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COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF PHILADELPHIA
COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC PROPERTY AND
PUBLIC WORKS

- - -

Room 400, City Hall
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania
Thursday, June 5, 2008
12:45 p.m.

- - -

PRESENT:

COUNCILMAN DARRELL CLARKE, CHAIR
COUNCILMAN WILLIAM GREENLEE
COUNCILWOMAN DONNA REED MILLER
COUNCILMAN FRANK RIZZO

BILL 080496 - An ordinance authorizing the
Commissioner of Public Property, on behalf of
the City, to acquire from the Philadelphia
Redevelopment Authority the properties known
as 917, 919, 923, 925, 927, 929 and 931 South
22nd Street...

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COUNCILMAN CLARKE: Good

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afternoon. This is the Committee on

4

Public Property and Public Works.

5

Will the Clerk please read the

6

title of the first bill.

7

THE CLERK: Bill No. 080496, an

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ordinance authorizing the Commissioner of

9

Public Property, on behalf of the City,

10

to acquire from the Philadelphia

11

Redevelopment Authority the properties

12

known as 917, 919, 923, 925, 927, 929 and

13

931 South 22nd Street, under certain

14

terms and conditions.

15

COUNCILMAN CLARKE: Thank you.

16

We have established a quorum.

17

We have Councilwoman Miller, Councilman

18

Greenlee and Councilman Rizzo present.

19

(Witness approached witness

20

table.)

21

COUNCILMAN CLARKE: Thank you,

22

sir.

23

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER HERZINS:

24

Good afternoon, Chairman Clarke and

25

members of the Committee on Public

1 6/5/08 - PUBLIC PROPERTY - BILL 080496
2 Property and Public Works. My name is
3 John Herzins, Deputy Commissioner in
4 Public Property. I'm here on behalf of
5 Commissioner Schlotterbeck to testify in
6 support of Bill No. 080496, an ordinance
7 authorizing the Commissioner, on behalf
8 of the City, to acquire from the
9 Philadelphia Redevelopment Authority the
10 properties known as 917, 919, 923, 925,
11 927, 929 and 931 South 22nd Street, under
12 certain terms and conditions.

13 This bill will enable the City
14 to acquire the necessary properties for
15 the creation of a neighborhood park and
16 open green space. The park will be
17 maintained by the Recreation Department.

18 The Department of Public
19 Property supports this measure and,
20 accordingly, we respectfully ask that
21 City Council approve Bill No. 080496, as
22 well as request that this Committee vote
23 the bill out of Committee with a
24 favorable recommendation and that the
25 rules be suspended to permit first

1 6/5/08 - PUBLIC PROPERTY - BILL 080496

2 reading at the next Council session.

3 Thank you.

4 COUNCILMAN CLARKE: Thank you
5 for your testimony.

6 The park will be maintained by
7 Recreation, okay. I just wanted to make
8 sure. Is this a part of an existing
9 recreational location or does it --

10 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER HERZINS:

11 No, it's not.

12 COUNCILMAN CLARKE: -- stand
13 alone?

14 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER HERZINS:

15 It's vacant lots.

16 COUNCILMAN CLARKE:

17 Interesting. Do you know of any other
18 instance where we have acquired a parcel
19 and then the Department of Recreation has
20 maintained it when it's just green space?

21 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER HERZINS:

22 We have someone here from the
23 Horticultural Society that could talk
24 about the plans for this park.

25 COUNCILMAN CLARKE: Well, I

1 6/5/08 - PUBLIC PROPERTY - BILL 080496
2 understand. I just want to talk more
3 about the City's policy, because,
4 unfortunately, I have a whole lot of
5 vacant lots in my Council district and
6 there are instances where --

7 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER HERZINS:
8 This is the first one I know I have
9 testified on.

10 COUNCILMAN CLARKE: That we are
11 actually creating a new park that will be
12 maintained by the Department of
13 Recreation?

14 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER HERZINS:
15 Right.

16 COUNCILMAN CLARKE: So we are
17 setting a precedent?

18 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER HERZINS:
19 I'm not sure about a precedent, but I
20 know I have no other knowledge of that
21 happening.

22 COUNCILMAN CLARKE: Okay.
23 Councilman Rizzo.

24 COUNCILMAN RIZZO: Has there
25 been money put in the budget for that

1 6/5/08 - PUBLIC PROPERTY - BILL 080496
2 maintenance?

3 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER HERZINS:
4 There is grant funding that has been set
5 aside for this.

6 COUNCILMAN RIZZO: Are the near
7 neighbors all aware of --

8 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER HERZINS:
9 Yes.

10 COUNCILMAN RIZZO: How did this
11 happen? What brought this to today?

12 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER HERZINS: I
13 think the friends group, the friends of
14 the park that they've formed to actually
15 probably be working on the creation of
16 this park, got together and decided they
17 wanted some green space in this area and
18 started working with the Horticultural
19 Society to try to obtain some funding for
20 the project.

21 COUNCILMAN RIZZO: Let's go
22 back to the grant. How much is the
23 grant? Because eventually somebody is
24 going to have to start paying when the
25 grant runs out.

1 6/5/08 - PUBLIC PROPERTY - BILL 080496

2 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER HERZINS:

3 He's here to talk about it. I think it's
4 \$100,000 initially.

5 COUNCILMAN RIZZO: And then
6 what happens?

7 COUNCILMAN CLARKE: Why don't
8 we just bring the representative from the
9 Horticultural Society to come up along
10 with Mr. Herzins.

11 COUNCILMAN RIZZO: Thank you,
12 Mr. Chairman. Good idea.

13 COUNCILMAN CLARKE: You're
14 welcome, Councilman.

15 MR. BONFANTE: Good afternoon,
16 Chairman Clarke and members of Council.
17 My name is Paul Bonfante. I am the
18 Senior Manager for Strategic Initiatives
19 for the Pennsylvania Horticultural
20 Society.

21 I have some prepared remarks.
22 Should I make those first or should I
23 answer the questions on the floor?

24 COUNCILMAN CLARKE: I'm sorry.
25 I'm having a hard time hearing you.

1 6/5/08 - PUBLIC PROPERTY - BILL 080496

2 MR. BONFANTE: I have some
3 remarks, but I'm not sure if I should
4 make those first --

5 COUNCILMAN CLARKE: I think one
6 is that we've heard that there's actually
7 a creation of a new park/green space and,
8 two, I guess we're trying to get a sense
9 of who is going to maintain it. It
10 states here the Recreation Department,
11 but the question is where is the funding
12 coming from for the maintenance of that
13 particular park, because I suspect that a
14 number of Councilpeople will follow this
15 up with requests to have similar type of
16 situations in their Council districts. I
17 can think of at least one, probably two
18 that will subsequently request a similar
19 type of arrangement.

20 MR. BONFANTE: So as for the
21 first question, kind of how this has come
22 about, this has been something we've only
23 been working for the last two years. My
24 understanding is that the community has
25 been working with Council President Verna

1 6/5/08 - PUBLIC PROPERTY - BILL 080496
2 for about six or seven years around it,
3 in part because there was no park space
4 in the immediate vicinity in this
5 neighborhood. It's about half a mile to
6 the nearest park. So there was a need
7 there. The community has worked with
8 Councilwoman Verna on that, and
9 Councilwoman Verna has obtained resources
10 to acquire the land. The land is now in
11 the transfer process.

12 As for the funding, we have
13 worked with the community for the last
14 two years. We've obtained \$100,000 worth
15 of funding. That will lead to sort of
16 stage one for the park. It will put
17 benches, trash cans, nice turf, trees and
18 two lighting fixtures. That will be for
19 the improvement of the park. Future
20 improvement of the park would have to
21 come from some other source. We're
22 working with the community and with the
23 Councilwoman to identify other potential
24 sources.

25 As for maintenance, the

1 6/5/08 - PUBLIC PROPERTY - BILL 080496

2 Department of Recreation has agreed to
3 take on maintenance, so they will add it
4 to their trash pick-up schedule, they
5 will add it to their grass contract and
6 provide other repairs as necessary.

7 COUNCILMAN CLARKE: Okay.

8 Councilman.

9 COUNCILMAN RIZZO: Thank you.

10 That sounds great. It's nice
11 to know that new space will be available,
12 especially since it's so far -- the next
13 facility is so far off. Thanks. Good
14 work.

15 COUNCILMAN CLARKE: Councilman
16 Greenlee.

17 COUNCILMAN GREENLEE: Thank
18 you, Mr. Chairman.

19 Just a quick question, kind of
20 a spin-off question of the Chairman's a
21 minute ago for the Horticultural Society.
22 Do you have other locations, maybe not
23 that were City-owned, but you kind of do
24 this, you work with the community and get
25 grants and at least get the process

1 6/5/08 - PUBLIC PROPERTY - BILL 080496
2 going?

3 MR. BONFANTE: We work with the
4 community all over the City of
5 Philadelphia on a variety of projects.
6 We work with a City contract to do
7 stabilization of vacant lots. We also
8 work with 100 parks around the City of
9 Philadelphia. So this sort of is a
10 merger of the two where we're working to
11 take a vacant lot into a park. It's the
12 first time we've ever done something like
13 this.

14 COUNCILMAN GREENLEE: First
15 time you've ever --

16 MR. BONFANTE: Yes.

17 COUNCILMAN GREENLEE: You mean
18 something that was City-owned, you worked
19 with the City, you mean?

20 MR. BONFANTE: Well, we work
21 with the City on all this. Through our
22 Parks Program, we work with the
23 Department of Recreation and the
24 Fairmount Park Commission. We've been
25 working with those agencies for the last

1 6/5/08 - PUBLIC PROPERTY - BILL 080496

2 15 years. This is the first time we've
3 worked on a project where we take a
4 vacant lot and turn it into a park.

5 COUNCILMAN GREENLEE: That's
6 what I meant. So this is the first time
7 you've done that, okay.

8 MR. BONFANTE: As for the
9 question that was asked earlier, I know
10 there was at least one case about 20
11 years ago a park in the 1st Council
12 District, Conrad Square, was turned from
13 a vacant lot into a park. I don't know
14 of too many other examples, of any other
15 examples.

16 COUNCILMAN GREENLEE: Okay.
17 Thank you.

18 Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

19 COUNCILMAN CLARKE:
20 Councilwoman Miller.

21 COUNCILWOMAN MILLER: Thank
22 you.

23 What is it today? Is it a park
24 or have they been using it as a park or
25 is it just a vacant --

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2 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER HERZINS:

3 It's just vacant land.

4 COUNCILWOMAN MILLER: So no one
5 has done any improvements and the
6 community hasn't been -- I know that if
7 you go into these type of -- if you
8 decide to set something up on vacant
9 land, you're actually trespassing, but
10 people trespass all the time because
11 they're tired of seeing the vacant land
12 and they plant flowers and some people
13 even go as far as putting up a fence.
14 But right now it's still just a whole
15 bunch of lots all together?

16 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER HERZINS:

17 Yes.

18 COUNCILWOMAN MILLER: And I
19 have one other question. You have 917,
20 919 and then you go to 23. What is 21?

21 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER HERZINS:

22 That parcel is already in Public
23 Property's inventory.

24 COUNCILWOMAN MILLER: Oh, okay.

25 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER HERZINS:

1 6/5/08 - PUBLIC PROPERTY - BILL 080496

2 So this will complete the block package.

3 COUNCILWOMAN MILLER: Okay.

4 Thank you.

5 COUNCILMAN CLARKE: Councilman
6 Rizzo.

7 COUNCILMAN RIZZO: Maybe my
8 District Council colleagues can help me.
9 We're saying that this is a precedent.
10 Isn't there a program, especially at the
11 ends of blocks, that we knock down -- we
12 demolish some of the ends and made little
13 community parks at the end of some
14 blocks?

15 COUNCILMAN CLARKE: What we
16 have done, particularly over the last
17 couple of years under the NTI program, we
18 have amended the demolition contract.
19 So, one, when we demolish a property, we
20 put the nice wooden fences up. And I
21 don't know if that contract is with the
22 Horticultural Society or part of the demo
23 contract. And we green the lot, plant
24 trees on it. We have a contract with the
25 Horticultural Society and they

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2 subcontract out with non-profit groups to
3 maintain the grass. We have also had a
4 contract with them to green certain lots,
5 not necessarily owned by the City of
6 Philadelphia, throughout the
7 neighborhoods, put fences and similar
8 treatment with grass and trees.

9 So we have done that. I don't
10 think that any of them are maintained by
11 the Recreation Department or any other
12 City department. They're primarily done
13 with the subcontracts through the
14 Horticultural Society.

15 So we are doing that, but the
16 reason I asked the question, because this
17 is the first I can recall of us actually
18 acquiring, "us" the City, and then
19 entering into an arrangement where it's
20 maintained by the City. But we are doing
21 a significant number of those throughout
22 the --

23 COUNCILMAN RIZZO: The reason I
24 brought that up, because I visited one of
25 those many months back and it was such a

1 6/5/08 - PUBLIC PROPERTY - BILL 080496

2 pleasant environment where many of the
3 folks that lived on the block were able
4 to come in the late afternoon and they
5 gathered, and it was nice, and they said
6 that because they saved that end of the
7 block, it really stopped other
8 deterioration from occurring.

9 COUNCILMAN CLARKE: Exactly.

10 COUNCILMAN RIZZO: So it seems
11 like that psychologically it actually
12 worked.

13 COUNCILMAN CLARKE: Oh,
14 absolutely. The downside is that we
15 don't have enough money to treat enough
16 of the vacant lots, because once people
17 actually -- we just did some up in
18 Strawberry Mansion and we stopped at, I
19 believe, York Street. Now the people
20 south of York Street are upset with me
21 because I haven't taken it all the way
22 down to Norris Street, but,
23 unfortunately, resources are relatively
24 thin. But it is a good interim strategy
25 for vacant lots throughout the City.

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2 COUNCILWOMAN MILLER: It is,
3 and a lot of what happens on vacant lots
4 when they're improved happens informally.
5 People just put flowers on it, keep the
6 grass cut, and it's all -- the citizens
7 do that. There's no City agency or
8 anybody else that participates. But then
9 I've had instances where people have come
10 along and want to purchase that land, and
11 the citizens lose, particularly on the
12 streets where there's so much density on
13 blocks that there's not like large
14 backyards and people are using some of
15 this vacant land as a place where
16 neighbors can barbecue or outdoor seating
17 and places for children to play, but to
18 actually make it an official neighborhood
19 park. We did NTI tours. There were lots
20 of requests. You know that?

21 COUNCILMAN CLARKE: Absolutely.

22 COUNCILWOMAN MILLER: This
23 might open up a whole -- I am telling
24 you.

25 Okay. Thank you.

1 6/5/08 - PUBLIC PROPERTY - BILL 080496

2 COUNCILMAN CLARKE: Sounds like
3 we need more NTI money, but that's a
4 separate hearing.

5 Any other questions of
6 Mr. Herzins?

7 And I understand that you still
8 have testimony to give, sir.

9 MR. BONFANTE: Yes.

10 COUNCILMAN CLARKE: Okay.
11 There are no other questions of Deputy
12 Commissioner Herzins. We'll just allow
13 the individual representative from the
14 Horticultural Society to give their
15 testimony.

16 MR. BONFANTE: I may repeat
17 myself a little bit, so forgive me.

18 COUNCILMAN CLARKE: That's
19 okay.

20 MR. BONFANTE: Thank you,
21 Chairman Clarke and the members of
22 Council for the opportunity to testify in
23 favor of Bill 080496. My name is Paul
24 Bonfante from the Pennsylvania
25 Horticultural Society.

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2 We have been working for the
3 last two years on turning this space at
4 22nd and Montrose into a beautiful park.
5 We have worked in partnership with the
6 community, some members of which are here
7 today, as well as the Department of
8 Recreation, the Redevelopment Authority,
9 the Department of Public Property and
10 Council President Anna Verna's office,
11 and we're very excited to be at this
12 point.

13 The community around 22nd and
14 Montrose has many assets, but lacks a
15 public park. The residents have long
16 recognized this need and have been
17 advocating to have a park created in
18 their neighborhood for most of this
19 decade. Opportunity presented itself in
20 the form of eight joined vacant lots,
21 which, through the leadership of Council
22 President Verna, were acquired by
23 Redevelopment Authority. The acquisition
24 of these lots by RDA was intended as a
25 temporary solution while plans were

1 6/5/08 - PUBLIC PROPERTY - BILL 080496
2 developed for the park and funding was
3 pursued.

4 We are now at a point when a
5 park can be created at 22nd and Montrose.
6 The Department of Recreation has agreed
7 to take responsibility for the land and
8 to maintain it as one of their
9 neighborhood parks. The Redevelopment
10 Authority Board and the City Planning
11 Commission have approved the transfer.

12 We, at the Horticultural
13 Society, have obtained a total of
14 \$100,000 of funding for the project. We
15 have also worked with the community to
16 develop the stage one design for park
17 improvements. These improvements will
18 turn the space from a cleared vacant lot
19 to a park with grass, trees, benches,
20 trash can, lighting and planters. These
21 initial improvements will, in addition to
22 making a clean, safe and attractive park
23 for residents to enjoy, galvanize more
24 community involvement and attract further
25 funding for additional improvements.

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2 A tremendous amount of work
3 from the community, City government and
4 the non-profit sector has gone into the
5 dream of a park at 22nd and Montrose. We
6 ask you to please approve this bill and
7 make it a reality.

8 Thank you.

9 COUNCILMAN CLARKE: Thank you.

10 Any questions of this witness
11 by members of the Committee?

12 (No response.)

13 COUNCILMAN CLARKE: Thank you
14 so much for your testimony.

15 Anyone else to testify on this
16 bill?

17 Please come up.

18 (Witnesses approached witness
19 table.)

20 MRS. SMITH: Good afternoon.

21 COUNCILMAN CLARKE: Good
22 afternoon.

23 MRS. SMITH: Gentlemen and
24 ladies. My husband and I, we're Mr. and
25 Mrs. Smith.

1 6/5/08 - PUBLIC PROPERTY - BILL 080496

2 COUNCILMAN CLARKE: State your
3 name for the record, please.

4 MRS. SMITH: Darlene Branch
5 Smith and my husband is William Smith.

6 COUNCILMAN CLARKE: Thank you.

7 MRS. SMITH: We are long-time
8 residents of the area at 22nd and
9 Montrose Street and we've been working on
10 the park for quite a while, with the help
11 of President Anna Verna and Terry Gillen,
12 to obtain the land, and as was said
13 earlier, at the time, it was just lots
14 and we started planting flowers, because
15 we saw a need that there's no green space
16 in the area. And we found that as we
17 began to work on it, neighborhood
18 children began to play in it after
19 school. Grandmothers used it as a place
20 to send their children while they watched
21 them after school, and it just grew. We
22 have a mailing list of almost 100 people,
23 e-mail, and we also hold our monthly
24 meetings at the neighborhood church at
25 21st and Christian.

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2 There is no green space there,
3 and we now see younger couples moving in
4 who have toddlers and we'd like an area
5 for them to come as well and sit with
6 their children.

7 The area we're calling -- we
8 would like to call the group Friends --
9 we call ourselves correctly Friends of
10 Julian Abele Park. We would like the
11 park named Julian Abele, as he was a
12 famous African-American who lived in that
13 area and resided at 1911 Fitzwater
14 Street, 721 South 21st Street and,
15 finally, 1515 Fitzwater Street. He
16 passed in 1950, and as you know, he is
17 the architect of the library at Harvard
18 University and the Franklin -- the
19 Philadelphia Art Museum, the Free Library
20 and many beautiful buildings in our city,
21 as well as the architect of Duke
22 University.

23 There is nothing in this area
24 that really is named after him, and we
25 thought since he came from that

1 6/5/08 - PUBLIC PROPERTY - BILL 080496
2 particular neighborhood -- and Marian
3 Anderson has been talked about and there
4 are things in the area that are named
5 after her -- we would like to have the
6 park named Julian Abele after this great
7 man.

8 We certainly hope that you pass
9 our bill and make our dream a reality,
10 because we have worked on it, and we're
11 planning some things this summer at this
12 area.

13 So we wish you a good day. We
14 won't belabor it, but we hope it's not in
15 vain.

16 COUNCILMAN CLARKE: Thank you
17 so much for your testimony. I'm sure
18 that the members of the Committee will be
19 supportive of the efforts of Council
20 President Verna in naming of the park.
21 We'll be very supportive of that
22 initiative.

23 Any questions of these
24 witnesses?

25 (No response.)

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2 COUNCILMAN CLARKE: Sir, are
3 you testifying?

4 MR. SMITH: No.

5 COUNCILMAN CLARKE: Just here
6 to provide support?

7 MR. SMITH: Yes.

8 COUNCILMAN CLARKE: Thank you.
9 I want to thank you so much for your
10 testimony.

11 MRS. SMITH: Thank you.

12 COUNCILMAN CLARKE: You're
13 welcome.

14 Anyone else to testify on this
15 bill?

16 (No response.)

17 COUNCILMAN CLARKE: There being
18 none, we will now leave the public
19 hearing and move into the public meeting.

20 Councilwoman Miller, would you
21 please give me a motion on Bill No.
22 080496.

23 COUNCILWOMAN MILLER: I move
24 that Bill No. 080496 be reported out of
25 this Committee with a favorable

1 6/5/08 - PUBLIC PROPERTY - BILL 080496
2 recommendation and -- I guess we need a
3 rules suspension.

4 COUNCILMAN CLARKE: Yes.

5 COUNCILWOMAN MILLER: And
6 further move that the rules of Council be
7 suspended so as to permit first reading
8 at our next session.

9 (Duly seconded.)

10 COUNCILMAN CLARKE: Those in
11 favor?

12 (Aye.)

13 COUNCILMAN CLARKE: Those
14 opposed?

15 (No response.)

16 COUNCILMAN CLARKE: The ayes
17 have it. Bill 080496 is reported out of
18 Committee with a favorable recommendation
19 with rules suspension. It will be read
20 at the next session of Council.

21 Thank you all very much for
22 your time.

23 (Committee on Public Property
24 and Public Works adjourned at 1:05 p.m.)

25 - - -

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CERTIFICATE

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I HEREBY CERTIFY that the

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proceedings, evidence and objections are

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contained fully and accurately in the

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stenographic notes taken by me upon the

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foregoing matter on June 5, 2008, and that

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this is a true and correct transcript of same.

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MICHELE L. MURPHY

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RPR-Notary Public

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