Camden and Philadelphia's waterfronts together as a premier waterfront destination and by tying into Philadelphia's historic district, Camden

and Philadelphia could start to draw more visitors for longer stays.

As two cities each operating within different local and state jurisdictions, Camden and Philadelphia are fortunate to have quasi-public nonprofit waterfront development and marketing organizations that understand and share this vision for a unified waterfront destination.

Early coordination between DRWC and CFP has focused on joint programming of holiday fireworks events. Twice a year, on New Year's Eve and 4th of July weekend, a major fireworks display over the river is choreographed to music that is simulcast on Penn's Landing and the Camden Waterfront. This joint programming is symbolic but also has real economic value.

A recent economic impact study conducted in 2010 by Urban Partners found that "New Years Eve fireworks directly motivated visitors to come to Philadelphia, and that these visitors utilized an estimated 1,720 hotel room nights and expended nearly \$1.25 million beyond what would have occurred in the absence of the Fireworks program. In addition, another 4,700 persons viewed the fireworks from the Battleship New Jersey, Adventure Aquarium, and other Camden waterfront venues and added \$115,000 in spending in New Jersey." The total direct and indirect economic impact generated by the fireworks was \$2.871 million within the Philadelphia region. (*Economic Impact of Penn's Landing Fireworks*, 2010, Urban Partners).

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Since 2010, New Year's Eve fireworks have been expanded from one nightly display to a 6pm and a 12am display. Estimated crowds of viewers on the Camden Waterfront have grown to over 15,000 and on Penn's Landing to 50,000. DRWC and CFP plan to expand joint programming to coordinate activities for many other major holidays including Memorial Day and Labor Day.

There are additional opportunities to take existing annual multi-day festivals such as the XPoNential Music Festival in Camden and the WHYY Connections Festival in Philadelphia and to work with organizers to plan these events to straddle the river. Following this model, in the summer of 2013, the WXTU country music event will hold concerts on both sides of the waterfront for the first time. DRWC and CFP believe there is also an opportunity to take a more coordinated



Credit: Cooper's Ferry Partnership

Visitors bask in the sun, enjoying river breezes and great entertainment on the Camden Waterfront.

approach to attracting national touring events. DRWC and CFP have also begun to market upcoming events on the other's waterfront, projecting a sense of connectedness and coordination between the two sides.

Another area for a growing partnership is in joint marketing of the waterfronts as a single destination, as exemplified in Fodor's online guide for The Camden Waterfront and Penn's Landing:

"Perfectly located along the scenic Delaware River, the Camden Waterfront shares the river's banks with Penn's Landing, just one mile from Philadelphia's historic district, forming a unique two-sided waterfront destination that bubbles over with fun."

A key marketing strategy is to promote awareness of both waterfronts to visitors at Philadelphia's historic district. In 2010, 2.4 million visitors came to the Independence Visitors Center seeking information about their stay in Philadelphia. (*Philadelphia Area Hospitality Snapshot*, Greater Philadelphia Tourism and Marketing Corporation, 2011.) Staff at the Independence Visitors Center, located just four blocks from the river, could be promoting visitation to attractions on both waterfronts.

Ultimately, in order to significantly expand joint programming and marketing it will be necessary to forge more integrated organizational capacity and to work with regional and state partners. DRWC and CFP are exploring the possibility of appointing shared marketing professionals who could jointly program two-sided events and develop marketing materials featuring attractions on both sides.

Collaborative efforts can be augmented through regional organizations including the Greater Philadelphia Tourism and Marketing Corporation, the Pennsylvania Convention and Visitors Bureau, and the South Jersey Tourism Bureau to market both sides to national and international tourists and conventioneers coming to Philadelphia. In addition, Camden and Philadelphia need to seek resources and support from the Pennsylvania and New Jersey state tourism bureaus for marketing the two-sided waterfront.

In addition to enhanced programming and marketing, it is essential to focus on improving physical linkages and multi-modal transportation options between Camden and Philadelphia. The Delaware River Port Authority (DRPA), the bi-state agency that operates several bridges that span the river as well as the RiverLink Ferry and PATCO high-speed line, is a critical partner in this effort.

The RiverLink provides ferry service during the summer months between Penn's Landing and the Camden Waterfront. Camden and Philadelphia would like to expand water transportation in the future with year round ferry service, more frequent trips, and more stops on both sides. DRWC has secured a small fleet of water taxis to use in the future to provide point-to-point service. These options would not only support tourism but would make commuting via water transportation an option for people who live in one city and work or go to school in the other.

Another transit option is the PATCO line, which travels between Center City and South Jersey, stopping in downtown Camden. While currently not open, the Franklin Square station stop at 4th and Race could create rail connections on both sides of the river.

Both cities are also working on improved bicycle linkages between their waterfronts. New traffic patterns, designated bike lanes, and signage in Camden and Philadelphia's downtown districts are improving safety and awareness of bicycle routes to the river. To connect these improved routes, CFP is working with the DRPA to rebuild the pedestrian and bicycle pathway

on the Ben Franklin Bridge, making it easier to travel from the bridge into Camden.

The pathway on the Ben Franklin Bridge offers not only a functional route for pedestrians and bicycles to cross the river, but also a spectacular experience, with sweeping views up and down the river far above vehicular traffic. The bridge serves literally and symbolically as a bi-state venue that is popular for charity race events and presents an opportunity for additional types of shared programming.

In addition to ferry, rail, and bicycle connections, Camden and Philadelphia would also like to offer bus service from various Center City locations to the attractions on the Central Delaware Waterfront and to the RiverLink Ferry terminal for passage to Camden.

The Adventure Aquarium has been at the lead with this strategy. The Aquarium packaged an excursion from the Independence Visitors Center, where the Philly Phlash, a tourist jitney, picked up visitors and transported them to the RiverLink Ferry terminal for a scenic 12-minute ride across the river.

Both Camden and Philadelphia's waterfronts are on trajectories of growth and regained economic significance in the region. By working in tandem to create a signature regional waterfront destination, both cities and the region will benefit from direct and indirect economic impacts including additional housing demand on both waterfronts, growth in supporting retail services, and extended stays in both Philadelphia and future Camden hotels. 



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