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Business

Columbus companies add elbow room with outdoor work spaces

By Patrick Cooley

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MKC Architects, Continental Office and ootBox, all of which are based in Columbus, used three Downtown parking spaces Friday to showcase their vision for the future of work.

Three Columbus companies spent Friday morning and afternoon showing central Ohio what the future of work might look like.

The occasion was “PARK(ing) Day,” an annual international event first observed by landscape architects in San Francisco and intended to showcase alternative uses for on-street parking spaces.

MKC Architects partnered with office supplier Continental Office and the startup ootBox which leases portable offices and meeting spaces to create an outdoor work area in front of several parking meters outside the MKC office on

ootBox co-founder Allison Zofan sat inside a portable office resembling a shipping container at the west end of the three spaces. She worked and answered questions from anyone who walked by.

“Generally, when you drive by and you see a box on the street it raises questions,” she said. “There’s been lots of interest and curiosity.”

While the company has been in the works for more than a year, it first offered its services in June, at the height of the coronavirus pandemic.

“Pre-COVID, when we would talk to people about the need for additional space, everyone thought we were crazy,” Zofan said.

She said the company has been inundated with calls this year.

“Home offices are obviously a big thing right now,” she said. “Especially now, with COVID, people are looking for controlled spaces to work.”

Zofan expects the pandemic to result in a permanent shift away from traditional offices, and predicts that customers will remain interested in the company’s services.

pcooley@dispatch.com

[@PatrickACooley](#)

Chestnut Street.

“It’s about reallocating public space and not just taking it all up with parking spots,” said Katie Shipman, an MKC designer.



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The event took on special importance this year by showcasing an open-air office, she said.

Last year, MKC set up an outdoor reading space in front of Prologue Books in the Short North, Shipman said.

In 2020, however, it was especially important to demonstrate that offices can be moved outside, with enough space for employees to distance themselves, said Allison Rubadue, an MKC project designer.

Doctors largely agree that outdoor spaces are safer than indoor spaces during the coronavirus pandemic.

The companies paid for three spaces for the day, using them as an open-air lounge and office, complete with desks, sofas and wireless internet. An open canopy with a colorful wire frame separated the space from the street and sidewalk and passersby could easily mingle with representatives of MKC and ootBox.

The setup was a creative way to show companies there is an option between a traditional office and asking employees to work from home, Rubadue said.

“We’re using this as a solution to spread out office spaces and create socially distant work environments,” she said.