Eighth Street Facelift Begins Friday

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Volunteers will give East Eighth Street some much needed love on Friday as they mow, edge, sweep, plant and trim along the street and adorn each side with potted mums.

The ten local volunteers are among thousands of AmeriCorps members who plan to come out in force on Friday, coast-to-coast, to celebrate the nonprofit’s 20-year anniversary. The volunteers normally work with SEEDS to help combat issues of poverty, says Communications Manager Kaitlyn Burns.

The four-hour work bee comes in advance of next week’s restriping, which will add a bike lane in each direction and reduce car lanes from four to three -- including a turn lane -- between Lake Street and just east of Woodmere Avenue.

The project will also pare down the two left turn lanes from Woodmere onto Eighth Street to one, Missy Luick, the city’s planning and engineering assistant, tells The Ticker.

“The timing of the signal will be readjusted, maybe giving more time to make the left turn,” she said, adding that it may have to be tweaked a couple of times.

Drivers can expect lane closures during the required two days of work, which will start on Monday if the weather is dry.

Bob Otwell and Mike Coco organized a petition drive for the experimental restriping to slow down traffic to the 25 mph speed limit, widen the car lanes, and allow room for bicycles.

“Part of the reason we wanted to try this out is the city will completely rebuild the street in a few years,” Otwell explains. “We're trying to get ahead of the game and rebuild it with what we want. This is a trial. If this works out, we can design the final street for our lifetime.”

Critics of the overhaul contend it will clog traffic on a cross-town artery that already suffers from congestion, especially during rush hour. Others question how safe it is for bicyclists to ride on pavement marred by potholes and patches.

The city hired a consultant to come up with a plan to monitor traffic before and after the restriping to determine whether it will choke up traffic. The consultant’s findings will be presented later this fall or winter, Luick says. The restriping will cost $54,000, $23,000 of which is for design and $31,000 for implementation.