Grand Rapids Announces Winner of City of Tomorrow Challenge

GRAND RAPIDS, Mich. – After working collaboratively with Ford Motor Company, AT&T, Dell Technologies and Microsoft, the City of Grand Rapids today announced the winning project in the Ford City of Tomorrow Challenge™. The winning proposal will be awarded $100,000 to fund a pilot program that will test its implementation in a real-world setting.

Kaizen Health, a proposal that aims to eliminate transportation as a barrier to good medical care, was chosen as the winning project in the City of Tomorrow Challenge – a crowdsourcing platform created to help prepare cities for the future by bringing groups of people together to design and pilot new solutions that help improve mobility in cities.

Kaizen Health is an early stage health technology company working to modernize and streamline access to transportation in partnership with providers, payers, self-insured employers and municipalities. The team is passionate about pursuing creative ways to deploy its technology and vehicle network to reduce unnecessary costs in health care and help people live healthier, happier lives. In Grand Rapids, the group has proposed a pilot that integrates existing services from Lyft, GO!Bus, The Rapid call center and Innova EV’s first- and last-mile vehicles to allow Grand Rapids residents to make independent decisions about their mobility options.

“This proposal stems directly from the experiences of Grand Rapids residents and the obstacles they face on a daily basis,” said John Kwant, vice president of Ford City Solutions. “Listening to the community, collaborating with residents and bringing them into the design process is a new and novel approach to developing mobility solutions, and it’s exactly the kind of local engagement we wanted to foster with the City of Tomorrow Challenge.”

Through its Mobile GR-Parking Services Department, the City worked closely with the Ford City of Tomorrow Challenge team to solicit ideas from the community. The best idea was chosen as a pilot solution that will focus on addressing pain points and issues that residents shared with the Challenge program regarding mobility in Grand Rapids.

“This has been a great partnership with Ford to engage our community in the future of mobility in Grand Rapids,” said Josh Naramore, Mobile GR-Parking Services manager. “The stories and experiences we have heard from residents and other community stakeholders through this process are guiding our work to make sure this is an accessible city for everyone.”

Launched in June, the City of Tomorrow Challenge was created to help prepare cities for the future by identifying new mobility designs and innovations that could improve the way people get around. The Challenge platform brought together officials, residents and local businesses in Grand Rapids as well as program sponsors AT&T, Dell Technologies and Microsoft, encouraging people to share their mobility experiences.

More than 200 Grand Rapids residents and community stakeholders engaged with the Challenge throughout the process and more than 100 proposals for ideas were received via the website. Twelve semifinalists were chosen to work with a mentor and local accelerator to further refine their proposals before a winner was selected.

“Dynamic mobility solutions are the foundation for our future cities,” said Amanda Roraff, operations manager of PlanetM, a mobility-focused brand and business development program at the Michigan Economic Development Corporation. “The practical solution unveiled today will have an immediate, positive impact on real transportation challenges facing city residents. This pilot project puts Grand Rapids at the forefront of the mobility revolution, and we’re excited to welcome this solution to Michigan’s mobility ecosystem.”
Throughout the Challenge, people were encouraged to submit ideas in three key areas:

- **Enable smart transportation choices** – How might we deliver useful information for seamless travel around Grand Rapids? When planning a commute, it’s crucial to know when the bus arrives, where the safe bike paths are and how construction or events downtown impact travel time. The Challenge sought innovative and accessible tools to help travelers navigate around town, with a focus on creating awareness and simplicity for those with disabilities or other barriers to using the current system.

- **Extend mobility options** – How might we provide dynamic mobility options that build on the existing transportation network? What are mobility options that can extend or enhance the existing infrastructure and services? Grand Rapids has key locations for jobs, health care and education that may not be easily accessible by public transportation. Solutions should focus on areas of Grand Rapids with concentrations of households facing multiple social vulnerabilities – for example, less than high school diploma attainment, living at or below poverty levels, limited English proficiency, etc. Also, consider the cost of transportation, the unique needs of people with disabilities and the challenges of traveling during different times of day or days of the week. How might we offer new transportation options at times, locations and places that are currently underserved?

- **Encourage walking, biking and busing** – How might we build on efforts to make Grand Rapids a more walkable and bikeable city? Ideas should make walking, biking and busing more accessible and enjoyable options for getting around Grand Rapids. Some people might face barriers when considering those options – both social and infrastructural. Maybe they are worried about the safety of the area for walking or biking, or maybe they are not sure how to find out the schedule of nearby bus routes. How might we encourage walking, biking, and busing in a way that improves the quality of life for all?

For more information on the semifinalists and other proposals that were submitted, CLICK HERE.

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