Approach & Methods
Understanding places people love in Uptown and Midtown Columbus

Gehl Studio focuses on creating mutually beneficial relationships between people’s quality of life and their built environment. Gehl studies how people’s senses, movements, interests, and behaviors are influenced by the scale and quality of built form. The Gehl approach starts here to ensure design is guided by the unique features of a place — the features that make it welcoming and comfortable from the user-experience. This approach involves qualitative and quantitative analysis that helps collect data on people’s behavior and also understand their perception.

Favorite Place Workshops
Favorite Place Workshops start the planning process with a focus on what people love in their city and what’s working. They involve asking: Where do people currently feel invited or enjoy spending time? What qualities are missing from these places?

From a busy street corner to the parking lot of a fast food joint, cities of all sizes have public spaces loved or well-used by residents. Favorite Place Workshops and activities are designed to understand the qualities that make these places thrive and to understand why other public spaces in Columbus might not be performing to their greatest potential. By asking people to share what they love and what leads them to have a great experience in a place, we collect feedback that can be applied to developing design principles and guidelines.

Public Space, Public Life (PSPL) Survey and Quality Criteria
The Survey is a tool to collect people-oriented data and to document existing human behavior. It helps to understand how people use the streets in their city or neighborhood; the types of activities people engage in; the demographic mix of those people; and the barriers that may inhibit walking or socializing on the street. Data collected with the survey informs the strategies to make a place more connected, livable, walkable, and inviting to all.

The Gehl Quality Criteria is a tool to understand the qualities of a place and how it feels to be there. The Criteria is used as a complement to the quantitative data collected with the PSPL. It is organized into three core categories: protection, comfort, and delight. While these categories are essential to a quality space, they are broad. The Favorite Place Workshops help identify the more specific, locally important qualities for a place.

Developing Project Principles
The Favorite Place Workshops, the Public Space, Public Life Survey and Quality Criteria Assessment helped Gehl better understand what people love — and the areas in the city that need more love. They also helped define guiding project principles. The following pages detail the preliminary analysis and principles that emerged.

Surveyors count pedestrians on Broadway, mid-day on the weekend
6 Guiding Principles

01 Prioritize People, not Transportation
Focus on how people live and their everyday routines; follow their ‘desire lines.’

02 Support Democratic Streets
Provide choice and options by fostering equally safe, convenient, affordable and comfortable ways to move around.

03 Create Streets as Public Spaces
Make streets places, not just thruways to move from A to B.

04 Listen to Columbus
Engage with residents, businesses, students and all stakeholders to understand how they experience public space.

05 Connect Places and People
Focus on connecting places with activity, favorite places, cultural centers, shopping hubs, schools, major intersections, and parks.

06 Focus on Design and Programs
Change the design of places, but also host events and programs that draw people to a place.
Mapping what people want and care about

At a Favorite Place Workshop with 130 participants, held in March 2015 at the Columbus Museum, people worked in small groups to map their favorite places and identify the qualities that make them special. Understanding what people love and care about is an important element to making a successful mobility and public space plan reflective of Columbus’ identity, characteristics, and resident desires.

We asked:

What is your favorite place, and why?

Where do you feel invited to spend time?

What are the qualities of those places? What makes you want to spend time there?

Favorite places ranged from parks and trails, active streets and busy coffee shops, to civic institutions. Despite their differences, each creates places for people to be together or to be alone, but still around others.

The places mentioned more than once were:

1. RiverWalk (31)
2. Lakebottom Park (28)
3. Broadway (20)
4. Uptown Area (14)
5. Iron Bank Coffee (9)
6. 14th Street Bridge (8)
7. Flat Rock Park (8)
8. Bibb City / Fall Line Trace / Linwood Cemetery / The Village on 13th / Fountain City Coffee (4)
9. 1000 Block of Broadway / Malitude / City Island (3)
10. Buena Vista Road at St. Mary’s Road, at Peabrook Rd / City Village / Columbus Museum / Columbus Library (2)
Places that lack what people love

At the same workshop, participants mapped locations that present the greatest barriers to walking, biking or taking transit and that lack the qualities associated with favorite places.

As the map to the right shows, all of the locations identified were roads. This further emphasized that Columbus has great places and destinations - it is connecting to them that is the challenge.

The top priority areas identified (mentioned more than once) included:

1. 13th Street (20)
2. 1st Avenue (14)
3. Front Avenue (11)
4. Civic Commons / Linwood Boulevard (8)
5. Macon Road (7)
6. 2nd Avenue / West 5th Avenue / Wynnton Road (5)
7. West 10th Street (4)
8. Central Railroad (3)

The priority, challenge streets, along with the favorite places, helped identify where additional analysis and observation would be needed, as well as identifying opportunities for pilot projects.
How do we get more of what people love in the challenge areas?

Mapping favorite places and challenge areas in Uptown and Mid-Town revealed the locations that people love, as well as those that need attention. This helped identify places to analyze in detail, including where to conduct more direct observation of people’s behavior, and where to focus on surveying and collecting quantitative and qualitative data that could provide evidence to inform the Minimum Grid and pilot project strategies.

Three study methods were used to study public life and public space. Local partners and volunteers were critical to implementing the surveying.

Public Life, Public Space (PSPL) Survey

OBSERVE: Who and how are people using space? Where are people walking and biking? Where are they spending time? What are the ages and genders of the people walking and biking?

Intercept Survey

ASK: How do you travel & why? How would you like to get around in the future? Where are you going?

Mobility Survey

EXPERIENCE: Document the quality of one’s travel experience. How does it vary if one walks, drives, rides a bike or takes the bus?