

## AVICC Walking Tour notes

### NeighbourSpace

Centrally located at 708 Douglas Street, beside the Victoria Conference Centre, the NeighbourSpace is an accessible venue for residents and non-profit organizations focused on fostering community building and social connection. The City of Victoria provides this space at no cost to strengthen community engagement and social ties among residents.

**Location:** 708 Douglas Street (close to the Douglas Street entrance to the Victoria Conference Centre)

**Hours of Operation:** 8 a.m. to 9 p.m., daily

If you are a Victoria resident or local non-profit organization focused on community building, the NeighbourSpace could be a great fit for you. Local groups or individuals looking for an occasional gathering space can apply to use the space at no charge.

**Old NeighbourSpace site:** located at 711 Douglas St. courtyard additions were created by Local Champion cohorts who were given a large group project to tackle via a consensus building exercise. The additions ended up being seating with plant boxes and a mural.

### Wee Free Seed Box

The Wee Free Seed Box and garden aimed to beautify the village core, promote gardening, and create a friendly space for neighbours to connect. A drought-tolerant garden was installed (2020) at the busy Michigan and Menzies intersection, converting worn grass into a vibrant, eco-friendly space that offers year-round interest and environmental benefits.

Alongside the garden, a seed box was introduced, allowing residents to exchange seeds and gardening magazines. The box quickly became a hub of conversation and sharing over 500 seed packets circulated in the first three weeks. From families picking beans to seniors adding flowers to balcony pots, the project sparked joy, biodiversity, and neighbourliness.

This simple idea has grown into a thriving community resource that continues to inspire local gardeners. Volunteers continue to save and sort seeds, packaging and filling the seed box weekly.

### James Bay New Horizons Pollinator Garden

The James Bay New Horizons Pollinator Garden is a community-driven initiative in Victoria, BC, established around 2015 to support local pollinators with native, neonicotinoid-free plants. Located at the New Horizons Centre, the garden features diverse, intentionally planted species, bee hives, and a Fuyu Persimmon tree.

**Purpose:** Created to provide a safe, lush habitat for bees, butterflies, and other pollinators, while educating the community on organic gardening.

**Location:** Situated at the James Bay New Horizons centre, with initiatives to expand the garden around the building.

**Development:** The garden has been maintained by dedicated volunteers since 2015, often involving partnerships for enhancing local biodiversity.

**Features:** The site includes a "pollinator playground" with hives and a variety of plants designed to offer nectar and pollen across different seasons.

The garden is part of a broader effort in the James Bay community to foster environmentally friendly spaces, including nearby school projects and community plant swaps and to enhance this community space for both people and pollinators, and create room for education about organic gardening and the negative health and ecological impacts of toxic pesticides.

They love the Himalayan honeysuckle, salvia hotlips, St. John's wort, borage, yarrow and camas! We also grow certain edible plants which are great for pollinators, like the plum tree and strawberries which are a great plant for carpeting open spaces.

People were initially fearful of having bees around, but now they've grown to love having them around. I also feel we've created a sanctuary space where people of all generations can come for some rest and spend time connecting to the plants and the pollinators.

## **Irving Park Labyrinth**

Sheltered amongst the magnificent old trees and the beautiful Japanese plum trees on the far side of Irving Park (located at the corners of Menzies and Michigan Streets) in James Bay is a labyrinth made of flat stones sunk into the grass, hardly visible until you're on top of it.

This seven circuit-stone labyrinth was created in 1999 by Candis Elliott, a development worker with the James Bay Community Project; Terry Loeppky worked with City of Victoria Parks staff to finalize a design requiring almost zero maintenance. In 2002, The Gifu Prefecture Cherry Blossom Society planted an avenue of 21 shirofugen ( pinky white double blossoms in May) trees leading to the labyrinth and surrounding it to promote peace and an understanding of Japanese Culture.

Plans are in the works for the Irving Park Labyrinth to become official with directional signage placed at the entrance of Irving Park by City of Victoria Parks and Recreation.

## **Dallas Road Waterfront**

The City of Victoria completed significant upgrades to the Dallas Road waterfront, transforming it into a "first waterfront seawall experience" that features enhanced street furniture. This project includes new chairs, benches, and improved pedestrian/biking pathways along the shoreline.

### **Key Features of Dallas Road Street Furniture & Design:**

**Seating Upgrades:** New benches and chairs are placed along the walkway, offering scenic views of the water, particularly near renovated areas like the [Dallas Road Breakwater](#).

**Public Amenities:** The area includes renovated public washrooms and, at times, interactive art, such as the rehabilitated [Dallas Road Swim Pavilion staircase](#).

**Infrastructure Improvements:** The upgrades complement the pedestrian pathways, aiming for a "people place" vibe that encourages strolling and cycling.

**Historic Context:** The upgrades are part of a broader, ongoing effort to modernize the James Bay waterfront while preserving its history.

These improvements are part of the City of Victoria's larger planning initiatives, which include enhancing Greenway categories with public art, street furniture, and signage.

## **Victoria's cherry blossom season**

This walking route will take you through some of the most stunning cherry blossom-lined streets, with a mix of iconic landmarks and quiet residential roads. The best part? It ends near Fisherman's Wharf, where you can grab a bite to eat or loop back to the BC Royal Museum and Thunderbird Park for even more blooms.

**Starting Point: Inner Harbour & Menzies Street**

Head south on Menzies Street, passing by the BC Parliament Buildings. Cherry blossoms lining the street against the grand architecture here make a striking contrast to the delicate pink blooms; it's a great start to your walk.

A second perspective of the charming teacup tree, with floral teacups and saucers swaying among the pink cherry blossoms. A cozy house with white columns and lush greenery forms the background, enhancing the enchanting aesthetic.

**South Turner Street & Clarence Street – Fairfield's Cherry Blossom Hotspot**

Once you pass the Legislature, continue down Menzies until you reach James Bay Market Corner and head left on Simcoe Street towards South Turner Street in James Bay. This is where things start to get really good. The entire stretch of South Turner Street between Simcoe Street and Dallas Road is lined with mature cherry blossom trees that arch over the street, creating a tunnel of pink petals. This is one of the best spots in the city for photos.

From South Turner, take a right towards Clarence Street, another quiet residential street with great cherry blossoms. This is also where you'll find the Tea Cup Tree. This quirky landmark started in 2009 when Rory Palmer strung up a teacup as a tribute to his late grandmother, Eleanor Palmer no a local tradition that adds a unique touch to your walk.

**Niagara Street to Croft Street – More Blossoms and Quiet Charm**

After checking out the Tea Cup Tree, head east on Niagara Street toward Croft Street. This section is one of the most peaceful parts of the walk, with less traffic and charming homes. Croft Street is another prime cherry blossom viewing area, with trees creating a picturesque canopy over the road.

## Lewis St. Historical Plaques

Over a decade ago, the neighbourhood marked the 100th anniversary of the 1911 Lewis Street extension and subdivision. During the event temporary historic informational signs were installed on each property indicating the date the house was built, the first residents names as well as their occupations.

In 2018, with the assistance of a City of Victoria My Great Neighbourhood grant, permanent descriptive, historical plaques were installed on the front fences of each of the 18 properties on the street. There have also been discussions about installing a plaque at the end of the street which would outline in text and photos the history of the street and its early residents. Many people, both local and visitor, walk along Lewis Street each year. It is clear from many casual conversations that the historic ambiance of the street is often the reason that they choose this route.

## Breakwater mural at Ogden Point

In 2009, to honour the traditions and history of the Salish Nations, the GVHA sponsored phase I and II of the Unity Wall Mural, a project that transforms the breakwater into an enormous canvas upon which established First Nations artists, and the young artists they mentor, share their stories with the world. In 2013, the GVHA also sponsored the creation of the mural's third phase and the painting of related designs along the outer breakwater.

The response to the incredible, original artwork has been powerful and has spurred a vision to cover both sides of the breakwater with the largest mural in Canada, a public art piece that extends to the sea and creates a bridge between cultures.

As each phase of the mural is completed, it adds to the spirituality of this very special place that has profoundly shaped our history and culture. Artists Butch Dick and Darlene Gait worked with 11 youth artists to create the piece.

## James Bay Library

In 2018, City council consulted with the Songhees and Esquimalt nations and selected the Lekwungen word for the James Bay area — *sx<sup>w</sup>en'x<sup>w</sup>ən tən'exw*, pronounced *s-hweng hw-ung tongue-oo-hw*.

In the Lekwungen language, *sx<sup>w</sup>en'x<sup>w</sup>ən tən'exw* is how our ancestors knew the land now called James Bay," he said. "I welcome the recognition of that history by the City of Victoria as it names the new James Bay library the *sx<sup>w</sup>en'x<sup>w</sup>ən tən'exw*branch."

The city also named one of the library's two meeting rooms after Songhees elder Elmer Seniemten George for his efforts to protect the Lekwungen language.

The other meeting room was named for former James Bay resident Mifflin Wistar Gibbs, who, in 1866, became the first black person elected to public office in B.C. when he won a seat on Victoria city council. His name was submitted by, among others, the B.C. Black History Awareness Society.