

Fourth phase of Pleasant Hill Road facelift nearly complete

Gwinnett Place CID expects to finish work by end of April

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Saul Martinez, right, checks to see if a cement block is flush while working on a new stone sign at the intersection of Pleasant Hill Road and Satellite Boulevard on Tuesday in Duluth. (Staff Photos: David Welker)

DULUTH — The sea of orange on Pleasant Hill Road near Gwinnett Place Mall is close to receding.

Drivers may have noticed it in recent months. It took the form of those waist-high barrels that are a sign of construction. It may not be the prettiest site, but officials with the Gwinnett Place Community Improvement District say the end result — new sidewalks, brick plazas, lighting, landscaping and park benches — will be a thing of beauty.

It's a move the businesses in the district are making to encourage customers to continue shopping in the area.

"When people come into an area, they make a decision about whether they should stay or move on in a matter of moments based on what the area looks like," CID Executive Director Joe Allen said. "That's why we have put in plants and landscaping in the area."

The CID has spent two years working to beautify the Pleasant Hill Road area through a series of streetscaping projects. It is close to finishing work on the project's fourth phase, which focuses on a stretch of roadway located between Venture Drive and Satellite Boulevard.

The current phase is expected to be completed sometime around April 23.

April 23.

The remaining work drivers are seeing this month includes landscaping and the installation in new lighting along the roadway. The lights will be "acorn"-style fixtures which Allen described as having a "turn of the century" feel.

It's a major investment in what the CID considers "Gwinnett's Main Street." Businesses in the district are spending \$375,000 to pay for the entire phase currently under construction. The first three phases were paid for through a mixture of the CID's funds, Transportation Enhancement Grants and assistance from county officials.

Once the current phase is completed, Pleasant Hill Road will be streetscaped from Club Drive to Satellite Boulevard. Business owners in the area — particularly hotel managers — said the construction can produce traffic hassles at times, but they like what it has done for the area.



Carlos Rodriguez uses a saw to cut blocks for other workers who are building a new stone sign at the intersection of Pleasant Hill Road and Satellite Boulevard on Tuesday in Duluth. (Staff Photo: David Welker)

"The look and the concept is great," said Tim Burns, general manager of the Hyatt Place at Gwinnett Place Mall. "Our customers have said it looks nice. The construction can be a headache at times, but overall, it's making a difference."

The CID won't rest on its laurels from the first four phases though. Allen said there are as many as five more phases left to complete before all of the work is complete.

A future project calls for improvements along Satellite Boulevard. However, there is no time line for when it will take place though. Allen said it will depend on when the CID can line up funding.

"If I could find a bunch of money, we'd get started right away, but as it is, we can only do work as we find funding," he said.

Allen said there are economic development benefits to making these kinds of improvements in a major shopping area. The work alone will make Pleasant Hill more attractive to potential business owners. The fact that the existing businesses are planning the project and backing it financially will boost the attraction, he said.

"When you have an area that is making these kinds of improvements, it says people are investing in the area and then other businesses will want to come in and invest in the area as well," Allen said.

The most important factor for economic development may be the attractiveness to potential customers, though. That is especially true for hotels in the area, said Burns and David Kohlasch, general manager of the Sonesta Gwinnett Place Atlanta hotel.

The area must look good when drivers pull off Interstate 85 and begin looking for a hotel to stay in, Kolasch said. Otherwise, they may pass by.

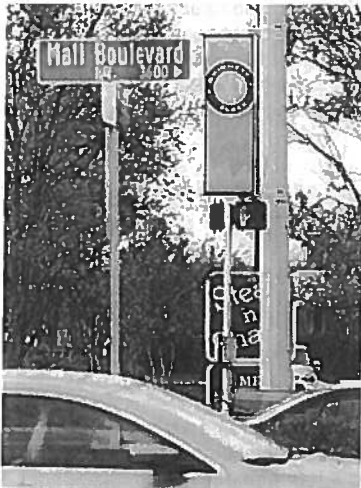
"It's critical that the area looks good because you only get one chance to make a good impression," Kohlasch said. "If the area doesn't look good, they may not give your hotel a second chance. Maybe not even a first chance."

Burns said this is true for any business, though.

"For businesses, the nicer an area is, the safer it looks and the more customers are going to want to visit," he said.



Each corner along Pleasant Hill Road between Satellite Boulevard and Venture Parkway has new benches and sidewalks as seen on Tuesday in Duluth. (Staff Photo: David Welker)



New signage is seen along Pleasant Hill Road between Satellite Boulevard and Venture Parkway on Tuesday in Duluth. (Staff Photo: David Welker)



New landscaping lines the sidewalk along Pleasant Hill Road between Satellite Boulevard and Venture Parkway on Tuesday in Duluth. (Staff Photo: David Welker)



Cars pass through the intersection of Pleasant Hill Road and Gwinnett Place Drive on Tuesday in Duluth. Crews are finishing up an addition of new landscaping and signage along Pleasant Hill Road between Satellite Boulevard and Venture Parkway. (Staff Photo: David Welker)



Renovated sidewalks are a new feature along Pleasant Hill Road between Satellite Boulevard and Venture Parkway on Tuesday in Duluth. (Staff Photo: David Welker)





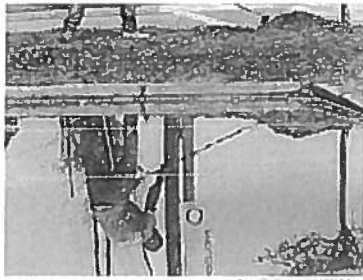
Saul Martinez uses a hammer to even out a cement block while working on a new stone sign at the intersection of Pleasant Hill Road and Satellite Boulevard on Tuesday in Duluth. (Staff Photo: David Welker)



Saul Martinez checks to see if a cement block is flush while working on a new stone sign at the intersection of Pleasant Hill Road and Satellite Boulevard on Tuesday in Duluth. (Staff Photo: David Welker)



Renovated sidewalks are a new feature along Pleasant Hill Road between Satellite Boulevard and Venture Parkway on Tuesday in Duluth.



Jarett Smith uses a rake to clean up an area where sod was removed near the intersection of Pleasant Hill Road and Satellite Boulevard on Tuesday in Duluth. The area is undergoing new landscaping in order to renovate the aesthetics of the area near the mall. (Staff Photo: David Welker)



Each corner along Pleasant Hill Road between Satellite Boulevard and Venture Parkway has new benches and sidewalks as seen on Tuesday in Duluth. (Staff Photo: David Welker)



Jarett Smith, left, and Juan Morales, right, use rakes to clean up an area where sod was removed near the intersection of Pleasant Hill Road and Satellite Boulevard on Tuesday in Duluth. The area is undergoing new landscaping in order to renovate the aesthetics of the area near the mall. (Staff Photo: David Welker)

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