New bridge to complete disputed section of Greenbelt in Eagle

Legal issues resolved, path in Laguna Pointe is getting spruced up for public use

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Joe Gomez installs the wood decking that will be well-worn as it provides a key part of a pathway from Eagle to Garden City.

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It wasn’t long ago that weeds and brush choked the public path along the south channel of the Boise River in Eagle to less than a foot. The wild, natural beauty might have been enjoyable to casual users, but it was frustrating to others, including commuters.

There was no easy way to follow the path across a river overflow channel without going through water,
which at times was deeper than many wanted to ford.

The 1-mile section of path, a key section of an east-west Greenbelt corridor that connects Eagle to Garden City and Boise, languished as the city squabbled with Laguna Pointe homeowners over path easements and related issues. A half-year after the city opted to use eminent domain to take the land and end the stalemate, the path is getting groomed and improved.

The city had crews begin clearing weeds, brush and tree limbs in early October. Soon, they'll put down a durable gravel surface to create a path that's 6 to 8 feet wide.

"We'll have 12 inches on either side of the trail that we'll cut back, and 10 feet overhead," said Mike Aho, Eagle's parks director.

The path will be open to pedestrians and bicyclists.

A garbage can and a dispenser for dog-poop bags have been placed at the west entrance to the path on Eagle Road. A sign informs users to keep their dogs leashed and pick up after their pets.

OVER TROUBLED WATERS

The single biggest improvement is a new bridge, which will be in the same spot as a wood bridge that was blocked, then dismantled, during the subdivision's dispute with the city. Installation of the metal bridge began Monday, Aho said.

Art Robertson, a 78-year-old Boise retiree who lives near Chinden Boulevard and Eagle Road, said he walks a section of the Boise River Greenbelt almost every day. The Laguna Pointe section is a favorite because it gives the quickest access to a rookery, where dozens of blue herons and cormorants nest in the spring.

"They build their nests within 50 feet of the pathway," the bird enthusiast said. "That's a big local attraction."

He can get to that same area - near the Boise wastewater treatment plant - from Glenwood Street in Garden City, but it's a much longer walk.

The city paid three Laguna Pointe property owners fair-market value for the easements for the path. The amount totaled $156,983 - $10,896 to Jade Properties, LLC; $120,000 to Laguna Pointe HOA; and $26,087 to Premier Industrial, LLC. The city is also paying for the bridge - not to exceed $70,000 - and Premier Industrial owner Steve Peel agreed to get it built.

"It made it faster for him to do it," Eagle City Attorney Susan Buxton said. "He already had a plan. He already had a permit."

Buxton said he is aiming to have the bridge completed by Halloween.

Not long after the city resorted to the courts, Laguna Pointe property owners carved out a second, parallel path that was closer to the river and farther from their homes. That second path begins on the east side of the bridge.

After seeing the new path, City Council members, staff and Aho agreed that it was preferable to the original one. It is now the official public path. Buxton said the path has the appropriate permits from the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers.

BUT WHERE TO PARK?

Parking continues to be a concern.

There's a dirt and gravel area on the shoulder of Eagle Road near the trailhead where people park. It's buffered from the road by a line of jersey barriers.
Property owners don't like the public parking there, Buxton said, in part because they believe it's a hazard for drivers leaving the subdivision. The parking area is under the jurisdiction of the Idaho Transportation Department, and so far it hasn't prohibited parking.

Aho said the city would like Greenbelt users to park on Three Bridges Way, the first right after you turn into the Laguna Pointe subdivision from Eagle Road. It's about 100 yards from the trailhead. Parking on both sides of Three Bridges Way can accommodate about 25 vehicles.

The 2006 development agreement for Laguna Pointe included a 10-space parking lot when a section of the subdivision near the Greenbelt was developed. It's unclear when that will happen.

Property owners near the Greenbelt wanted the city to restrict the hours the path could be used. Aho said the city recommends dawn to dusk use of paths, but doesn't have established hours because of legitimate uses, including fishing, commuting and running, outside daylight hours.

Alcohol and glass containers are prohibited on the Greenbelt.

People using the path from the east side still will encounter a locked gate, but the path bypasses the gate. The gate will not be removed.

More clearing along the path will be done, and a sign will be installed so that it's clear how to follow the path and bypass the gate, Aho said.

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