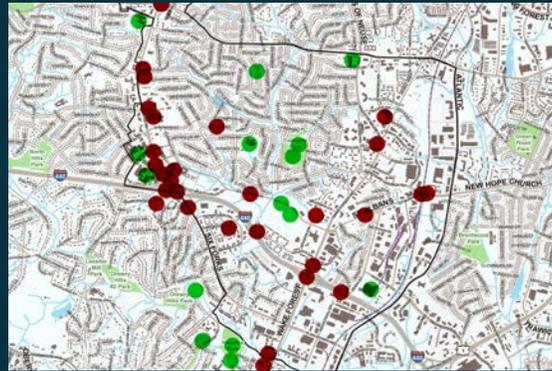




Midtown-St. Albans Area Plan



Visioning Event Summary

July 2018



A photograph showing two men in a room. One man, wearing a brown hat and a dark t-shirt with a logo, is pointing at a large map on a wall. The other man, in a dark long-sleeved shirt, is looking at the map. The map is a detailed street map with various colored markers.

Community outreach

A photograph of a large community meeting. Many people are seated at round tables, looking at maps and documents. Some people are standing and talking. The room is well-lit and has a professional atmosphere.

3 in-person events, including
two Saturday events

1 month of online survey activity

A photograph of a woman with short white hair, wearing a black and white patterned top, looking at a large map on a wall. The map is titled "MIDDLETOWN ST. ALBANS AREA PLAN" and shows a street network. Other maps are visible on the wall behind her.

400+ total participants

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Project Introduction

Area Planning Process and Plan Purpose

The purpose of Midtown-St. Albans area study is to provide detailed multi-modal transportation, streetscape, urban design, and land use recommendations that are based on stakeholder input and a thorough understanding of community values, history, and future development scenarios. These recommendations will act as policy guidance to future transportation, land use, and urban design decisions. One primary objective of the Midtown-St. Albans Area Plan is to consider the transportation impacts of recent land use and zoning changes on existing and proposed transportation infrastructure in the Midtown area. Other topics will be considered as well, including those identified during community visioning exercises. The area planning process will use data collection, issue analysis, and various public input opportunities to formulate alternatives and recommendations for the Midtown-St. Albans area.

The process will include the following components:

- Visioning Workshop (summarized in this report)
- Inventory & Analysis
- Public Design Workshop
- Alternatives and Public Input
- Recommendations & Report

Study Area Background

With the exception of downtown, the Midtown area includes the most intensive zoning within the City of Raleigh. Millions of square feet of new development are expected in the coming years. While an interstate highway and several arterial streets serve the area, it does not have the type of connectivity and grid pattern found downtown, creating a set of transportation challenges.

The area has seen extensive development in recent decades. North Hills is a nationally-recognized example of a suburban place retrofitted and redeveloped as a walkable urban center. Starting in 2003 with the redevelopment of an aging enclosed mall and strip center into a mixed-use development featuring retail, hotel, office, and residential, the approval of the North Hills East Master Plan in 2007 set the stage for an even more significant transformation on the east side of Six Forks Road, featuring high-rise office buildings, a variety of residential types, and even more retail. The build-out of North Hills, as summarized in an Urban Land Institute Case Study, includes roughly a million square feet of office and retail, over 500 hotel rooms, and nearly 1,400 residential units. A recent expansion of the master plan increased this potential even further.

The Six Forks Corridor Study, which explored options for widening Six Forks Road north of Interstate 440, and recent rezoning petitions along St. Albans Drive, which allowed greater intensities and heights, have raised community concerns about transportation impacts and transit options for the areas surrounding St. Albans Drive. St. Albans Drive currently serves as a transition line between the existing and proposed mixed-use development to the south and older, primarily residential, areas to its north. It also serves a more traditionally suburban commercial area and Duke Raleigh Hospital along Wake Forest Road, before turning northward to terminate at New Hope Church Road. With the recent rezoning changes and Six Forks Corridor improvements, St. Albans Drive area is poised to see significant change as this part of Raleigh continues to grow and transform. Neighborhood streets that connect into St. Albans—including Hardimont, Dartmouth, and Quail Hollow—may see traffic spillover from increased trips to and from the area.

Public input

Input for this report came from a series of online and in-person events held during June 2018.

More than 400 participants told us what they like about the Midtown-St. Albans area — and what needs some work.

This is the first step in a series of opportunities for public input in the plan. Beginning here at the broad vision stage, the process will increasingly focus on specific options to address key questions.



Eastgate Park open house



Midtown Farmers Market pop-up event

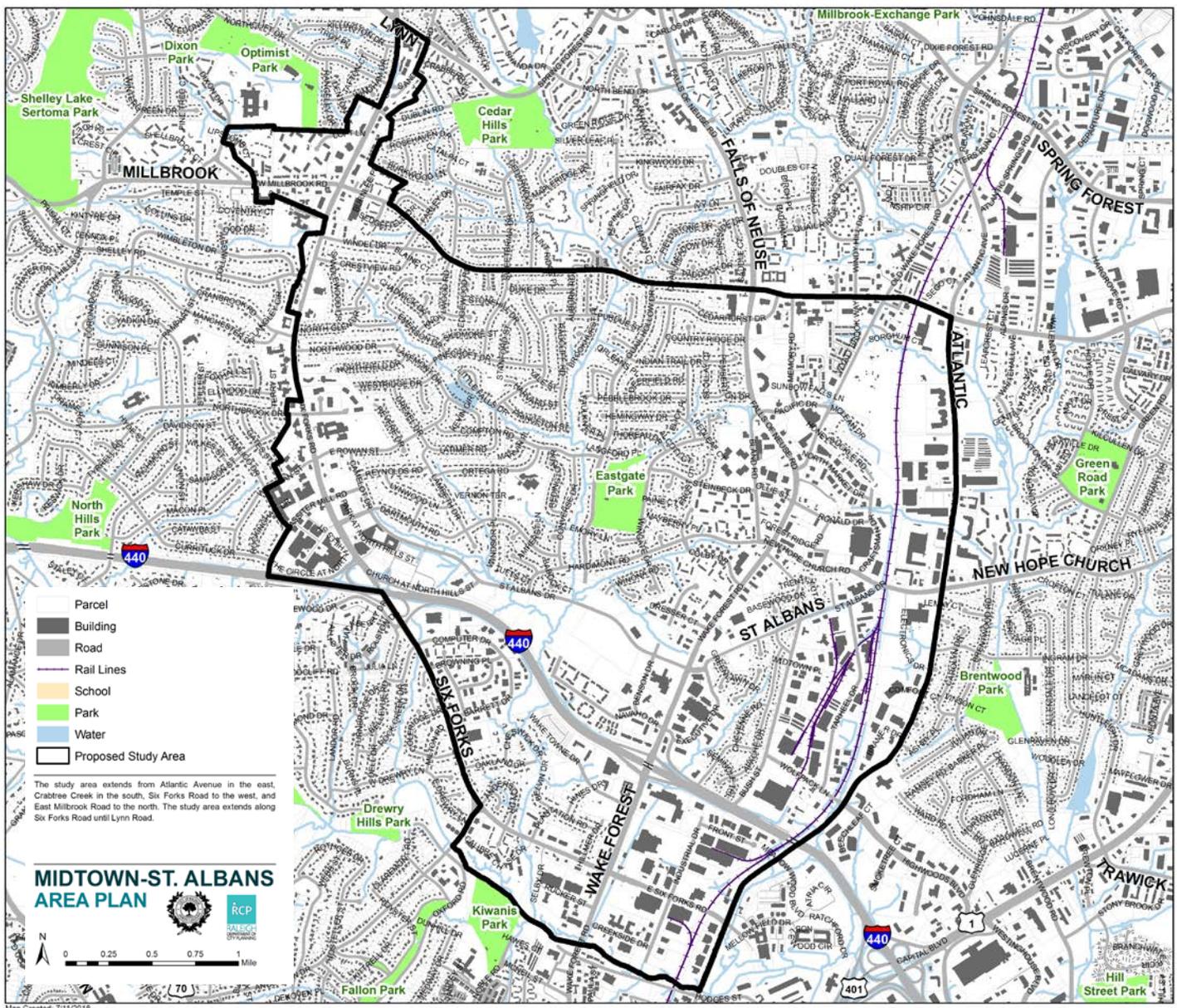


Trinity Baptist Church workshop

The Study Area

The study area is centered on the rapidly developing area just north of I-440 from Six Forks Road to Wake Forest Road. It extends south to Crabtree Creek and north to Millbrook Road and includes both strictly residential areas and more intense mixed-use and commercial areas.

A map showing the area boundaries and key locations is below; images showing the typical existing character in various locations are on the following page.





Office condominiums, south side of I-440. Barrett Drive.



Typical arterial intersection, with limited pedestrian comfort. Wake Forest/Hardimont/New Hope Church.



Two-story apartments. Navaho Drive.



Current condition of St. Albans Road between North Hills and Wake Forest Road.



Typical detached houses. Eastgate neighborhood.



Entrance to Crabtree trail, north side of Crabtree Creek.



No pedestrian options. I-440 overpass over Atlantic Avenue



Mixed-use development at North Hills. East side of Six Forks Road.

Visioning Process

Overview

The visioning process, which took place in May-June 2018, marked the official start of the plan process. The visioning events aimed to create a rich base of community-sourced knowledge about issues and opportunities in the area. That information will be used to focus the planning effort that follows. Specifically, it will assist in identifying where data gathering and analysis resources should be focused, both in terms of specific places and broader issues. Finally, it represented a way for residents, business owners, institutions, and others to share with each other and the City project team their hopes for the future of the area.

Schedule of Events

Visioning events for the Midtown-St. Albans Area Plan took place in the early summer of 2018. These included three in-person events and a currently-running online survey. Outreach was designed and promoted to reach a broad cross-section of stakeholders. The events included:

- Pop-up at Midtown Farmers Market at the Commons at North Hills. Saturday, June 2 from 8 a.m. to noon
- Evening workshop at Trinity Baptist Church. Thursday, June 7 from 6 to 8 p.m.
- Pop-up at Eastgate Park. Saturday, June 9 from 10 a.m. to noon.
- Online survey. May 18-June 22.

Outreach Process

The visioning events included significant promotional efforts, including the mailing of more than 5,000 postcards with information about the plan. Mailed notice was sent to each property owner and current resident within the project area, as well as within

a 100-foot radius of the plan area. In addition, a dozen apartment communities totaling more than 3,500 units were contacted and given flyers to post or electronically send to residents. The City also publicized the events through emailed notices to city newsletter subscribers, through social media including Facebook and Twitter, on the project website, and on signs posted along major corridors that run through the area. All invitations included the dates of the meetings and a link to the survey.

Visioning Event Process

Visioning meetings were held at three locations within the study area. The intent was to rotate venues throughout to engage feedback from a diverse set of stakeholders. “Pop-up” events were held on two different Saturday mornings, with a more traditional Thursday evening meeting between. The Thursday evening meeting began with a presentation followed by facilitated small group discussions. Attendance for each event ranged from 35 to 60 attendees with a total attendance of over 100 participants with the informal Saturday morning pop-ups seeing the most attendance. More than 300 respondents provided input through the survey, substantially adding to the responses gathered during the in-person events.

While the in-person events varied in format, they all included similar questions and exercises:

Issue prioritization exercise. Participants used dots to indicate what they feel are the three most important issues the area is facing.

Mapping exercise. Participants placed red and green dots to geographically locate the strengths and weaknesses of specific areas. In addition to placing dots, participants used sticky notes or wrote in the map to provide more information.

An open-ended exercise. This provided space for positive and negative thoughts that applied areawide, as well as an opportunity to share an overall vision for the area’s future.



The following section includes additional detail about the particulars of each event.

Farmers Market Pop-up. This event involved staffing a table at the Midtown Farmers Market on a Saturday. At this drop-in event, attendees were asked to individually identify strengths, weaknesses, issues and opportunities on a map of the study area. Information about the project scope, process, and existing conditions were also available to the public. Approximately 35-50 participants took part in the event.

Evening Workshop. The formal public meeting was held on weekday evening. Upon arriving, participants were given a preliminary opportunity to look at wall displays of area maps and provide initial comments. The meeting then began with a 20-minute presentation introducing the area planning process. The presentation included a brief overview of current policies and conditions specific to the plan area, including existing zoning, Future Land Use Map recommendations, floodplain, street plan, street connectivity, sidewalks, bike lanes, and bus routes. A timeline of future stages detailed how initial input would be utilized moving forward.

At the end of the presentation, instructions were given for the breakout session where community members in attendance would complete each exercise in small groups of no more than eight people. Attendees were then asked to review, discuss and provide feedback on the various questions. At the end of the evening, each group reported back to the whole. Approximately 35 people took part in the event.

Eastgate Park Pop-up. The final in-person visioning event, held on June 9, had a similar setup to the June 2 event, although the indoor location created more of an open house atmosphere and may have encouraged participants to stay longer. Approximately 30 people took part.

Online Survey. The survey was a key part of the input effort. Many residents do not have the time or inclination to attend in-person events, but still wish to add their voice to the input process. Accordingly, the process included significant efforts to promote the survey, and future public input periods will include similar opportunities.

The survey began by describing the Midtown-St. Albans area planning effort and outlined the planning area with a map. Similar to the in-person events, the survey was structured to ask participants about issues and opportunities for improvements as well as an overall vision for the area. Questions were structured similar to in-person exercises. A few additional questions asked about participants' age, location of residence and how they personally experience the area. Overall, 318 individuals participated in providing online public input, submitting 974 responses and 358 unique comments.

More than half of the respondents (53 percent) live in the area. Twenty percent visit the area, eight percent work there, and 15 percent pass through on their way to another destination.

Summary of Input

The following is a summary of the responses to questions posed at the public meetings and to the online survey responses. Much more raw data is available in the appendix to this report. A number of major themes emerged during the visioning meetings and were consistent across public events.

Top Issues

Generally speaking, transportation-related issues emerged as a primary theme (see the ranked list on the following page). Many residents expressed concern about the current and future impact of traffic on local streets. Many also mentioned a need to make the area safer and more comfortable for people walking or riding a bicycle. Similarly, a desire to see transit improvements emerged as another common theme.

Housing emerged as another significant issue, with many participants expressing concern about future housing affordability and hoping for a diversity of housing types in the area. Some respondents cited teardowns of older houses as an issue.

To gain a sense of the most pressing issues in the area, the events asked participants to rank issues in order of importance and to add additional issues if needed (see the full list on the following page).



Example of priority ranking input from Midtown Farmers Market event.

Top five issues*

The effect of traffic on local streets (66)

Walking and bicycling (51)

Getting around on transit (46)

Housing (types, location, affordability) (42)

Streetscape improvements (33)

*Numbers indicate the number of participants who ranked the issue among their top three.

The top three issues identified as priorities all related to transportation, although none of these directly involved getting around the area by car. The effect of traffic on local streets was the highest ranked issue out of all input gathered, online and in person, and participants listed a variety of examples of local streets experiencing increased traffic.

The next issue receiving strong support was walking or bicycling. Comments in this section included the need for more sidewalks, concerns about crossing Six Forks Road, and the possibility of adding bikeshare to the area. Getting around on transit was the third most prioritized issue. Comments regarding transit saw the need for the area to be more navigable by transit, and identified improved coverage, service, and infrastructure as current needs.

Beyond the three transportation issues, the next-most cited issue involved housing, specifically, the location, types, and affordability of housing. The next two issues, streetscape improvements and parks, both involved improvements to the public realm and could be seen as overlapping. The remaining issues, including getting around by car, land use, stormwater, development design, and transitions from commercial to residential, all received similar numbers of mentions. (See the appendix for a full list of comments.)

Issues as ranked by participants

(The numbers indicate the number of participants who included the issue in their top three)

- 1) Transportation: The effect of traffic on local streets (66)
- 2) Transportation: Walking or bicycling (51)
- 3) Transportation: Getting around on transit (46)
- 4) Housing (types of housing, location of housing, affordability) (42)
- 5) Streetscape improvements (street trees, benches, lighting) (33)
- 6) Creating or improving parks and public spaces (30)
- 7) Transportation: Getting around by car (30)
- 8) Land uses (what land uses should go where) (29)
- 9) Stormwater (27)
- 10) The design of new development (how close or how set back should buildings be from the street, how visible is parking) (27)
- 11) Transitions from commercial to residential areas (27)

Other commonly-mentioned issues

Environmental/wildlife issues

Greenways

Street connectivity

Safety

Issues Sorted by Topic

Comments on the subject of issues that need work were compiled and sorted by topic. A summary of the number of comments by topic follows:

- (54) Transportation: The effect of traffic on local streets
- (47) Transportation: Walking or bicycling
- (35) Transportation: Getting around by car
- (19) Land uses (what land uses should go where)
- (19) The design of new development (how close or how set back should buildings be from the street, how visible is parking, etc.)
- (15) Housing (types of housing, location of housing, affordability)
- (13) Transportation: Getting around on transit
- (11) Other: Connectivity
- (10) Stormwater
- (8) Creating or improving parks and public spaces
- (7) Other: Greenway Corridor
- (5) Other: Safety
- (5) Streetscape improvements (street trees, benches, lighting, etc.)
- (3) Other: Impact on local wildlife and the environment



Issues Mapped

Both the survey and in-person events included a mapping exercise designed to identify place-specific issues. Participants were asked to place green dots on a map on areas that they like or red dots in places that need help. The results are shown below and are available on the online map (link at raleighnc.gov, keyword Midtown, closed for

new comments). Generally speaking, green dots clustered around both sides of North Hills and other shopping areas, parks, and schools. Red dots generally reflected transportation concerns, such as traffic and pedestrian safety along Six Forks Road, particularly at North Hills; similar issues at major intersections on Wake Forest Road and other arterials; and traffic and speed in residential areas.

114 dots representing places or things people like.

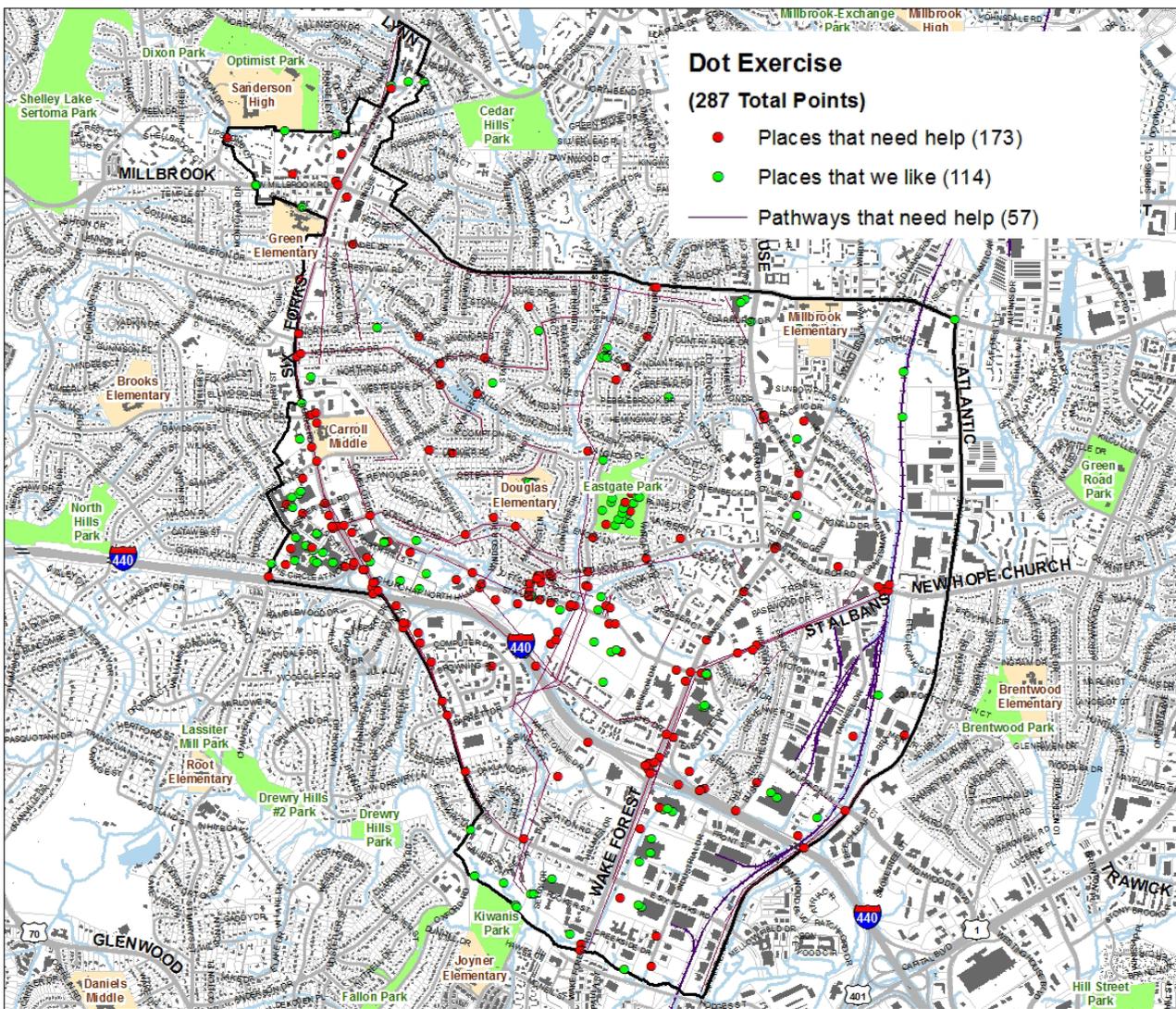
Comments most often included:

- (12) Park
- (4) North Hills
- (3) Greenway
- (3) Downtown
- (3) School
- (3) Trader Joe's

173 dots representing places that need help.

Comments most often included:

- (27) Traffic
- (14) Six Forks
- (10) Intersection
- (10) Pedestrian(s)
- (8) St. Albans
- (5) Development



Next Steps

This feedback will shape the next phase of the planning effort, which involves a deep dive into the current conditions of the area. This will include a look at current and projected future transportation demand, future development, infrastructure needs, and more.

Once this work is complete, another round of public input will take place to present these findings and gather additional feedback. Following that step, the next phase will be to develop and present different options and scenarios, which will again be the subject of a series of public input events, likely in spring 2019. That feedback will then be used to shape a draft report containing a series of recommendations, likely in summer 2019.



MSA

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Area Plan



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