AUSTIN CLAIMS 2ND STRAIGHT LOVB TITLE WITH GOLDEN SET WIN OVER SALT LAKE | A6

WEEKENDER

HILL COUNTRY NEWS

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Jonestown man gets 30 years in Leander fentanyl death



KRELI HAYNES

STAFF REPORTS

GEORGETOWN, Texas — A Jonestown man was sentenced to 30 years in prison after a Williamson County jury convicted him of murder in the fentanyl-related death of a Leander High School student.

Kreli Terry Haynes, 23, was convicted April 10 in the 2023 death of 16-year-old Zarek McMeekin, prosecutors said. District Attorney Shawn Dick said the sentence "sends a clear message that those who profit from the sale of poison in our community will be held accountable."

McMeekin was an 11th grader at Leander High School. Authorities said he died after taking a counterfeit pill made to resemble a prescription opioid but containing fentanyl.

McMeekin's mother found him un-

See **SENTENCE**, page **A4**



FILE PHOTO / SCOTT W. COLEMAN

A file photo shows the renovation of the historic jail complex in Georgetown circa 2024. Williamson County recently approved a contract to purchase more than 250 acres in southeast Georgetown as a potential site for a future county justice complex.



LEANDER ISD PHOTO

Students at Leander ISD's Knowles Elementary developed projects for presentation in both English and Spanish to engineers from Cedar Park-based Firefly Aerospace.

Knowles Elementary students pitch space-tool fixes to engineers

Dual language students at Knowles Elementary recently took on a space-age engineering problem as part of a science unit on forces and motion.

Working in teams, students used lessons on gravity, friction and magnets to design ways to keep tools and equipment from floating away in space, according to Leander ISD.

After several weeks of research and testing, three bilingual engineers from Firefly Aerospace visited classrooms to hear the students' ideas. Students presented their projects in English and Spanish and demonstrated how magnets could help secure equipment in microgravity.

The visit doubled as a language-learning exercise, district officials said, giving students a real-world reason to explain their thinking in Spanish.

After student presentations, the engineers described their day-to-day work and shared examples of projects they handle at Firefly Aerospace. The session offered students a closer look at potential careers in science and engineering, Leander ISD said.

District leaders framed the collaboration as an example of the Leander ISD Graduate Profile, pointing to communication and teamwork as skills students practiced during the project.

Williamson County moves toward justice complex land deal

STAFF REPORTS

Williamson County commissioners have approved a contract to buy about 253 acres in southeast Georgetown for $75.8 million as a potential site for a future county justice complex.

The Commissioners Court voted to approve the purchase contract, which includes a 75-day feasibility period and covers four adjacent tracts, including a 134-acre triangular parcel at 1200 County Road 110, according to county materials. The site is bordered by S.E. Inner Loop, Southwestern Boulevard and Sam Houston Avenue, with additional acreage south of Sam Houston Avenue and east of Maple Street.

"We were looking for a site that has sufficient acreage to support county justice services over the next 50 years, and we think this property can do that," Precinct 3 Commissioner Valerie Covey said in a county release. She added that the contract "does not obligate the county to build immediately" and is intended to allow phased development.

County officials said the justice complex must be located within Georgetown city limits or its extra-territorial jurisdiction because Georgetown is the county seat. The proposed site sits near existing county buildings along S.E. Inner Loop and offers room for a campus-style layout, expanded parking and future growth, according to the county. The county also cited access to utilities, including natural gas, electric and water.

Covey said county leaders heard concerns from law enforcement about reachability and proximity to medical care. She said the site has access from Interstate 35 and Texas 130 and is near hospitals in Georgetown and Round Rock.

Separately, county materials outlining early planning for a justice complex say officials reviewed existing operations across courts, law enforcement, detention and administrative services and modeled long-term population and workload trends to help right-size future facilities. The same materials say planners screened 37 potential sites using criteria that included access, infrastructure, capacity and operational fit, then narrowed options for further

See **JUSTICE**, page **A4**

Texas grid operator forecasts massive growth in demand, but says data is likely flawed

The Electric Reliability Council of Texas reported that peak energy demand could quadruple by 2032, but cautioned that its estimate is likely too high and must be revised.

BY PAUL COBLER
THE TEXAS TRIBUNE

Texas' grid operator raised eyebrows this week when it reported that peak demand on the grid could more than quadruple by 2032.

The 2032 peak load forecast of 367,790 megawatts far exceeds the highest recorded peak demand for the Texas grid — 85,508 megawatts in August 2023.

The forecast is preliminary, the Electric Reliability Council of Texas cautioned in the filing submitted to the Public Utility Commission of Texas. In a Friday PUCT meeting, officials agreed the forecast is likely higher than what demand will actually look like in the years ahead.

The grid operator plans to file a revised forecast in near future, officials said, as the agencies figure out how best to track the rapid buildout of energy-intensive projects like data centers and cryptocurrency mines.

"Texas is experiencing exceptional growth and development, which is reshaping how large load demand is identified, verified, and incorporated into long-term planning," ERCOT President and CEO Pablo Vegas wrote in a statement Wednesday. "As a result of a changing landscape, we believe this forecast to be higher than expected future load growth."

ERCOT, the state's grid operator, filed its forecast with the Public Utility Commission of Texas on Wednesday as required by Senate Bill 6, approved by the Legislature last year. The preliminary data is based on ERCOT economic forecasts and data from utilities working with so-called large load customers — projects expected to exceed 75 megawatts of demand.



SERGIO FLORES FOR THE TEXAS TRIBUNE

ERCOT CEO Pablo Vegas and Texas Public Utility Commission Chairman Thomas Gleeson attend a briefing on an incoming winter storm on Jan 22, 2026, in Austin.

The forecast was presented Friday at a PUCT meeting and both agencies agreed they need to work together to develop a more accurate forecast before relying on it for long-term planning.

"ERCOT's long term load forecast is the backbone of so much of what we do here and so much of our reliability planning and of our reliability assessment," PUCT Commissioner Courtney

See **ERCOT**, page **A2**

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NEWS

Leander ISD students host first health outreach

STAFF REPORTS

Cedar Park, Texas — Health science students from Leander ISD's six comprehensive high schools gathered April 11 at Cedar Park High School for the district's first District Outreach Convention, a student-organized community event focused on health education and career exploration.

"Student-led events require a lot of time, effort, dedication and external support to bring them from an idea on paper to something real," said Saron Amsalu, executive vice president of the Vandegrift HOSA chapter and an event organizer.

The convention brought together HOSA chapters from across the district. Students set up interactive booths aimed at introducing visitors to health careers and encouraging personal wellness.

Inside the event, each chapter highlighted opportunities available through HOSA, including volunteer service, scholarships, competitions and leadership development, according to the district.

Attendees also met with local health care and higher education partners, including Concordia University's College of Health Sciences, the College of Healthcare Professions, the Texas chapter of the National Kidney Foundation, the ACC phlebotomy program and Longhorn EMS.

Organizers said the goal was to create a single service project that connected students across campuses while allowing each school to showcase its health science program.

Planning lasted about eight months, the district said. Students coordinated partners, organized booth activities and built a schedule for visitors.

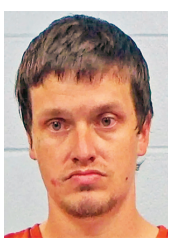
Organizers said they hope to repeat the event next year and expand participation.

"Showing students it's possible to organize such a large community event like the DOC, with little prior experience or references beyond an event outline and a dream, can inspire them to pursue their own passions and goals," Amsalu said.

Austin man charged in WilCo fentanyl death

STAFF REPORTS

An Austin man has been charged with murder after investigators said he distributed fentanyl that led to a woman's death in northeastern Williamson County.



GARRETT WISE

Garrett Wise, 33, was arrested March 19 with assistance from the U.S. Marshals Service's Lone Star Fugitive Task Force, according to the Williamson County Sheriff's Office.

Wise is accused of being involved in distributing fentanyl that resulted in the March 15, 2025, death of Jensen Anders, 30, authorities said.

Anders was found dead at a home in the 50 block of County Road 433 in Thrall, the Sheriff's Office said. Investigators determined she died after being exposed to fentanyl, according to the Sheriff's Office and a news report citing investigators.

The Sheriff's Office said its Organized Crime Unit has kept the case active since Anders' death. Deputies obtained an arrest warrant and coordinated with other agencies to locate Wise, the agency said.

Deputies said they found additional suspected fentanyl when Wise was taken into custody.

Wise remained in the Williamson County Jail the day after his arrest, according to one report. At press time, bond information was not available in the materials provided.

Texas law allows prosecutors to file murder charges in some cases when a person dies after ingesting or being exposed to fentanyl that was illegally distributed, according to multiple reports.

Fentanyl is a synthetic opioid that can be lethal in very small amounts, Texas health officials have warned.

The Sheriff's Office said the investigation remains ongoing.



COURTESY PHOTO

From left to right: Joy Simonton, Commissioner Terry Cook, Justin Lee, Commissioner Cynthia Long, Michelle McKinney, Kerstin Hancock, County Judge Steve Snell, Sandra Malcolm, Commissioner Valerie Covey, Jesel Vigil, Cheryl Johnson, Commissioner Russ Boles, Vickie Johnson and Johnny Grimaldo.

Williamson County purchasing department earns 26th national procurement award

STAFF REPORTS

GEORGETOWN, Texas — Williamson County's Purchasing Department has received a 2025 Achievement of Excellence in Procurement Award from the National Procurement Institute Inc., county officials said.

The award marks the county's 26th consecutive year receiving the recognition, according to a Williamson County Public Affairs release.

The Achievement of Excellence in Procurement program recognizes public purchasing offices for practices that include innovation, professionalism, productivity, leadership and electronic procurement. Organizations are evaluated using standardized criteria intended to measure best practices and ongoing improvement, the county said.

Williamson County was one of 48 counties nationwide to receive the 2025 award, the release said.

"The Williamson County procurement team works tirelessly to achieve the best value for residents, ensure transparency in contracting, maintain legal compliance and provide prompt service to the county's 67 departments," Joy Simonton, the county purchasing agent, said in the release. "This award is truly earned by this hardworking team."

County officials said the program is supported by multiple national procurement associations and is considered a benchmark for public purchasing.

The county encouraged vendors and residents seeking information about purchasing or doing business with Williamson County to visit the Purchasing Department webpage.

ERCOT

from page A1

K. Hjaltman said. "Every decision that we make as commissioners and everybody else makes really depends on the accuracy of the forecast."

Regardless of where the final forecast lands, the data continues to point to massive growth in demand on the ERCOT grid as large data centers and other power-intensive projects are built across the state amid the artificial intelligence boom. Texas is expected to become the nation's No. 1 market for data centers within the next two years.

ERCOT's more conservative forecast for this summer would still break the grid's 2023 record for peak demand.

Vegas told the House State Affairs Committee earlier this month that his agency is tracking requests for grid connections that could require approximately 410,000 megawatts of electricity, 87% of which are data centers.

Energy experts and ERCOT officials are quick to point out that requests to connect are not guarantees that construction will happen.

"I think it's clear we need to engage in the process to find ways to refine this number into something that's more usable," PUCT Chair Thomas Gleeson said Friday.



SUDOKU



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Fun By The Numbers

Like puzzles? Then you'll love sudoku. This mind-bending puzzle will have you hooked from the moment you square off, so sharpen your pencil and put your sudoku savvy to the test.

Here's How It Works:

Sudoku puzzles are formatted as a 9x9 grid, broken down into nine 3x3 boxes. To solve a sudoku, the numbers 1 through 9 must fill each row, column and box. Each number can appear only once in each row, column and box. You can figure out the order in which the numbers will appear by using the numeric clues already provided in the boxes. The more numbers you name, the easier it gets to solve the puzzle!

Answers found in next week's classified section.

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CHRIS STOKES FOR THE TEXAS TRIBUNE

The Archimedes screw pump is used for moving water and sludge, from a lower to a higher elevation. Wastewater treatment process at SAWS' Steven M. Clouse Water Recycling Center in San Antonio on Aug. 23, 2024.

Texas needs at least $174 billion to avoid water crisis, state says

That new amount is more than double the amount predicted four years ago. The new forecast comes as supply is already drying up.

BY CARLOS NOGUERAS RAMOS, COLLEEN DEGUZMAN AND ALEJANDRA MARTINEZ
THE TEXAS TRIBUNE

Texas communities will need to spend $174 billion in the next 50 years to avert a severe water crisis, a new state analysis revealed Thursday. That's more than double the $80 billion projected four years ago, when the Texas Water Development Board last passed a state water plan.

The three-member board presiding over the agency authorized the highly anticipated draft blueprint Thursday, the first administrative step toward adopting the water development board's plans for the next 50 years. The plan, released every five years, encompasses the projects that 16 regional water planning groups in Texas said are the most urgent, water development board officials said.

The board's latest estimates come as the state's water supply faces numerous threats. Growing communities across Texas are scrambling to secure water, keep up with construction costs and cope with a yearslong drought. This week, Corpus Christi officials said the city may be just months away from declaring a water emergency. Meanwhile, other rural cities by the Coastal Bend are rapidly drilling wells to avoid a crisis. Residents in North Texas have also been bracing for groundwater shortages.

In an effort to restrain the crisis, lawmakers last year called an election in which voters approved a $20 billion boost for communities to use on water-related expenses. The water development board's estimate shows that what lawmakers proposed on the ballot falls dramatically short of the needed cash, experts said.

"What this number tells me at the end of the day is if we don't get serious about (funding water projects), there are going to be serious consequences for Texas," said Perry Fowler, executive director of the Texas Water Infrastructure Network. "Even with the billion-dollar-a-year plan kicking in, it's not going to be enough to offset the costs of the projects that are going to have to be executed."

The new estimate accounts for 3,000 projects, from regional infrastructure upgrades to smaller endeavors such as drilling new water wells. Texas' water supplies are expected to drop by roughly 10% between 2030 and 2080, according to the water plan. In that same time frame, the maximum amount of water communities can draw is also expected to decline by 9%.

The 80-page plan notes approximately 6,700 recommended strategies that would add water to the state's dwindling portfolio. The recommendations — which are not accounted for in

See **WATER**, page **A4**

Texas job numbers swing to start 2026

STAFF REPORTS

AUSTIN — Texas started 2026 with a strong hiring month, then gave some of it back in February, a reminder that headline job totals can mask sharp shifts by industry and region even when the unemployment rate barely moves.

Texas added 40,100 nonfarm jobs in January, pushing total employment to 14,379,500, according to the Texas Workforce Commission. The state's seasonally adjusted unemployment rate held at 4.3%. TWC said construction led January gains, adding 11,800 jobs, while leisure and hospitality and private education and health services each added 10,300. Professional and business services gained 10,200. Over the year, TWC reported Texas added 112,200 jobs, a 0.8% growth rate.

But the next monthly report showed hiring momentum cooling. TWC reported Texas lost 8,500 nonfarm jobs in February, dropping the total to 14,354,600. The unemployment rate stayed at 4.3%, but the labor force also shrank by 13,400 people over the month, to 15,941,800. TWC still reported the labor force grew by 121,200 over the year.

"The addition of more than 121,000 people to the labor force over the year reinforces the need to make sure all Texans can participate in — and benefit from — our evolving economy," TWC Commissioner Representing Labor Alberto Treviño III said in the agency's February release.

The February report also underscored how uneven the job market can be beneath statewide averages. TWC said professional and business services added 6,300 jobs over the month, while manufacturing gained 2,500 and information added 200. The agency also reported construction had the highest annual growth rate of any major industry for the 19th straight month, at 2.7%.

At the same time, the detailed industry table in the February release shows mining and logging down year over year, and manufacturing below its level from a year earlier. Several large service sectors were also little changed or down slightly over the month.

Geography told a mixed story as well. In February, the Midland metro posted the lowest unemployment rate among Texas metro areas at 3.3% (not seasonally adjusted), followed by San Angelo at 3.5% and Abilene at 3.6%, TWC reported. The unemployment rate was higher in places such as Eagle Pass, Brownsville-Harlingen and McAllen-Edinburg-Mission, according to metro data summarized in a separate Texas jobs story published by The Center Square.

Gov. Greg Abbott's office pointed to January's job gain and a "new historic high" in total jobs as evidence of economic strength, while The Center Square also highlighted a $2.9 trillion Texas economy figure it attributed to U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis data. Those measures can describe scale and momentum, but they do not answer whether job gains are broad, durable or translating into easier hiring for workers.

TWC notes its employment estimates are produced with the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics and are subject to revision — a key caveat as Texas heads into spring with a job market that looks stable on the surface, and choppier underneath.



• WILLIAMSON COUNTY — WILCOTX.GOV
The Williamson County Commissioners Court is the county's governing body. Commissioners meet beginning at 9:30 each Tuesday morning at the Williamson County Courthouse in downtown Georgetown. Agendas and packets are available, and the meetings are streamed live, on the county's website. Meetings are open to the public. If you wish to speak, arrive early and register.

• LEANDER INDEPENDENT SCHOOL DISTRICT — LEANDERISD.ORG
Leander ISD Board of Trustees meet the second and fourth Thursday each month at Lippe Instructional Materials Center located at 1775 W. New Hope Dr., Building B at 6:15 p.m. Meetings are open to the public. If you wish to speak, arrive early and register. Agendas, board meeting packets and a live stream are on the district's website.

• LAGO VISTA INDEPENDENT SCHOOL DISTRICT — LAGOVISTAISD.NET
Lago Vista ISD Board of Trustees meet at 6:00 p.m. on the second Monday of the month in the MAC at Lago Vista High School, 5185 Lohman Ford Rd. Meetings are open to the public. If you wish to speak, arrive early and register. You can find agendas and board meeting packets on the district's website.

• CITY OF CEDAR PARK — CEDARPARKTEXAS.GOV
Agendas and minutes for all boards and commissions are available, and many meetings are streamed live, on the city's website.

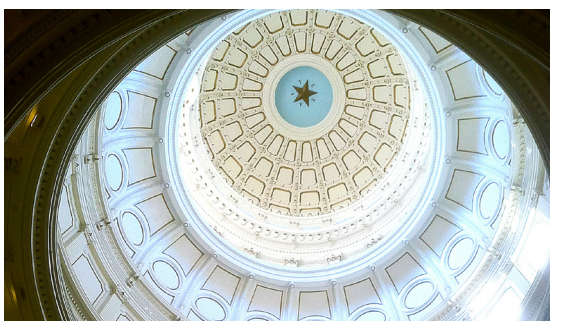
• CEDAR PARK CITY COUNCIL
Meets at 6 p.m. the second and fourth Thursday of each month at City Council Chambers, 450 Cypress Creek Road, Building 4. Council agendas and packets are available on the city's website. Meetings are open to the public. If you wish to speak, arrive early and register.

• CITY OF LEANDER — LEANDERTX.GOV
Agendas and minutes for all boards and commissions are available, and City Council meetings are streamed live, on the city's website.

• LEANDER CITY COUNCIL
Meets at 6 p.m. the first and third Thursday of each month in the City Council Chambers, Pat Bryson Municipal Hall, 201 N. Brushy Street. Council agendas and packets are available on the city's website. Meetings are open to the public. If you wish to speak, arrive early and register.

• CITY OF LAGO VISTA — LAGOVISTATEXAS.ORG
Agendas and minutes for all boards and commissions are available on the city's website.

• LAGO VISTA CITY COUNCIL
Meets at 4 p.m. the first and third Thursday of each month in the Council Chambers at City Hall, 5803 Thunderbird Drive. Council agendas and packets are available on the city's website. Meetings are open to the public. If you wish to speak, arrive early and register.



CAPITAL HIGHLIGHTS

Cost for future water needs could reach $174B

Texas will need to invest $174 billion over the next 50 years to keep up with water demand, according to a draft 2027 state water plan approved last week, the Austin American-Statesman reported. That is more than twice the projected cost in the previous state water plan published in 2022.

The draft report, released by the Texas Water Development Board, says the increased costs are due to a number of factors: inflation in construction costs, more frequent droughts, and a decline in existing water supplies as the state's aquifers become depleted.

The state water plan is created with input from 16 regional planning groups that identify future water needs in their regions and how to meet them. The draft plan is open for public comment and can be accessed here: https://tinyurl.com/3ktz5fpm.

Talarico raises record $27 million; Cornyn leads Paxton in fundraising

State Rep. James Talarico raised a record $27 million in this first quarter of this year, the largest-ever sum for any Senate candidate in any state in the first quarter of an election year, The Texas Tribune reported.

"Winning in Texas will require unprecedented resources," said Seth Krasne, Talarico's campaign manager. "This grassroots fundraising haul puts our movement in a strong position to spread our message in some of the most expensive media markets in the country. But we can't take our foot off of the gas."

Talarico has raised more than $40 million since entering the race last September from more than 540,000 individual contributors.

On the Republican side, where incumbent U.S. Sen. John Cornyn is heading to a May 26 runoff against Texas Attorney General Ken Paxton, Cornyn outraised his opponent by fourfold, pulling in $9 million in the first quarter. Paxton raised $2.2 million

Judge orders Camp Mystic to preserve cabins where girls died

An Austin state district judge ordered Camp Mystic's owners not to alter, repair or demolish cabins that housed campers and counselors who died in last year's July 4 flood along the Guadalupe River, southwest of Kerrville. The flood killed 25 girls, two counselors and one of the owners of the camp.

The camp's owners are being sued by the parents of 8-year-old Cile Steward, the only victim whose body has not been recovered. Other parents of children who died in the floods also have lawsuits pending.

"This finding is supported by facts tending to show that defendants owed a duty of care to Cile Steward and other minor campers, which they breached by operating Camp Mystic in a high-risk zone without adequate flood protections," Judge Guerra Gamble wrote.

The injunction remains in place until the lawsuit is resolved or the court rules otherwise. The judge set a trial date of May 3, 2027.

SNAP rule change forces recipients to read food labels

Changes in what can be purchased under the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program are now in place in Texas, and consumers are spending more time examining the ingredients label, the Texas Standard reported.

SNAP benefits can no longer be used to buy candy or sweetened beverages, under Texas Senate Bill 379, passed last year. That includes drinks with more than five grams of added sugar or any amount of artificial sweetener.

The ban does not include baking sugar or sweet cereals, however. The guidelines do not provide an itemized list, so retailers must interpret them and apply them to the food items they sell.

"You use Google a lot to get the internet's interpretation. You look at the law and how it's written," said John Robertson of Austin's Fresh Plus grocery stores.

Data center owners grilled by legislators

Texas lawmakers grilled data center developers, energy companies and grid officials recently on the impact of the state's data center boom, the Houston Chronicle reported. Grid officials say they are proposing regulations that will ensure Texas can handle data centers without raising electricity costs for consumers or risking power blackouts.

Officials from various Texas energy companies said data centers could help upgrade the state's grid infrastructure.

"If we have an opportunity to have new customers coming to the state pay for that, we'll have done some really good work," said Brian Lloyd, with Dallas-based Oncor, the Texas utility with by far the most data centers seeking to connect to its system.

Thomas Gleeson, chair of the Public Utility Commission, told lawmakers his agency is working with the Electric Reliability Council of Texas, the grid operator, on rules to encourage data centers to bring their own power generation to help prevent price spikes.

"I honestly don't think on the generation side you're going to see a large increase in costs at this point, because we have so many renewables and batteries on the system," Gleeson said.

Amount of state in drought increases again

Near the end of March, 89% of the state was in drought, according to hydrologist Dr. Mark Wentzel with the Texas Water Development Board. That is the largest extent of drought in nearly four years, Wentzel wrote. In addition to continued dry conditions, average March temperatures were 66.8 Fahrenheit, beating the previous record by more than one-and-a-half degrees.

Wentzel said there is some reason for optimism with a wet, cooler start to April and a forecast of drought contraction in much of the state, except for the Panhandle and West Texas by early summer.

"Also note that we've set a new monthly record every year since 2021. In 2021, we set the record for the hottest December. In 2022, it was the hottest July, hottest September in 2023, October in 2024, and November in 2025," he wrote.

Now we can add March 2026 to that list.

Gary Borders, a veteran award-winning Texas journalist, compiled this report. He published a number of community newspapers in Texas during a 30-year span, including in Longview, Fort Stockton, Nacogdoches and, once upon a time, the Hill Country News in Cedar Park. Email: gborders@texaspress.com.

NEWS

AlphaRoute says Leander ISD could save $1M

STAFF REPORTS

A school bus routing review with AlphaRoute could help Leander Independent School District cut more than $1 million a year in transportation costs, the company said.

AlphaRoute, which sells an AI-powered route-optimization platform, said in a March 20 news release that Leander ISD's transportation team identified the projected savings after reviewing new routing scenarios produced with the firm.

At the start of the project, Leander ISD was running 173 routes with 150 available drivers, AlphaRoute said. District leaders wanted to reduce route demand without changing school bell times or moving bus stop locations, the company said.

AlphaRoute said it delivered a full routing plan in four weeks. The district's routing team believes the plan would reduce the route count by 21 buses, the company said.

The plan is set to take effect in the 2026-27 school year, AlphaRoute said. The company said the district began implementing some changes within a month of receiving the plan and expects to save "hundreds of thousands of dollars" this school year.

"For the first time, we were asked why we do what we do, not just what we do," Toni Tichi of Leander ISD said in the release. "That shift helped us uncover opportunities we hadn't previously considered."

AlphaRoute said its software uses optimization algorithms and scenario modeling to test thousands of routing options. The company said the process combines computer analysis with input from district staff to produce plans that work in day-to-day operations.

In addition to projected savings and route reductions, AlphaRoute said the project maintained bell times and stop locations. The company also said the district gained access to scenario data and planning tools for future decisions.

"Many districts have strong operational foundations, but limited time and tools to explore alternatives at scale," an AlphaRoute executive said in the release. The executive said the Leander ISD work shows how data-driven reviews can identify practical changes while maintaining service.

School districts nationwide have faced driver shortages and rising transportation costs, AlphaRoute said. The company pointed to national reporting by the Economic Policy Institute that found staffing challenges remain a persistent issue.

AlphaRoute said route optimization can help districts better use drivers and buses without major disruptions. The company also said planning tools can help leaders test "what-if" scenarios before making policy or operational decisions.

AlphaRoute, based in Waltham, Massachusetts, provides transportation software and consulting services for K-12 school districts, according to the release. The company said its products include routing and planning tools, real-time dispatch with GPS and student tracking, mobile apps for parents and drivers, and an AI assistant it calls Alphie AI.

SENTENCE

from page A1

sponsive in his bed in December 2023, according to the Williamson County District Attorney's Office. Investigators said they found a clear bag with residue that later tested positive for fentanyl.

Prosecutors said McMeekin bought "M30" pills marketed to look like Percocet. Investigators tied the purchase to Haynes through messages and payments on Telegram and Cash App, authorities said.

Officials said evidence at trial showed McMeekin asked Haynes whether the pills contained fentanyl. The district attorney's office said McMeekin referenced a previous overdose in that message.

Authorities described Haynes as operating "a virtual storefront" to sell drugs and firearms. Dick said the case reflected a tougher approach in Williamson County toward fentanyl deaths linked to drug distribution.

Under a Texas law that took effect in September 2023, prosecutors can pursue murder charges when fentanyl distribution results in a death, authorities said. Officials described Haynes' case as the county's first jury trial conviction under the newer approach.

After the guilty verdict, Haynes pleaded guilty to a related fentanyl delivery charge and asked the court to set punishment on both cases, authorities said.

During sentencing, prosecutors presented evidence that Haynes continued selling narcotics and guns after McMeekin's death. Authorities said deputies arrested Haynes in March 2024 with more than 57 fentanyl pills, cocaine, other pills and THC vape cartridges, along with a loaded gun that had an obliterated serial number.

Haynes' attorney, Sam Bassett, said after the verdict that the defense disagreed but respected the jury's decision.

JUSTICE

from page A1

review in a second phase.

A tentative project schedule in county planning materials shows programming targeted for completion in 2026, with construction listed as starting in 2027 and continuing into 2030, followed by a transition to new facilities in 2031. The county described the schedule as preliminary.

Williamson County hosted a public information session on the project from 5 to 7 p.m. Tuesday, April 21, at the EMS North Campus, 3189 S.E. Inner Loop in Georgetown. The event was come-and-go, with no formal presentation.

WATER

from page A3

the cost — include developing new supplies from aquifer storage and recovery, brackish groundwater, desalination and recycled water. It also calls for water conservation.

The report suggested that if Texas does not implement the plans and recommendations, the state is one severe drought away from an estimated $91 billion in economic damages in 2030.

The state's plan attributes a variety of reasons for the bigger price tag, such as higher costs of construction due to inflation, impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on supply chains, and a growing backlog of water supply projects.

"There's a plan that can meet our needs," said Matt Nelson, deputy executive administrator for the Office of Planning at the water development board, adding that they take their cues from the regional planning groups. "These are local projects that folks need to implement; they're needed regardless of how they're funded. It's important to remember these are not top-down projects or state projects."

Experts told The Texas Tribune that the board's estimate is only a fraction of what Texas communities will need to ensure they have water in 50 years' time, saying growth and development are outpacing the state's ability to keep up.

"This is a bigger water plan in terms of volume strategies and capital costs compared to anything we've ever seen before," said Jeremy Mazur, the director of infrastructure and natural resources policy at think tank Texas 2036.

Mazur suggested that the $174 billion only covers water supply projects and does not account for updating aging infrastructure, adding that the actual price could amount to a quarter of a trillion dollars.

"There's a substantial magnitude with regard to the capital investment needed to both fix our aging and current systems and potentially develop the water infrastructure, water supply projects that we need."

The report largely confirmed what many water experts have warned regarding threats to the state's water supply, said Sarah Kirkle, director of policy at the Texas Water Association.

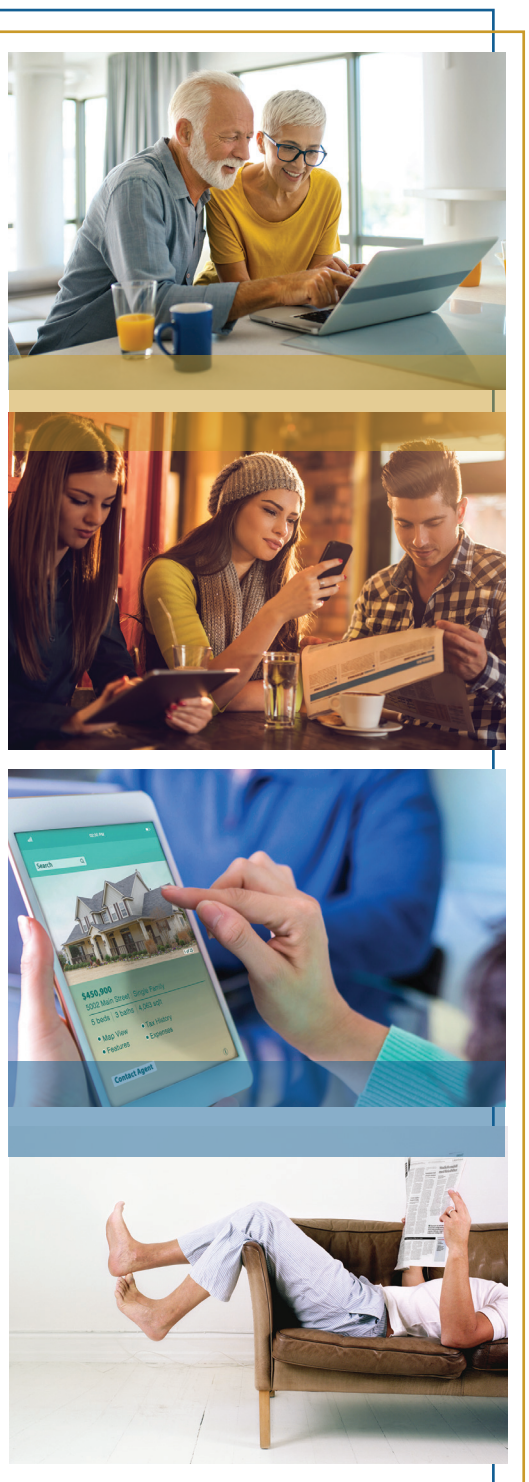
"Population growth, extreme weather, and economic development needs are all increasing demands on our infrastructure, and the state is going to need more water, sooner," Kirkle said. "This is all while water projects are becoming more costly and complex because the easiest and cheapest local projects have already been developed."

Fowler, with the infrastructure network, said he expects the Texas Legislature to take up the issue next year, when lawmakers meet for the 90th legislative session. He said the state should take a bigger role in ensuring that communities can afford their respective water projects.

"It's going to have to be a top-down priority, there's no way around it," he said. "The challenges are so immense that it's going to take all hands on deck."

Texas residents have until the end of May to comment on the proposal. Water development board officials must adopt it by January 2027.

— Alejandra Martinez contributed to this story.



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NEWS

Austin Water wins 2026 IDC Smart Cities award for My ATX Water



COURTESY PHOTO

Left to right: Samantha Smith, Business Process Consultant, Sr. & Ariel Brown with Austin Water Technology / IT Service Owner.

STAFF REPORTS

AUSTIN — Austin Water has won a 2026 Smart Cities North America Award from International Data Corp. for its My ATX Water smart meter replacement program and online customer portal, the utility said.

The award recognizes "leading practices and innovation" in government projects across North America, according to the announcement. Austin Water said the program aims to modernize water metering, improve customer service and support long-term water conservation.

Austin Water began installing smart meters in September 2020 as part of the My ATX Water program. The utility said it has installed nearly 267,000 meters, giving customers access to near real-time water-use data through the portal.

The portal provides several features, the utility said, including customized alerts when water use spikes — which can signal a leak — and daily water-use updates. Customers can also set a water budget threshold and receive alerts if usage exceeds that target, Austin Water said. The portal also produces monthly use reports designed to help customers identify conservation opportunities.

Since 2021, customers have saved an estimated 1.2 billion gallons of water by receiving leak notifications through the portal and making repairs, Austin Water said.

"This recognition reflects Austin Water's commitment to preparing for the future by using technology in ways that make a real difference for our community," Austin Water Director Shay Ralls Roalson said in a statement. "Our My ATX Water Portal gives our customers the power and tools they need to play an active role in protecting Austin's water supply."

> **"This recognition reflects Austin Water's commitment to preparing for the future by using technology in ways that make a real difference for our community."**
>
> SHAY RALLS ROALSON
> Austin Water Director

IDC said the Smart Cities North America Awards highlight projects by states, provinces, municipalities and educational institutions. Austin Water said winners were honored at an awards ceremony during the Smart Cities Connect conference on March 11.

"Organizations throughout North America continue to find new ways to provide services for their communities and improve the experience of working in, and with, the public sector," Ruthbea Yesner, vice president for IDC Government Insights, Education and Smart Cities, said in a statement.

Austin Water said it provides water services to more than 1 million people across more than 538 square miles in the Austin metropolitan area.

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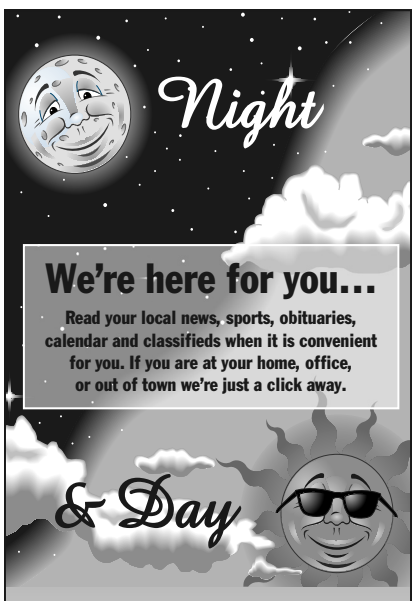
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950 PUBLIC NOTICES

APPLICATION HAS BEEN MADE WITH THE TEXAS ALCOHOLIC BEVERAGE COMMISSION FOR A MIXED BEVERAGE PERMIT BY THE VAULT RETRO BAR LLC DBA THE VAULT, TO BE LOCATED AT 7652 183A TOLL RD, LEANDER, WILLIAMSON COUNTY, TEXAS 78641. OFFICER OF SAID CORPORATION IS JENNIFER DIAZ - OWNER.

April 16 Puzzle Answers

9	8	5	6	1	3	4	2	7
2	1	4	9	7	8	3	5	6
6	3	7	5	4	2	9	8	1
5	4	6	7	9	1	8	3	2
1	7	2	8	3	4	6	9	5
8	9	3	2	6	5	1	7	4
7	5	1	3	8	6	2	4	9
3	6	9	4	2	7	5	1	8
4	2	8	1	5	9	7	6	3



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950 PUBLIC NOTICES

PUBLIC NOTICE: OFFICE CLOSURE

This notice is being published to inform our patients and the community that Aspen Dental Round Rock, located at **2800 South Interstate 35, temporarily closed effective March 31, 2026.**

After this date, the office will no longer be open to patients, and normal business operations will be paused. All patient records from the Round Rock location will be available at Aspen Dental Cedar Park, located at 4807 183-A Toll Road Cedar Park, TX 78613, (512) 616-6853.

Notice Public Hearing

The City of Lago Vista Planning and Zoning Commission will hold a Public Hearing on May 14, 2026 at 4:00 PM in the Council Chambers at City Hall, located at 5803 Thunderbird, Lago Vista, Texas to receive citizen input in consideration of the following:

Consideration and recommendation on an amendment to Chapter 14 of the Code of Ordinances of the City of Lago Vista, TX, also known as the "Zoning Ordinance", specifically Section 20, Tree Preservation and Landscaping Requirements, Subsection (E)(7), by removing the word "Pocket". Copies of the proposed amendment are available for public review at City Hall.

All interested persons are invited to attend.

NOTICE TO ALL PERSONS HAVING CLAIMS AGAINST THE ESTATE OF GLENDA MARY SMITH, DECEASED

Notice is hereby given that original Letters Testamentary upon the Estate of Glenda Mary Smith, Deceased, were issued to Elizabeth Butler Smith Wilson on April 14, 2026, in Cause No. C-1-PB-26-000220, in the Travis County Probate Court No. 2 of Travis County, Texas, which matter is still pending. All persons having claims against said estate are required to present same within the time prescribed by law to:

Elizabeth Butler Smith Wilson
c/o Erin F. Stevens
Haley & Olson, P.C.
100 N. Ritchie Road, Suite 200
Waco, Texas 76712

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950 PUBLIC NOTICES

PUBLIC NOTICE

The City of Leander Planning and Zoning Commission will meet on May 14, 2026 at 6:00 p.m. at Pat Bryson Municipal Hall, 201 North Brushy, Leander, Texas, to hold a public hearing to consider the following:

AND

The City of Leander City Council will meet on June 18, 2026 at 7:00 p.m. at Pat Bryson Municipal Hall, 201 North Brushy, Leander, Texas, to hold a public hearing to consider the following:

Conduct a Public Hearing and consider action regarding Zoning Case Z-25-0195 to amend the Leander Springs PUD (Planned Unit Development) with base zoning districts of MF-2-A (Multi-Family) and GC-3-A (General Commercial) to update the language as it relates to phasing and timing of the development, reduce the total number of apartments, and modify the phasing requirements on two (2) parcels of land approximately 77.90 acres ± in size, more particularly described by Williamson Central Appraisal District Parcels R403524 and R051592; and generally located southwest of the intersection of 183A Toll Road and RM 2243, Leander, Williamson County, Texas. Applicant/Agent: iLand Development Group (Pete Conklin) on behalf of Stallion Texas Real Estate Fund, LLC., Stallion Texas Real Estate Fund II – REIT, LLC. Austerra Stable Income Fund, LP., and Austerra Stable Growth Fund, LP. (Vincent Balagia).

Conduct a Public Hearing and consider action regarding Zoning Case Z-26-0212 to amend the current zoning of GC-2-C (General Commercial) and SFT-2-B (Single-Family Townhouse) to adopt the Lifetime Fitness Minor PUD (Planned Unit Development) with the base zoning of LC-3-C (Local Commercial) on two (2) parcels of land 14.037 acres ± in size, more particularly described by Williamson Central Appraisal District Parcels R031386 and R031387; and generally located south of Hero Way West, approximately 1,600 feet east of the intersection with N. Bagdad Road, Leander, Williamson County, Texas. Applicant/Agent: Lifetime (Natalie Nye) on behalf of Leander Hero Holdings (Muralidhar Bandlapalli).

Conduct a Public Hearing and consider action regarding Zoning Case Z-26-0220 to amend the current zoning of Interim SFR-1-B (Single-Family Rural) to adopt the Newton Nursery Minor PUD (Planned Unit Development) with the base zoning of LC-2-A (Local Commercial) on one (1) parcel of land approximately 5.018 acres ± in size, more particularly described by Williamson Central Appraisal District Parcel R516920; and generally located south of San Gabriel Parkway, approximately 800 feet west of the intersection with CR 270, Leander, Williamson County, Texas. Applicant/Agent: Westwood (Hollis Scheffler) on behalf of Newton Nurseries Leander Operating, LLC. (Megan Tervo).

Robin M. Griffin,
Executive Director of Development Services
512-528-2791

Austin claims 2nd straight LOVB title with golden set win over Salt Lake

STAFF REPORTS

LOVB Austin rallied from an opening-match loss and delivered under pressure Saturday night, defeating LOVB Salt Lake in a five-set battle before clinching the League One Volleyball championship with a decisive golden set to secure its second consecutive title.

Austin won the match 25-20, 21-25, 22-25, 25-22, 15-11, then closed the championship with a 15-8 golden set victory in front of a sellout crowd at the LBS Financial Credit Union Pyramid.

After dropping Thursday's series opener in five sets, Austin responded in a must-win scenario with a balanced performance and late-match composure. Outside hitter Logan Eggleston led the charge, finishing with 15 kills, 14 digs and three blocks in the match, while contributing three more points in the golden set.

"We are creating a legacy, we are really showing what Austin volleyball is ... it is really cool in a new league that is this competitive to come out on top [two years in a row]," Eggleston said.



COURTESY LEAGUE ONE VOLLEYBALL

LOVB Austin players celebrate after winning the league title on Saturday in Long Beach, California. It was the franchise's second-straight League One Volleyball title.

The match swung on momentum runs throughout. Austin controlled the opening set behind strong net play, but Salt Lake answered with disciplined defense and timely offense to take the next two sets and push Austin to the brink.

Facing elimination, Austin steadied in the fourth set before closing out the fifth. Madisen Skinner delivered key points late, including a tip that extended the lead to 12-9, helping Austin maintain control down the stretch and force the winner-take-all golden set.

"We knew going into that fifth set that we had every opportunity to go out and win that game," Eggleston said.

Austin carried that momentum into the golden set, using a five-point run to build separation early. The lead held as the team maintained pressure before Eggleston sealed the title with a match-ending kill.

Skinner, who posted 21 points and nine digs in the match, was named championship MVP for the second straight year after also contributing two points in the golden set.

"I think a lot of us are also chasing more than championships, we're chasing connection and personal growth," Skinner said. "We want to win, but with this group, that wasn't the end goal."

Austin's title run capped a dramatic two-match series in which Salt Lake took the opener 16-14 in a fifth set Thursday before Austin responded to win both the rematch and the golden set to defend its crown.

April 18, 2026

BOX SCORE

Austin	25 21 22 25 15 — 3
Salt Lake	20 25 25 22 11 — 2

GOLDEN SET

Austin	15
Salt Lake	8

KEY PLAYER STATS

Austin — Madisen Skinner: 21 points, .342 hitting, 9 digs
Austin — Logan Eggleston: 15 kills, 14 digs, 3 blocks
Austin — Molly McCage: double-digit points *(exact total not specified)*
Austin — Madi Banks: double-digit points *(exact total not specified)*
Austin — Asjia O'Neal: double-digit points *(exact total not specified)*

Texas Stars roll into playoffs after regular-season finale win

STAFF REPORTS

CEDAR PARK, Texas — The Texas Stars closed the regular season on a high note Saturday, defeating the Rockford IceHogs 5-1 at the H-E-B Center at Cedar Park, and now turn their attention to a Central Division Semifinals matchup against the Chicago Wolves in the Calder Cup Playoffs.

Texas opened the scoring early on a four-minute power play when Antonio Stranges connected from the left circle. Rockford answered midway through the first period, but the Stars regained control in the second when Harrison Scott scored his 18th goal of the season to give Texas a 2-1 lead.

The Stars pulled away in the third period with three unanswered goals. Dylan Hryckowian added an insurance tally on a rebound, Luke Krys scored from the slot, and Tristan Bertucci capped the scoring with a breakaway goal. Goaltender Remi Poirier made 19 saves as Texas outshot Rockford 36-20 in the win.

The victory sends Texas into the postseason with momentum ahead of a best-of-five series against Chicago. The teams will open the series with Games 1 and 2 at the H-E-B Center on April 28 and April 30 before shifting to Allstate Arena in Illinois for the remainder of the matchup.

Texas dominated the season series against the Wolves, posting a 7-1-0-0 record, including a perfect 4-0 mark at home. The Stars also went 3-1 in Chicago, showing consistency across both venues.

The postseason meeting marks the first playoff matchup between the teams since 2010, when Texas advanced in a seven-game series. With recent success against Chicago and a strong finish to the regular season, the Stars enter the playoffs positioned as a formidable contender in the Central Division.



LOGAN FOUST / TEXAS STARS

The Texas Stars will host the Chicago Wolves to start the Calder Cup Playoffs beginning next Tuesday.

Upcoming Schedule

(Central Division Semifinals, best-of-five)

- **Game 1** — April 28, 7 p.m., H-E-B Center at Cedar Park
- **Game 2** — April 30, 7 p.m., H-E-B Center at Cedar Park
- **Game 3** — May 2, 7 p.m., Allstate Arena
- **Game 4** — May 3, 3 p.m., Allstate Arena *(if necessary)*
- **Game 5** — May 5, 7 p.m., Allstate Arena *(if necessary)*

LAST GAME SUMMARY

Texas 5, Rockford 1

Shots: Texas 36, Rockford 20
Winning Goalie: Remi Poirier (19 saves)



FILE PHOTO / SCOTT W. COLEMAN

Facundo Torres scored in the 78th minute at Toronto last Saturday, part of a much-improved attacking performance after two previous losses.

Austin FC settles for draw at Toronto after late equalizer caps wild swing

STAFF REPORTS

Austin FC stopped a two-game slide but was left with mixed emotions after conceding a late equalizer in a 3-3 draw against Toronto FC on Saturday at BMO Field.

The Verde & Black earned a point on the road following consecutive setbacks — a 2-1 home loss to the LA Galaxy and a 2-1 defeat to Louisville City FC that eliminated them from the U.S. Open Cup — but surrendered a lead in the closing minutes that denied them a needed win.

Austin (1-3-4) showed a response after those results, opening the scoring in the 29th minute when Jon Bell finished from close range. Toronto answered in the second half through Daniel Salloi (52nd minute) and Richie Laryea (67th), putting the hosts ahead 2-1.

Austin regained control late. Facundo Torres capped a team buildup in the 78th minute to level the match, and Christian Ramirez converted a loose ball four minutes later to give Austin a 3-2 advantage.

But the lead lasted only six minutes. Toronto's Kobe Franklin scored in the 88th minute, finishing a rebound to pull the hosts even and secure the final 3-3 result.

The draw came against a Toronto side that extended its unbeaten run to six matches and its home unbeaten streak to 12, underscoring the difficulty of the road result. Still, Austin was unable to close out the match after taking a late lead.

Austin held a 54.8% edge in possession but was outshot 17-12 and 11-6 in shots on goal, according to the match stats. Goalkeeper Brad Stuver and the defense absorbed sustained pressure, particularly in the opening minutes when Toronto forced multiple saves.

The performance marked a shift from Austin's previous two matches, where it struggled to generate consistent attacking play. Against Toronto, the club produced three goals from Bell, Torres and Ramirez and created multiple scoring sequences in the second half.

Even so, the inability to secure all three points continued a trend of narrow margins during a difficult stretch. Austin had taken a 3-2 lead in the 82nd minute before conceding late.

Austin returned to league play on the road at San Jose on Wednesday and will host the Houston Dynamo on Saturday at 7:30 looking to build on the improved attacking performance while addressing defensive lapses.

BOX SCORE

Toronto FC	0 3 — 3
Austin FC	1 2 — 3

SCORING SUMMARY

ATX — Jon Bell 29'
TOR — Daniel Salloi 52'
TOR — Richie Laryea 67'
ATX — Facundo Torres 78'
ATX — Christian Ramirez 82'
TOR — Kobe Franklin 88'

TEAM RECORDS

Austin FC (1-3-4),
Toronto FC (3-2-3)

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