

They're only a week old, and already cars have hit them, errant sneakers have left marks and they're stirring up emotions among Bloomington residents.

Those green and purple concrete balls installed on the eastern corners of Kirkwood and Walnut are part of the newly announced Bloomington Entertainment and Arts District, or **BEAD** — which is what the balls are intended to be. Each was installed at a cost of about \$1,100, from the city's general fund.

But the beads aren't merely decorative. They were installed by the city to act as bollards, which protect pedestrians and bicycles from car traffic. Cars, especially delivery trucks, often drive over the curb while making turns on the narrow intersection.

That was one of the problems with the large planters that preceded the "beads," according to city Public Works Director Susie Johnson.

"We do have concerns — that is a tight intersection," Johnson said. "The old planters were hollow, and if they were even tapped by a vehicle, they wouldn't hold up to that. (The bollards) are solid, reinforced concrete."

But they are purple and green for a reason. The colors are meant to coincide with the logo of the new arts district's colors of purple, green, yellow and red.

Area residents and businesses, however, are split in their opinions on whether the new bollards beautify or degrade the city aesthetic.

"I've had no positive comments from customers," said Margaret Taylor, who owns Book Corner on the northeast corner of Kirkwood and Walnut. "This is an historic district, and they're not in keeping with that."

Taylor said she was also concerned about the safety to traffic that she believed would be impacted by the installation of the bollards.

"They were installed on a Friday, and by Saturday morning when I opened up my store, one of the balls had already been hit by a car," she said.

Amber Seger also works at Book Corner and said she and other employees make jokes about the bollards, and she hasn't heard anything positive about them.

Joseph Hunt, one of the owners of the Emporium on Kirkwood — a store selling many jewelry beads itself — said he agrees with comments that the street beads don't fit the look of the neighborhood.

But at the Uptown Cafe, just near the intersection, restaurant manager Anne Gardner said she hadn't heard anything negative about them, but said many don't understand the color scheme.

"People don't know why they're green and purple. We didn't know until recently," she said. "But I don't mind the balls, and I find that most people are curious about them."

The Bloomington Entertainment and Arts District was announced in 2006 by Mayor Mark Kruzan to encourage development of arts businesses downtown. As part of the **BEAD** plan, the city intends to install two more bollards in red and yellow, the other colors of the **BEAD** logo.

Miah Michaelson, the assistant economic development director for the arts for the city, says locations for the other two bollards are being studied.

"We're studying traffic patterns downtown to decide where they will be," she said. "We're looking at where we see consistent issues with cars driving over the curb."

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