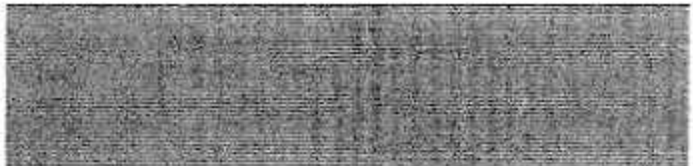


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DOT cuts back on landscaping

By [ARIEL HART](#)

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If highway shoulders look a little less manicured these days there's a reason: To cope with budget cuts the state Department of Transportation has cut back on roadside landscaping.

DOT spokesman Mark McKinnon said the agency is doing necessary landscaping, "like for sight distance and anything safety-related, like if a tree is about to fall over, removing it.

"But we are not doing any decorative landscaping, as a cost cutting measure," he added.

In the past DOT has planted decorative trees and bushes along some roads, McKinnon said, but not anymore.

The popular wildflower-sowing program is still on, though. That money is earmarked from license-plate fees, he said.

Between cleaning up its books and dealing with funding shortages, DOT has cut hundreds of millions of dollars in spending.

Local groups may take up some of the landscaping slack.

Some business groups already do. Before the current DOT cutbacks, for instance, a Gwinnett County group decided to go the extra mile with plantings along I-85 near the new interchange of Ga. 316.

The Gwinnett Place Community Improvement District, a self-taxing business district, is paying for magnolias, crape myrtles, bushes, professional sod and other landscaping, said Joe Allen, director of the group. The work is going on now, according to the CID.

As DOT cuts back and resorts to erosion-control grass, more local districts may take up more of the costs, Allen said. The effort on I-85 "improves the front door of our county's central business district," he said.