

East Village Magazine

April 2026



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Commentary

The Flint Water Crisis, 12 years on

By Paul Rozycki

It took the U.S. and its allies just under four years to defeat Nazi Germany and Japan in World War II. It took eight years for the U.S. to fulfill President Kennedy's 1961 promise to land a man on the moon before the end of the decade. And it took less than a year to develop a vaccine to combat the COVID pandemic.

Yet, after 12 years, the Flint Water Crisis has not yet been resolved. Though, as reported in a MLive headline last month, "The last service line replacements, [and] lawn restorations may begin soon."

It may be an unfair comparison, but to this Flint resident, it seems like defeating the Nazis, landing humans on the moon, and global cooperation to develop a vaccine should present a greater challenge and take more time than repairing our city's water system.

A brief history of the Flint water crisis

For those of us living in Flint, the history of the water crisis is both a familiar and complex one that we all recall by our own experiences. But for others, here are a few key points from the last 12 years.

In 2014, Flint's emergency manager, Darnell Earley, ordered a switch from the Detroit Water System sourced in Lake Huron to water from the Flint River to save money. Critically, though, that switch was made without adding appropriate anti-corrosive chemicals, and Earley's cost-saving

measure proved to be incredibly costly.

Almost immediately residents complained about the taste and color of their water, and General Motors stopped using it as it corroded metal engine parts. The date of the water switch, April 25, 2014, is considered the start of the Flint water crisis.

In 2015, after many reports of high lead levels in the water, Governor Rick Snyder ordered Flint switched back to the Detroit Water system. Later that year, Dr. Mona Hanna began a study (published early the next year) showing elevated blood lead levels in Flint's children, and Mayor Karen Weaver declared a state of emergency in Flint.

In 2016 the Michigan National Guard began to distribute bottled water to Flint residents, and both Gov. Snyder and President Barack Obama declared a state of emergency in the city, offering financial aid. A number of officials, including Earley, began to see criminal charges for their part in the water crisis.

In 2017, a settlement was reached to provide \$97 million for pipe replacement for as many as 18,000 Flint homes over the next three years. That same year, Flint's water began testing below the federal threshold for lead, as reported by the Michigan Department of Environmental Quality (MDEQ).

In 2018, the state announced that the free bottled water distribution to Flint residents would end, though the pipe replacement program was not yet complete.

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Cover: A dinosaur model stands guard at the Sloan Museum of Discovery.

(Photo by Edwin D. Custer)



Photo of the Month: Crocuses greet the early spring sun. (Photo by Edwin D. Custer)

Education Beat

Flint Schools adopt initiatives to retain students, boost test scores, improve graduation rate

By Harold C. Ford

At the March 18, 2026 meeting of the Flint Board of Education (FBOE), initiatives were launched to address the school district’s ongoing loss of students, lagging standardized test scores, and the district’s approximate 50% graduation rate.

Enrollment initiative

Ernest Steward, Flint Community Schools (FCS) Director of Student Service/Central Enrollment, unveiled an enrollment initiative for FBOE members. “Our goal is to strengthen enrollment and retention districtwide,” he said.

Steward presented a multi-pronged approach toward “retaining current families we already have in our district, preventing scholar withdrawal, and engaging former families.”

He said “creating a positive school culture” is the first step, as

“one of the major reasons [students] want to leave the district is due to the school culture.”

Toward the goal of improving that culture, Steward intends to ramp up the use of Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) and Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS) already in use by the school district.

According to the Center on PBIS website, PBIS framework teaches “positive behavior, reducing disruptions ... fostering a safe, supportive school climate,” and the Michigan Department of Education (MDE) explains MTSS as a proactive strategy that provides academic, behavioral, and social-emotional support to all students.

Steward said a second strategy is “family-centered enrollment” that would allow siblings, if possible, to enroll in the same school. “Most of our families, they don’t want to go to mul-

iple schools,” Steward said. “They want [their youngsters] to go to just one building.”

A third strategy is “intentional family engagement,” Steward continued. “We have to get our families more involved in our students’ education.”

Steward then articulated a fourth strategy: targeted family support. “Work on removing barriers and providing additional resources,” he said, adding that “we need to go that extra mile” and the district’s buildings “must be welcoming.”

“We have not been good at telling our story,” Steward said. “Increasing enrollment is centered around marketing and messaging.”

“People leave districts because they think their kids can get better [elsewhere],” responded Melody Relerford, FBOE trustee. “They’re frustrated, they don’t feel heard, they

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Flint Schools...

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don't feel safe."

Steward agreed, saying, "We have a lot of behavioral issues in the district."

Current FCS enrollment is 2,525 students. East Village Magazine recently reported that about 80 percent of students that live in Flint do not enroll in FCS schools, and each of those students takes about \$10,000 in state aid to other school choices. Flint is now the eighth largest school system in Genesee County.

At the conclusion of Steward's presentation, the FBOE approved \$52,000 to support Steward's enrollment initiative by a vote of 5 to 1. Relferford cast the dissenting vote.

Graduation initiative

A graduation initiative was presented to FBOE members by Kelly Fields, FCS director of academics, and Tracy Davis, an education consultant.

Fields and Davis said they intend to work from the bottom up starting with the class of 2038, those students who are currently enrolled in the district's kindergarten program. They said they envision "building a graduation culture where every student knows they can achieve to make it to the threshold of [high school] graduation.

Key components will include development of literacy skills, building social-emotional readiness, instilling a value of accountability, public relations campaigns, and supports for students at risk.

The initiative will also take aim at the class of 2029 – the critical 9th grade or freshman class – where students start the final march toward high school graduation or dropping out. (Fields called it the "freshman slide.") The district will endeavor to build resilience in those 9th graders.

Credit recovery opportunities will also be expanded and promoted, the pair said, and adult and peer inter-

ventions will assist those in need.

Less traditional strategies include: "monthly marches [during which] students can become familiar with what graduation and celebration feels like;" kindergarten summits to reduce "some of the behaviors that have plagued kindergartners across the district;" "future silhouettes" in which students artistically envision what they might look like on graduation day; and a "signature wall" ceremony during which students publicly commit themselves to graduate.

Other strategies noted were a "goal-keeping sheet," "commitment brunches," and a campaign to increase support for students from parents, school personnel, and others.

FCS-watchers will note that the strategies articulated by Fields and Davis are consistent with the 2022-2027 Strategic Plan posted at the district's website. Three of five of the plan's "strategic priorities" were represented in their proposed graduation initiative:

- Strategic priority #2: "The district has expectations for high levels of teaching and learning in an environment that supports ... continuous improvement."
- Strategic priority #3: "The district will build and promote a culture and climate of excellence that is conducive to high levels of teaching and learning."
- Strategic priority #5: "The district will align all fiscal resources to support high levels of teaching and learning."

Assessment data

Finally, Fields led a lengthy

Fast Facts

on Flint Community Schools

- K-12 enrollment trend: low
- K-12 enrollment (2025-2026): 2,525
- % college enrolled 0-6 months (2023-24): 12.3%
- % economically disadvantaged (2025-26): 90%
- % students with disabilities (2025-26): 25.1%
- Pupil to teacher ratio (2024-25): 33:1* or 34:1*
- Number of teachers (2024-25): 78.33
- Foundation allowance (2024-25): \$9,608
- Revenues (per pupil) (2024-25): \$33,151 [includes other revenue sources in addition to state aid]
- Instructional expenditures (per pupil) (2024-25): \$12,323
- Chronic absenteeism: 2024-25: 73.8%
- 4-year graduation rate 2024-25: 52.35%

Source: MI School Data website

*Note: Different ratios are given on two separate pages of the site.

review of recent assessment data provided by the state's education department. She noted that assessments are "a precursor to the next partnership agreement" with MDE. (FCS is but one of 44 low performing districts in the state partnering with the MDE toward the goal of improvement.)

During her discussion, Fields touched on a few nuggets of positive data.

The district's 52.3% graduation rate in the 2024-25 academic year was a 4% improvement for FCS. A 78.25% attendance rate was also a 4.41% improvement over last year's 73.84%. "We're increasing attendance and decreasing chronic absenteeism," Fields noted.

She also highlighted some academic improvements for the district.

"There's celebration in order for Eisenhower," Fields said. "They did a fantastic job of raising scores." She lauded Accelerated Learning Academy's 6.7% increase in math proficiency, and she also cited improvement at Neithercut Elementary even though the building is now closed.

Nonetheless, Trustee Laura MacIntyre judged the report on student assessments as "sobering" and "hard to look at."

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Commentary ...

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In 2019, Attorney General Dana Nessel dismissed charges against multiple people involved in the crisis, noting she would be restarting the investigation. In February 2020, after missing a January 1 deadline to replace all impacted service lines, the city announced that 9,516 lead pipes had been replaced. By 2021 Attorney General Nessel announced criminal charges against former Gov. Snyder and eight other defendants involved in the water crisis.

In 2022, the Michigan Supreme Court overturned the use of a one-man grand jury to issue indictments against those charged in the water crisis. The city says it has replaced 10,059 lead pipes and hopes to have the service line replacement process complete by the end of the year.

In 2023, Genesee County Circuit Court David J. Newblatt approved a \$626 million settlement with the State of Michigan, City of Flint, McLaren Regional Medical Center, and Rowe Professional Services. At the time, more than 50,000 people had registered to file claims for the settlement funding.

In 2024, the City of Flint was held in contempt of court for its failure to meet the deadlines for pipe replacement.

In 2025, City officials said about 97% of lead service line replacements were complete, according to reporting by the Detroit Free Press. The State of Michigan reached a \$53 million settlement with Veolia North America (VNA), a Boston-based company that, the state claimed, contributed to the water crisis by failing to properly identify corrosion control treatment issues. (VNA continues to reject that assertion.) In May, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) lifted its emergency protection order, imposed in 2016, declaring that

Flint water officially met federal standards. The EPA also noted that Flint's water had tested below federal lead limits for nearly a decade.

Which brings us to now, April 2026, when payments are finally starting to trickle in to claimants and fewer than 1,000 service lines still require work according to recent reporting by MLive.

So, 12 years on, we're almost at the end of the water crisis – but not quite yet.

The water crisis of today: what has and hasn't improved

In 2026, at least we seem to be near the end of the service line replacement process, and reports in recent years have shown the water to be safe and regularly meeting federal standards.

Though there were many delays and missed deadlines, almost all of the lead service lines in Flint have been replaced. And while we became the poster child for water issues (Flint made the cover of Time Magazine in 2016 with the headline "The Poisoning of an American City"), Flint also proved to be a warning to other places facing similar water issues – motivating them to take action.

But despite the strides in water quality and leadline replacements, there are impacts of the water crisis that can't be mitigated with money, time, and infrastructure changes. Perhaps the greatest result of the water crisis has been the loss of trust in many levels of government.

Decisions by Gov. Snyder and top level MDEQ officials – with most never being held accountable in court – have eroded the public trust. And with "three years" turning into "three mayoral administrations" of leadline replacements in Flint, it's no wonder residents continue to distrust local leadership regarding water quality to this day.

While payments have finally begun for adults who filed for compensation, the long delay in water settlement payouts may be an example of both the positive and negative aspects of the whole water crisis. Yes, it is great that some of those harmed finally received fi-

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The Flint Water Tower, located at 4500

Commentary ...

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nancial compensation, but the delay and complex hurdles that many had to go through to get those funds were daunting, and many are still waiting for their check in the mail – or may never get one.



Dort Highway. (Photo by Paul Rozycki)

One of my wife's friends suffered medical issues when the water crisis began and has been trying for years to win compensation. She has had to go to several offices a number of times, stand in long lines for hours, and repeatedly contact her doctor for medical reports. Six months ago she was asked, again, to resubmit more information, and she still hasn't received any payment. She described the whole process as "a nightmare" and that she "was ready to give up." She even said "I'm done with it" if nothing happens from this last attempt in her years-long effort.

What have we learned?

There are at least several lessons we can take from the last 12 years of managing the Flint Water Crisis.

One is the old maxim that "an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure." In order to save a few dollars the emergency manager switched to Flint River water. It may have been a little cheaper, but it proved to be enormously more costly in the long run.

Another is that honesty matters. After all the false promises that the water was safe to use and drink, people began to distrust many of the official statements about the water crisis – even when our water was testing well. After prosecutions of those involved in creating the crisis were set aside, many people, especially Flint residents, became even more cynical of the government systems meant to serve and protect them.

But, if there is a plus side, we've also learned that it can be done – we can reach solutions to our most difficult issues – albeit with constant advocacy. Even with all the delays, frustrations, and other problems that Flint is facing, nearly all the pipes have been replaced for our occupied homes, and

payments are starting to be made to impacted residents.

Over the last decade, Flint also produced a number of leaders who were willing to step forward and take action to make the water safe again. Among them are Miguel Del Toral, the EPA regional manager who first expressed concerns about the lack of corrosion controls; Marc Edwards, Virginia Tech environmental professor, who researched the leaching of lead into Flint water; LeeAnne Walters led a citizens' movement after lead levels in her water were testing at over 100 parts per billion (ppb); and, of course, Dr. Hanna, who reported on the impact of lead in children.

After 12 exhausting years it seems fair to say a solution to the water crisis hasn't been simple or quick. And while the leadline replacement work is nearly complete, replacing the pipes won't end the frustration and distrust that has grown out of the water crisis. The Flint water tower may say "Flint Strong" but the long story of the Flint water crisis tells a very different story, and there is more work to be done for the city to truly earn that title. ●



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THIS MONTH IN THE VILLAGE

Below is a selection of events available to our readers, beginning after our April publication date. To submit events for our May issue, email information about your event to eastvillagemagazineflint@gmail.com by April 30.

Trash to Treasure Community Indoor Garage Sale

You never know what you'll find! Looking for great deals and hidden gems? Join Genesee County Parks for our Indoor Community Garage Sale at the Crossroads Village Millstreet Warehouse! Just \$2 admission to shop, and children 12 and under are FREE! Crossroads Village Millstreet Warehouse
6140 Bray Rd., Flint

Julia A. Moore Poetry Contest

Saturday, April 18 | 2 pm
To honor its 175th Anniversary, the library brought back one of its most unique & beloved historic programs: The Julia Moore Poetry Contest! Moore became famous not because her poetry was praised, but because it was joyfully bad. Join GCFPL in celebrating its 175th Anniversary alongside this year's contest winners at this patron-favorite!
Gloria Coles Flint Public Library
1026 E. Kearsley St., Flint

Drag Queen Game Night

Saturday, April 18 | 7-11 pm
Join the Queens for a night of 21+ entertainment and saucy comedy! Bingo, dance numbers, and so much more! This fun and feisty adult evening includes several rounds of bingo for your chance to win fabulous prizes. Prepare to laugh and sing along as the Queens perform. Food and special alcoholic and non-alcoholic beverages available for purchase. Tickets \$30 at <https://sloanlongway.org/events/drag-queen-game-night/>.
Sloan Museum of Discovery
1221 E. Kearsley St., Flint

Flint Roller Derby B v. Marquette Roller Derby B

Saturday, April 25 | 8 pm
Flint Roller Derby is pleased to announce the launch of a second team! Flint Roller Derby B will begin their 2026 season against Marquette Roller Derby B. Doors open at 7:30 pm with the first whistle at 8 pm sharp. Don't miss out: get your tickets ahead for \$15 at <https://tinyurl.com/6wt23bww> or pay just \$18 at the door!
Rollhaven Skating Center
5315 S. Saginaw St., Flint

26th Annual Paws on Parade

Sunday, April 26 | 12-3 pm
Join the Genesee County Humane Society for a Champagne Brunch & Charity Auction while helping us continue caring for the animals who need us most. This special event is part of our celebration of 100 years of helping animals in Genesee County. Tickets \$125/person and available at <https://geneseehumane.org/community/paws-on-parade/>.
Warwick Hills Golf & Country Club
G-9057 S. Saginaw St., Grand Blanc

Inaugural Heather Burnash Spring Clean-Up

Saturday, May 2 | 10 am - 12 pm
Join The What's Up Downtown Project and GFAC for a cleanup dedicated to the legacy of a community champion, Heather Burnash. We'll be doing smaller maintenance & beautification projects, including trash pick up, planting flowers, & assisting our downtown businesses to spruce up the spaces around them. Meet at GFAC and we'll make our way to Riverbank Park!
Greater Flint Arts Council
816 Saginaw St., Flint

Flint Zine Fest

Saturday, May 2 | 12 - 6 pm
Come enjoy a celebration of self-published and small press art books called 'zines'! Enjoy an array of creative visual and written art by local & national artists and writers, fantastic music by local bands, delicious offerings from the best local food trucks, and more - and the fest is FREE to attend!
Factory Two
129 N. Grand Traverse St., Flint

St. Cecilia Society of Flint

Sunday, May 3 | 3:15 pm
Following the St. Cecilia Society annual meeting at 2 pm, stay for a program featuring Robert Hoag, bass-baritone; Glen Holcomb, tenor; and Stephanie Dean, soprano. The program is free and open to the public with reception to follow.
McArthur Recital Hall
1025 E Kearsley St., Flint

"Music in My Mother's House"

Sunday, May 3 | 4 pm
All the songs featured in this concert from New Century Chorale, a local adult community choir, are written or arranged by women. The choir is celebrating its 32nd season of enriching lives, one song at a time. The concert will also be live-streamed and you may purchase \$15 tickets at the door, online at <https://newcenturychorale.square.site/> or by calling (810) 771-8255.
St. Paul's Episcopal Church
711 S. Saginaw St., Flint



Flint Schools ...

(Continued from Page 5)

Below is a listing of 2024-25 FCS assessment data* through 8th grade that EVM pulled from the MI School Data website. A fuller listing of assessment data will be made available in the online version of this article at eastvillagemagazine.org.

M-STEP English Language Arts:

- **3rd grade:** 259 students assessed; 14 advanced or proficient; 41 partially proficient; 204 not proficient
- **4th grade:** 191 students assessed; 12 advanced or proficient; 17 partially proficient; 162 not proficient
- **5th grade:** 237 students assessed; 27 advanced or proficient; 31 partially proficient; 179 not proficient
- **6th grade:** 206 students assessed; 29 advanced or proficient; 43 partially proficient; 134 not proficient
- **7th grade:** 99 students assessed; 7 advanced or proficient; 10 partially proficient; 82 not proficient
- **8th grade:** 109 students assessed; 17 advanced or proficient; 15 partially proficient; 77 not proficient

M-STEP Math, includes PSAT data:

- **3rd grade:** 260 students assessed; 18 advanced or proficient; 46 partially proficient; 196 not proficient
- **4th grade:** 194 students assessed; 4 advanced or proficient; 34 partially proficient; 156 not proficient
- **5th grade:** 239 students assessed; 6 advanced or proficient; 33 partially proficient; 200 not proficient
- **6th grade:** 207 students assessed; 8 advanced or proficient; 36 partially proficient; 163 not proficient
- **7th grade:** 98 students assessed; <3 advanced or proficient; (no additional data at MI School Data site)

- **8th grade:** 109 students assessed; <3 advanced or proficient (no additional data at MI School Data site)

*Note: Data at various spots on the MI School Data site do not always agree. ●

* * * * *

Future FBOE meetings are scheduled for: April 15; May 13 & 20; and June 17. Meetings typically start at 6:30 p.m. and can be streamed on the district's YouTube page.



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Village Life ...

(Continued from Page 12)

This is not who I am... or at least, this is not who I planned to be.

I've always been organized and driven – the kind of person who wakes up early because she *wants* to, not because she *has* to.

And perhaps I should unpack all of this with a therapist instead of dumping it into the pages of a monthly magazine. But going to therapy would also require scheduling another appointment, and, well, you see where I'm going with that.

But while I'm working to catch up on life and work and fun – albeit in the wee hours of the morning while my cat “watches TV” – I will say this strange time before dawn has its charms.

I get to cuddle with Baci, a soft little ball of fur who doesn't judge that I haven't yet done the laundry; I open the rest of the shades to see our neighbor, Troy, walking his two adorable,

“ I've always been organized and driven – the kind of person who wakes up early because she *wants* to, not because she *has* to.”

long-haired chocolate brown Chihuahuas up the block before he has to leave for work; I get to ease into the day as I type up this column and silently consider which mugs I can donate without my boyfriend noticing – uninterrupted but for the first chirps of the birds Baci's been eying for the last 30 minutes.

And while I'd still rather be sleeping – if only to be more rested for the day still ahead of me – I admit I'm grateful for now knowing what these hours can hold, and that someday soon I might choose them instead of require them. ●

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Ravel's Piano Concerto for Left Hand & Daphnis and Chloé

Enrique Diemecke music director and conductor
Nada Radakovich Flint Symphony Chorus director
Abdiel Vázquez piano



Saturday, May 16, 2026
7:30pm at Whiting Auditorium



For more information and to purchase tickets, please scan the QR code or visit thefim.org/abdielev.

FIM Flint Symphony Orchestra



Flint Repertory Theatre



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Lyrics by Billie Joe Armstrong
Book by Billie Joe Armstrong & Michael Mayer

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FIM Flint Repertory Theatre



Village Life

On waking up early

By Kate Stockrahm

I've been waking up before dawn lately. I rise though the sky is still a deep black – the type of darkness that could mean it's 1 a.m. as easily as it could be 5 a.m.

Our house (which still seems strange to say even after months of living here) is near-silent, save for the hum of warm air being forced from unseen vents and Baci's soft "meow" from somewhere down near our duvet-covered feet. (He decided long ago he'll never use one of the several, actual cat beds we bought him.)

At my movement, the small, fluffy mass of fur and limbs will pull himself up to lay on my chest in the dark, expecting at least a few minutes of chin scratches before I'm allowed to leave bed or turn on a light.

When it seems Baci will permit it (this usually entails a scratchy-tongued kiss on my nose), I gently lift him back down to the corner of the mattress and open the window shade roughly halfway, as quietly as I can manage.

The window is just about level with the top of our bed, so the small cat is able to survey the full expanse of trees and grass on the vacant lot next door – which he does while softly purring in contentment. We've started to call this move Baci's "TV time" as it truly looks like he's watching a big

screen while settled on his belly, paws hanging from the side of the bed and eyes darting back and forth at birds, squirrels, and the occasional white-tipped tail of a rabbit hopping by.

I go start a pot of coffee (a brand that's cheap and already-ground) before cleaning up the remnants of the evening before: blankets that need



Baci's "TV time" on April 9, 2026. (Photo by Kate Stockrahm)

folding before returning to the linen closet, a couple of half-consumed cups of water, the books that never seem to make it back to our nightstands after we fall asleep reading on the burnt-orange sectional that takes up a whole wall of our front room.

By now the coffee is ready, and I pour it into one of our 3,000 mismatched mugs while thinking "we should really get rid of some of these" and knowing we won't because I've thought that for years now. Then I carry that coffee – today's mug says "Picolas Cage," accompanied by a bad drawing of Nicolas Cage as a pickle – back out to the living room and sit down to type the truth out in this column: I'd rather be sleeping.

This morning scene has become common only because I'm so behind on everything, not because I'm thrilled to start my day before the sun comes up.

I'm behind on the mundane stuff of life (this is the first year ever that I filed a tax extension); on work (because there's always more to do in news); and even the fun stuff (Jordan, if you read this before I call you: I promise we're finally meeting up for brunch this month).

In all honesty, I've been making bargains with myself for a couple of months now. I'll skip the gym to go to the grocery store, I'll

make that meeting but ask that someone else take on an action item, I'll get Baci's food but order it from Amazon (again) because I don't have time to go to the pet supply place just eight minutes up the road.

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