

Newsletter

Proposed Planned Multi-use Business Development Ordinance

Priscilla Leith, Local Action Co-chair

Newton aldermen are grappling with a proposal for a Planned Multi-Use Business District (PMBD) that would allow denser development, including 14 story buildings, maximum floor area ratio (FAR) of 3.0, and varying front, side and rear setback requirements. If this proposal is not passed by the Board of Alderman by December 23rd, it will expire.

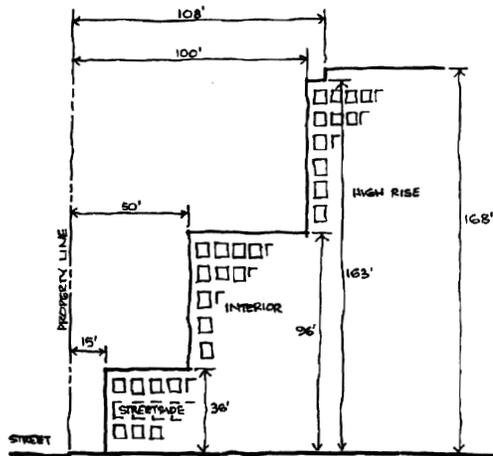
In its most recent draft, dated September 24, 2007 the new zoning category would allow the Board of Aldermen to grant a special permit for mixed commercial and residential uses, on tracts of land 10 acres or more, in any Business 4 zoned district, subject to certain criteria laid down in the new ordinance.

This current draft is the result of input from aldermen, from abutters of Chestnut Hill Square and from other interested Newton citizens including Phil Herr, Chairman of the former Comprehensive Planning Task Force. It was written and submitted by Planning Director Mike Kruse.

PMBD zoning could be applied to 1) the Chestnut Hill Square project on Route 9 east-bound, at Hammond Pond Parkway which is estimated to generate an additional 10,000 daily trips; 2) Riverside MBTA station on Grove St.; 3) Marshall's Shopping Plaza along Needham St.; and, 4) any existing parcel or parcels put together by a developer/group of individuals that has 10 acres or more and meets the criteria. A PMBD project may be built in phases, over time.

In addition to established special permit criteria, once this PMBD permit is granted, there would be a mandated post-construction traffic study. Modifications of materials would require aldermanic site plan approval. Also an Organization of Owners would be required to form prior to exercise of the special permit.

For details, please refer to the sketch. The devil is in the details in this proposed ordinance. ■



Illustrative Sketch: Setbacks and Heights
Source: Newton Planning & Development Dept.

LWVUS IMMIGRATION STUDY

Grassroots agreement on positions is one of the League's greatest strengths. Preparing for and taking consensus is hard work, but worthwhile. The resulting position will allow the organization to affect national policy for years to come, just as we have been doing in other areas for 87 years – it's part of the organization's history.

In 1992 we studied National Healthcare. The national consensus led us to adopt positions from which we lobby. The national convention adopted the following scope for the LWVUS Immigration Study:

- Underlying values and principles regarding immigration
- Reasons for migration from other countries, including but not limited to:
 - Effects of global interdependence on migration
 - Motivation of refugees and asylees
 - Motivation of other immigrants

Continued on page 3

Final Call for Sponsors for the 2008-2009 LWN Handbook

We have YELLOW PAGES for Goods and Services that you recommend. The price of a sponsorship is very reasonable and lasts for two years.

Please contact Lisa Mirable
617-221-5374 or Lisa@birchile.com

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Membership	Elaine Reisman Co-chair	617-244-6439
Recycling	Barbara Herson	617-964-7463

NEWSLETTER

Editor Ann Grantham 617-964-0333
To receive an **audio version** of this Newsletter call Sue Rosenbaum at 617-332-0306.

The League of Women Voters is a nonpartisan political organization open to all citizens of voting age. For more information about the League of Women Voters, call 617-964-0014.

PO Box 610207
Newton, MA 02461
617-964-0014
<http://www.lwvnewton.org>

The Right People

In his book, *Good to Great*, business writer Jim Collins relates that great organizations start out with "the right people on the bus." The League of Women Voters of Newton definitely has the right people on the bus, although we would be happy to welcome a few more. This fall was a busy time, filled with League activities. I would like to say a big thank-you to Sharyn Roberts and Bonnie Carter for organizing the numerous candidates' forum as well as the Voters' guide. Both endeavors took a lot of time and energy as well as a lot of volunteers. The local action committee has been very busy as well, studying many timely issues so the League can weigh in on important city matters. Recent recommendations include the adoption of the Comprehensive Plan (which was passed by the Board of Alderman 20-1), and the distribution of 32 gallon trash barrels (as opposed to the 64 gallon barrels the city is considering for the new automated trash pick-up) in order to promote increased recycling.

Terry Yoffie and I worked with Craig Manseau, the new Secretary of Elections to propose that the city invite students at the two high schools to work as poll workers. Terry and I brought the proposal to the Election Commission meeting in October where the proposal was well received. We then recruited teachers at the two high schools to be our liaisons between the Election Department and the students. The AP government teacher at Newton South, Mr. Tom Murphy and Mr. Ty Vignone, the Close-Up Washington coordinator at Newton North worked to recruit students. Over 20 students were trained and 14 worked at the polls on Election Day, November 6th. Our goal is to have all 20 working on February 5th for the Democratic primary and forty or fifty students working at the polls by next year. The warden at the Ward school was pleasantly surprised to have a new worker at her polling location. She did not know that the state had recently passed a law allowing students as young as 16 to work at the polls in order to help alleviate the shortage of poll workers. She said the student arrived on time, was very courteous and professional, and dressed appropriately. The feedback from the students has also been positive.

Speaking of students, Sharyn Roberts and I met with a Brownie troop (young girl scouts) to discuss the importance of voting. They told us that a group of young students proposed to make the Ladybug the state bug of Massachusetts and the bill passed and now they were eager to learn more. The hour passed quickly with lots of discussion. The next day I received a thank-you from one of the troop leaders. She felt empowered by the discussion and eagerly sought out the voters guide so she could make an educated decision at the polls. She was happy to learn that she could ask for another ballot if she made a mistake; in fact she could ask for a third if necessary. There are lots of people that I have not mentioned that have worked hard during the past few months. Their work is greatly appreciated as well. Please read the articles that review the monthly topic meetings as they have been exceptionally educational and provoking.

I hope to see everyone at our Annual Holiday Party on December 16th. Our gracious hostess will be Vicki Danberg, LWV member and Ward Six Alderman. Mark your calendars!

Sue Rosenbaum

WE HAVE A NEW ADDRESS!

Webmaster Lisa Mirabile has found a new home for us in cyberspace. Moderators will no longer trip over our lengthy address; we have become www.LWVNewton.org. Give us a try and notice how easily you feel connected to the League at the state and national levels as well! Thank you Lisa! ■

Topic Meeting Report

All You Ever Wanted to Know About Newton's Election Department

By Anne Borg, Topic Meeting Chair

On Wednesday, September 12, the League of Women Voters held its monthly topic meeting for League members. This month we were pleased to have Nancy Criscitiello and Myra Tattenbaum present an informative session about Newton's Election Commission and Department. Nancy and Myra have been longtime Election Day precinct wardens and observers to the Election Commission and recently served on the search committee for a new Executive Secretary to the Election Commission. We were also fortunate to have League member Priscilla Leith as the moderator.

Nancy and Myra explained that Newton has a four-member election commission. There are two Democrats and two Republicans, all appointed by the mayor. They are paid a yearly stipend and are appointed for staggered four-year terms, with no term limits. The Election Commission is mandated to meet at least once a year; it has not met since September 2006.

The Executive Secretary to the Election Commission is hired by the mayor and is essentially a department head, in charge of the employees of the Election Department. The Election Department is responsible for the yearly census, keeping the list of registered voters and names for jury duty, processing nomination papers, holding elections, hiring and training poll workers.

Topic Meetings are held on the second Wednesday of the month. They are designed to inform our members about current issues. Scheduled at 11:30a.m-1:00p.m., members and presenters can each lunch together. The events are held at the handicapped-accessible NewTV facilities, 23 Needham Street. Take the first right beyond National Lumber and go to the top of Easy Street.

One thing that Nancy and Myra found in their research, and shared with the attendees, is that many of the processes of the Election Commission and Election Department are done by "custom" rather than by law or mandate. The state requirements for election commissions are minimal. There has also been high turnover in the Executive Secretary position in the past five years.

League members had many comments and suggestions. They ranged from listing the Election Commission members on the City website, to hiring high school students as part-time poll workers, to discussing term limits for Election Commissioners.

After much discussion, it was decided to recommend to the League Board that it form a consensus committee for a comprehensive study of the Election Commission. Several attendees volunteered to participate in such a study. Thank-you to everyone who attended for their valuable input, and especially to Nancy, Myra, and Priscilla for their presentation. We look forward to future discussions and to working with Craig Manseau, the new Executive Secretary, and the Election Commission. ■

LWVUS Immigration Study *Continued from page one*

- Current federal immigration policy, including but not limited to:

- Overview
- Effectiveness in uniting families
- Effectiveness in meeting needs of businesses
- Effectiveness of enforcement
- Human rights concerns

- Impact of immigration, including but not limited to:

- Economic effects of authorized and unauthorized immigration
- Diversity
- Inclusion of immigrants in American society

There are study resources at our fingertips. Visit www.lwvnewton.org to link to information and background on US immigration policy. For paper copies of these materials, call 617-964-0014

Become acquainted with the topic and plan to attend the January daytime or evening consensus meetings when we will examine the questions and determine the consensus of the members of the Newton League. Our consensus will be combined with others across the US and a national position will be determined.

**If you are interested in serving on this committee,
now is the time to let us know.**

Myra Tattenbaum, Chair 617-527-2830
or tattenbaum@verizon.net. ■

Committees - in - Action

O b s e r v e r s

Coordinator: Andrea Kelley
617-964-4609

ELECTION COMMISSION Nancy Criscitiello
ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES Deb Crossley
NEWTON FREE Mary Adelstein
LIBRARY BOARD

C o m m i t t e e s

LOCAL ACTION

Focus *Community Preservation Act*

Contact Deborah Crossley 617-244-7597
Co-Chair
Priscilla Leith 617-969-6837
Co-Chair

Members

Anna Maria Abernathy Andrea Kelley
Carol Bock Jody Klein
Nancy Criscitiello Amelia Koch
Lucia Dolan Myra Tattenbaum
George Foord Terry Yoffie

ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES

Focus *Adoption of an Energy Action Plan in Newton*

Contact Lucia Dolan 617-332-1896
Co-Chair
Beth Lowd 617-325-1370
Co-Chair

Members

Mary Adelstein
Jane Baier
Carol Bock
Deb Crossley
Lucia Dolan
Beth Lowd
Sharyn Roberts

...

Feel free to call committee contacts or a Board officer or director to learn more.

*Welcome
New Member!*

BETTY COTTIN MILLER
280 Newtonville Avenue, #320
Newton, MA 02460-2038

Long Range Planning Committee

September 27, 2007
Observer: Lucia Dolan

Members Present: Verne Vance, chair; Vicki Danberg; Amy Sangiolo; Marcia Johnson; Lisle Baker; Ken Parker Also Present: Sandy Pooler; Sandy Guyrian; David Wilkinson; Susan Burstein; Ann Larner; Dori Zaleznik; Leslie Burg; Kurt Kusiak; John Freedman; Susan Albright Absent: Ted Hess-Mahan; Scott Lennon

Update of Long Range Forecast by Burstein Changes in annual budget assumptions: Now includes 2 ½% collective bargaining assumption; new school enrollment increases; reduced State aid assumption (down from \$2 million to \$1 million, most of that Chapter 70 funding); debt services and school building reimbursement built into forecast; 5 fire stations and NewTurf included in CIP (still has \$3 ½ million for other CIP projects); \$154 for NNHS; benefits increase 11%; trash collection 3 ⅓%; school tuition 8%; school transportation 6-10%.

Most increases based on a five year historical average. Expenses trending downward that logically should not be, like motor vehicle maintenance, were given an assumed 2% increase. Budget reserves increased \$100K annually, movement to decrease dependence on Free Cash by ½ million over 5 years.

Danberg asked if movement of pension to State included. Yes, change but does not affect 5 year budget assumption.

Discussion of Budget Reserves. Burstein said they were aiming to get to ½ of 1% of budget in reserves in 5 years. Parker asked if this is enough to cover volatile expenses – snow and ice removal, overtime (fire dept. overtime usage this year at twice the rate of last year), legal fees, etc.? Wilkinson replied if he were preparing the document he'd have a larger budget reserve and put more funds in snow and ice. Under Mann Newton had budget reserves of 1% taken from free cash. But Newton has had no written policy re: budget reserves. Parker stated Finance Committee is working on this. Pooler believed the volatile expenses, free cash, budget reserves issue wouldn't change the overall budget gap.

Albright asked to understand how CIP budget could stay near 3% of total budget in spite of increase in CIP projects (fire stations, NewTurf, NNHS increased cost). Burstein answered slight increase in CIP % from below 3% to 3.2% over 5 years, borrowing for 20 years, assumed reasonable rates of interest, SBA and Stark go into Capital. Danberg stated we could go up even higher in our debt service. Baker asked if we have a plan for where we'd put money into schools? Zaleznik replied there will be one by budget time. State hasn't come yet to talk with us about our school needs. State seems to be reimbursing 50% of school projects.

Albright and Johnson asked if 2 ½% collective bargaining assumption was low. Burstein replied it was a BRC assumption. Freedman asked if 5% energy assumption was overly optimistic when last year's increase was 13%. Vance replied they didn't have time to go over budget item by item. Sangiolo suggested budget assumptions be explained in document before it is distributed widely.

Baker asked if Aldermen felt comfortable with the presented 5 year budget. No decisive reply. Johnson asked Burstein to create a comparison budget with Parker's increased assumptions.

Vance asked Pooler for a sense from the Mayor's Office. Pooler replied - shortly we will have a report on impacts of cuts over the last 5 years and concrete suggestions for what we could do with more money. In late November Mayor will make an announcement of strategies.

Long Range Planning Committee

Cont. from page 4

Johnson asked that the Mayor 'be more transparent' and include more people in the process. Pooler replied the Mayor will offer insights to the Board in November, 'laying out a dialog' but does not tell the Aldermen how to do their business. Baker asked for more specifics on the process of creating a dialog between the Mayor, Aldermen, and community. 'We need to figure out an inclusive process and what roles various stake holders play.' Johnson said 'in the absence of information people are making assumptions and there is a lot of disaffection around these assumptions.' Sangiolo suggested the Mayor speak individually to Aldermen to diminish misunderstandings. 'We need to come out united to get out of this rut.' Danberg stressed the need to speak with one voice especially if for an override. Vance asked Pooler to take these concerns to the Mayor.

Parker began discussion of 2 docketed items before LRP Committee: 1) Outline for plan for waste stream reduction 'The Green Space Initiative' (www.greenspacenewton.org). He asked for a vote approving plan in concept and referring it to the Public Facilities Committee. Baker and Vance abstained, other committee members approved and the plan was past to the PF Committee

2) PILOT (Payment in Lieu of Taxes) Plan for Newton Non-Profits. If non-profit businesses were taxed at business rates, Newton would earn \$1 billion annually. Parker wrote and distributed to committee a draft City letter requesting non-profits voluntarily donate 25% of what their taxes would be. Parker said the letter was standard in many communities with PILOTs. Burg said the letter would be received negatively and Parker's comments to TAB about PILOTs had angered non-profits, like Newton Wellesley Hospital, where she had hoped to start a dialog re PILOTs. Phil Herr of the Comprehensive Plan Committee had suggested she and Mike Kruse, of Planning, begin meeting with non-profits. Vance and others questioned authority Burg had to begin dialog with non-profits. Committee agreed non-profits had to be approached through working with the Executive Department. Vance suggested study of other community's PILOT programs to show Newton non-profits. Parker made motion to hold the letter, motion passed. He suggested inviting Mayor to their next meeting. ■

OUR EYES AND EARS

The **Observer Corps** is vital to the League. If you have an interest in learning how to observe a public committee meeting, contact Observer Committee Chair, Andrea Kelley, 617-964-4609. She'll show you how easy it is! ■

Local Action



To: The Newton Board of Aldermen

Mayor David B. Cohen

Phil Herr, Chairperson, Comprehensive Planning Advisory Committee (CPAC)

On September 10, 2007 the League of Women Voters of Newton testified before the Zoning and Planning committee in support of swift adoption of the Draft Comprehensive Plan dated October 2006.

In its testimony the League noted the significance of the community effort that resulted in this Plan: "after many years of study and debate among dozens of citizen volunteers on the committee as well as hundreds of residents, city leaders and department staff who participated in the many public forums and workshops, this Plan is truly a consensus document."

The mayor spoke squarely behind the efforts of this consensus-based citizen driven document. All who testified at the September hearing, including aldermen, spoke in admiration of the Plan in its current form.

The League believes it is critical that our elected officials follow the public process they have set in motion for the community. That is, that the plan should be recommended forward to the full Board of Aldermen without substantive change. At this late hour, new testimony or analysis suggesting substantial reconsideration of Plan elements should not be accepted, as changes to this degree would no longer reflect the consensus document before you. The good work of the many citizens who have contributed their time, expertise and patience, who have responded conscientiously over the years to input from the community and elected officials, deserves to be voted on its merits.

We reaffirm our statement of September 10 and urge that the ZAP committee recommend approval to the Board of Aldermen in its present form.

The future is now. The Comprehensive Plan should be adopted prior to any further amendments to the Newton zoning ordinances, which should be consistent with the guidance provided by the Comprehensive Plan.

Sincerely,

Susan Rosenbaum

President, League of Women Voters of Newton

Local Action Update:

On November 19th, the Board of Alderman passed the Comprehensive Plan by 20-1. In attendance, Deb Crossley. ■

Environmental Committee Action

The Honorable Mayor David Cohen
1000 Commonwealth Avenue
Newton Centre, MA 02459



cc: Newton Board of Aldermen, Lisle Baker, President
Citizen's Commission on Energy

Dear Mayor Cohen:

The League of Women Voters of Newton applauds the city for converting streetlights (from principally mercury vapor) to more efficient High Pressure Sodium lamps. The 8,440 new lamps reduce energy usage by 68% or about 5,300,000 kWh annually. Timely installation earned the City a \$337,000 dollar incentive payment from NSTAR. This action results in about \$760,000 in avoided energy costs annually, reduces carbon dioxide emissions by over 6 million pounds, corrects lighting levels throughout the city and sharply reduces light pollution of the night sky.

The project is a model for working cooperatively to meet a shared goal. Mayor Cohen, the Public Facilities Committee and the entire Board of Aldermen, are all to be congratulated for fiscal and environmental prudence. The League recognizes the important advice provided by the Citizen's Commission on Energy, and the excellent work by both city Energy Engineer David Tannozi and city Transportation Engineer Clint Shuckle. This action meets an objective of both the draft Energy Action Plan and the street classification system from the Comprehensive Plan.

The League looks forward to further progress as the City begins to address needed improvements to municipal buildings that will reduce energy consumption, benefit the environment and help to control the city's bottom line.

Sincerely,

Susan Rosenbaum, President
League of Women Voters of Newton

City Finance Forum Roundup

By Sue Flicop

On October 16th, the first "Tackling the Tradeoffs" forum took place, featuring panelists Paul Levy, chair of the Blue Ribbon Commission, Phil Herr, chair of the Newton Comprehensive Plan Advisory Committee, and John Stewart, former alderman. Moderating was Brooke Lipsitt, past president of the Board of Aldermen.

After a brief review of the results of the Blue Ribbon Commission and the proposed Newton Comprehensive Plan, the conversation quickly centered on the idea of an override, with unexpectedly strong support from all three panelists.

Other ideas for raising revenue were discussed, including: air rights over the Mass Pike; increased business development; and trash fees. The panelists felt that none of these options represented a substantial enough increase in revenue to adequately address the structural deficit without an override.

However, mention was made that some of these options led to other benefits in the community, i.e. stronger villages, increased recycling.

The forum briefly focused on potential alternative forms of city government and the need for a review of the city charter, looking at the entire structure, not just at the Board of Aldermen.

The panelists explored potential ways to identify the city's priorities within our diverse community. Our diversity was seen as a strength and not a barrier to consensus. However, Mr. Levy, Mr. Herr and Mr. Stewart all felt that strong leadership is needed from the Mayor and the Board of Aldermen to create a sensible plan, make difficult decisions and lead the community to agreement.

The sponsoring organizations, Newton Council on Aging, Newton PTO Council, Newton Schools Foundation, NewtonTAB, NewTV and LWVN wish to thank the panelists and moderator for an interesting and thoughtful evening. The ideas presented and discussed will help structure future forums on public safety, zoning and development, education, environmental, and senior issues. The Tradeoffs series will resume again in Spring 2008. See you there ! ■

VOTERS SERVICE

By Bonnie Carter

On Monday, November 5 the League phone machine received a message from Janice Bourque, President of the Newton Highlands Neighborhood Area Council. She was asking for help at the polling place to encourage voters to vote in the NHNAC election which is now held on the same day as the municipal election. Sharyn Roberts immediately got on the phone and found League volunteers to staff the polling place for the whole day in one and two-hour shifts. Hurray for Sharyn and many thanks to the volunteers willing to come out on such short notice.

Listed from opening to closing:

Alice Wolpert, Lucia Dolan, Sharyn Roberts, Tamara Bliss, Rohna Shoul, Lois Smith, Barbara Balasa, Bonnie Carter and Rohna Shoul (on her second stint of the day!)

Having the polling in the lobby of the Hyde Community Center increased the turnout tremendously and every one enjoyed using the antique ballot box which goes "ding" when you put in your ballot and turn the crank. ■

Help Wanted Now!

The LWVN Local Action Committee reviews Community Preservation proposals each year after they are submitted, comparing them to League positions and to the Newton Community Preservation Committee's own guidelines and the State Community Preservation Act.

We are looking for League members to read the proposals due December 14, 2007 for FY2009 funding. This involves reading one or two proposals, writing a report of 1-2 pages for the Local Action Committee, and attending one Committee meeting to discuss all the proposals. It would take an estimated 4 hours, all told.

It is an interesting job. Our comments usually go on to the Newton Community Preservation Committee for their consideration as they hold working sessions later on.

We have a format for reports. Two people read each proposal. After discussion we make recommendations to the LWVN Board with comments and questions, or urging support or opposition to each proposal. Time frame is December 19 to about January 11.

Please call Priscilla Leith (617) 969-6837 or Deb Crossley (617) 244-7597 or email us at islpris@comcast.net or dcrossley@rcn.com. ■

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LWVN CALENDAR

December

- 4 Tuesday 7:30 p.m. **Legislative Roundtable**, NewTV, Sue Rosenbaum - host, Contact Lucia Dolan 617-332-1896
- 14 Friday, 9-10 a.m., **Local Action Committee Meeting** at the home of Deb Crossley, 26 Circuit Ave, Newton Highlands, 617-244-7597.
- 16 Sunday, 5-7 p.m., **Holiday Party**, at the home of Vicky Danberg, 30 Chase St., Newton Centre, 617-969-1756. All League members and their guests are invited to this special event. Finger foods to share are welcome.
- 18 Tuesday, 6:30-8:30 p.m., **Working Board Potluck** at the home of Bonnie Carter, 177 Homer St., Newton Centre, 617-969-0686

January

- 9 Wednesday. 11:30 a.m.-1:00 p.m., **Topic Meeting on Immigration**, NewTV Conference Rm., Brown Bagging Encouraged. Contact: Anne Borg 617-244-6366
- 10 Thursday, 7:30-9:00 p.m, **Topic Meeting on Immigration**, NewTV Conference Rm., Contact: Anne Borg 617-244-6366
- 11 Friday, 9-10 a.m. **Local Action Committee Meeting**. Contact Priscilla Leith, 617-969-6837.
- 19 Tuesday, 7:30-9:30 p.m. **LWVN Board Meeting** at the home of Terry Yoffie, 363 Waverly, Newton Centre, 617-965-1796
- 29 Friday, Environmental Committee at the home of Lucia Dolan, 20 Devon Rd., Newton Centre, 617-332-1893

Legislative Roundtable



For current schedule, log on to www.Newtv.org

ANNUAL LWVN
Holiday Party
Sunday, December 16
5:00 -7:00 p.m.
30 Chase Street
Newton Centre



January Fundraiser

Dine at Ground Round, Needham during the month of January and mention 'LWVNNewton' and Ground Round will donate a percentage of the tab to LWVN.

Tell your family and friends!

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