

Urban designers set to unveil 'Minimum Grid' draft plan



Gehl planners Julia Day, facing camera, and Andreas Rohl, to her right, speak to residents about the “Minimum Grid” draft proposal today at Lakebottom Park.

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Two urban designers from the international Gehl Studios are in town to unveil a draft proposal for Midtown, Inc.’s “Minimum Grid” project to better connect the Midtown and Uptown communities.

The planners will present a formal presentation Tuesday in Council Chambers from 5:30-6:30 p.m., then will hold a public meeting at 6:45 in the Community Room of the City Services Center to gather more input from the public for the final fine-tuning of the proposal.

Monday evening, starting at about 5:30, Andreas Rohl and Julia Day of Gehl joined Midtown, Inc. executive director, Anne King, at the bandshell in Lakebottom Park for an informal, drop-in presentation of the draft proposal. Gehl’s work on the project is being funded by a grant from the Knight Foundation, through a competition called the Knight Cities Challenge. King and Midtown won the grant with their “Minimum Grid” proposal.

Day, who has made several trips to Columbus along with other Gehl planners to gather information on existing infrastructure, but also to get input from the public to help them, said they picked out five focus areas to test some pilot projects that could enhance connectivity between them.

“What we have here are draft recommendations for how we might improve walking and biking, just general connectivity between Midtown and Uptown, which is being called the ‘core community,’” Day said as several dozen residents browsed poster-sized pages of ideas for the project. “By ‘minimum grid,’ what we really want to think about are what are the key destinations that people want to go to on an everyday basis and how do we connect them, so they have more options for how they travel between them.”

Day’s Gehl partner on this trip is Andreas Rohl, who has worked extensively on alternative transportation and connectivity projects in Europe, said there is considerable potential for a program like “Minimum Grid” to have an impact in Columbus.

“What strikes me, and I’m not from here, is that you have a lot of very nice areas, but maybe they’re not that well connected,” Rohl said.

King said she was encouraged by the crowd of several dozen who showed up Monday evening and is looking forward to hearing the public’s response to the draft proposal Tuesday.

“This is what the community wants, what they’ve heard from the community,” King said. “It’s not a team coming in and saying, ‘This is what we see and this is what you need.’ It’s actually listening to people and finding out what the community’s favorite places are and hearing that people want to connect between them better and get from our neighborhoods to these wonderful places.”