

Districts to landscape I-85 ramps

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LILBURN - From Jimmy Carter Boulevard to Gwinnett Place Mall, the county's interchanges with Interstate 85 will soon be planted with trees, shrubs and wildflowers.

This week, two community improvement districts approved plans that will sod and landscape the ramps, beautifying what they hope will be gateways to the county and their communities.

The Gwinnett Village CID will spend no more than \$780,000 to landscape the interchanges at Jimmy Carter Boulevard, Indian Trail-Lilburn Road and Beaver Run Road, while the Gwinnett Place CID will pay no more than \$297,000 for landscaping at Steve Reynolds Boulevard and the south ramps of Pleasant Hill Road.

The road's north ramps are part of a major overhaul of I-85's interchange with Ga. Highway 316.

Community leaders said the plans will help distinguish Gwinnett and the districts as drivers come through the area.

"This is the front door," said Chuck Warbington, executive director of the Gwinnett Village CID. "It's just going to be an outstanding project. It's really going to put us on the map as the front door to Gwinnett."

In that CID, leaders hope that money spent on landscaping will help improve the image of the area and deter crime. Warbington said the intent of the oak trees, crepe myrtle, holly bushes, daisies and other items that will be planted is to have year-round color up and down I-85.

"It helps with the perception of cleaning up the area," he said.

Joe Allen, the executive director of the Gwinnett Place CID, said he hopes to expand the plantings into the north ramps at Pleasant Hill once construction is complete, possibly with the help of the construction company.

Both self-taxing districts are footing the entire bill for the improvements. The Gwinnett Place CID is also considering adding signs and banners to brand the area and direct drivers through the CID. Allen said the steps will help people identify the communities.

Gwinnett Village CID board member Bruce Le'Veil said that identification and a positive perception of the CID is imperative to the area's future.

"Image is critical," he said. "Critical, critical, critical."