

Path bridge planned north of Highway 22

Town, county agree on site that advocates see as best way over Snake.

By Kevin Huelsmann

Jackson and Teton County officials on Monday backed plans for a multi-million-dollar pathway bridge on the north side of the road that spans the Snake River.

The decision marks the end of more than a year of tumultuous negotiations and deliberations that eventually cleared the way for the bridge and possibly an ambitious new park. Elected officials and several nonprofit groups worked to secure what most path advocates see as the best location for the crossing.

Before voting for the project, county commissioner Hank Phibbs invoked Emily Stevens, who donated land on the northeast side of the Snake that now serves as a popular park.

"She would be proud to see both sides connected," he said.

Representatives from Nelson Engineering are working with town and county staff to develop a process through which residents can talk about what kind of bridge they would

like to see.

"Basically, we're going to proceed full steam ahead with design and construction planning to try to get this thing on the ground as soon as possible," Jackson Hole Community Pathways Coordinator Brian Schilling said.

Estimates put the cost of the new bridge between \$3 million and \$5 million. The price will depend largely upon the width and any features that might be added, such as viewing decks and underpasses that would funnel cyclists to it.

The project is backed by \$6 million in tax revenue that voters approved in 2008. The proposed bridge is the key component of a larger project that seeks to provide a pathway connector between downtown Jackson to the west bank.

A surprise land deal in 2010 threw a wrench in plans to build the path bridge on the north side of the road. The owner of the property where the west end of the bridge was to go could not come to an agreement with the county regarding use of that property.

But the crucial property, once a gravel pit, sold late last year. The Jackson Hole Land Trust and LOR Foundation bought the 57-acre property to develop a 40-acre park and residential land and will allow the bridge.