

WESTSONG Sensory Garden



Presentation for Esquimalt Parks Committee

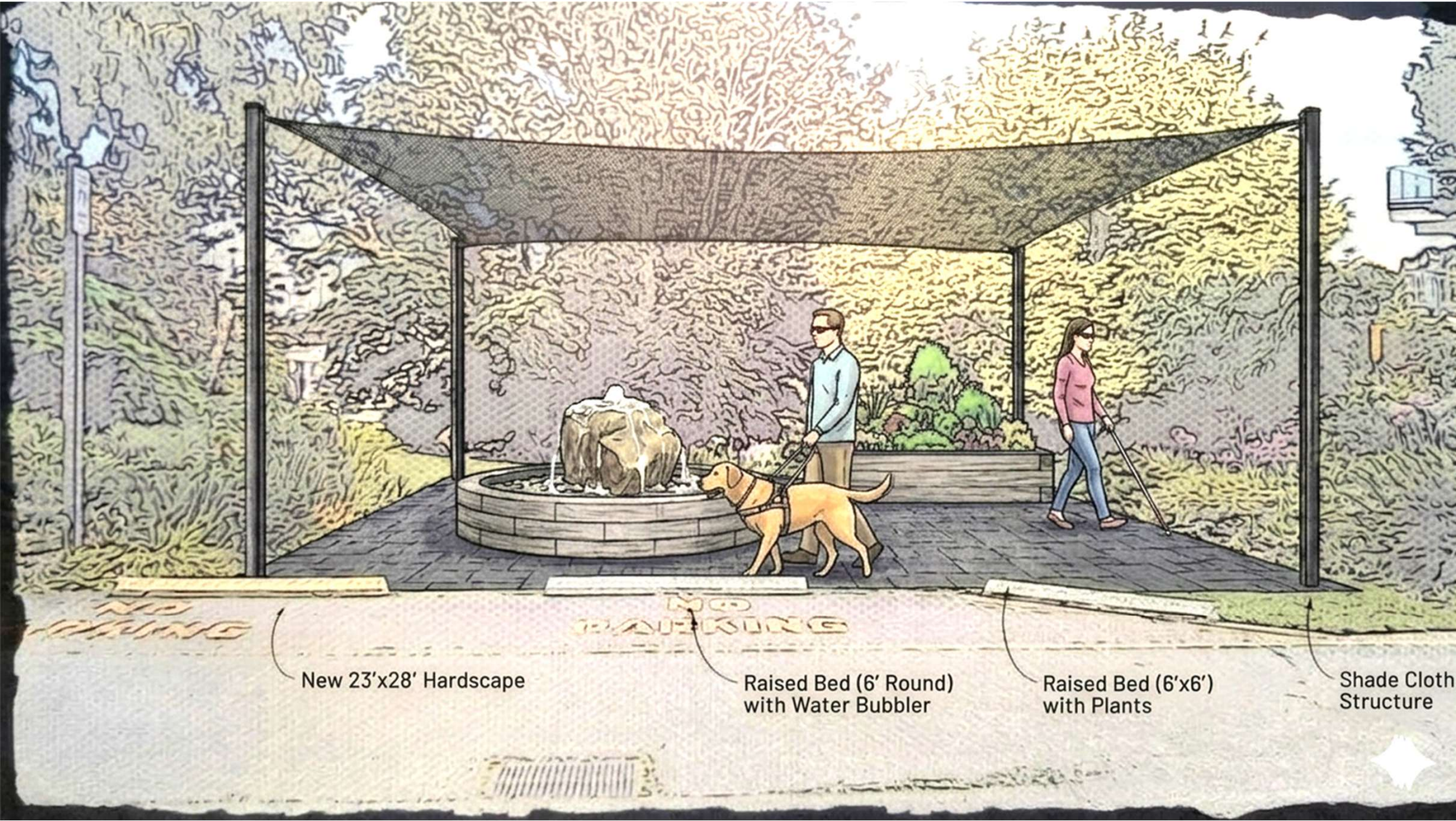
April 22, 2026



WESTSONG Sensory Garden Club was created with the desire to share the natural surroundings of South Vancouver Island with people who have Vision Loss and to encourage those who do not have vision loss to interact and interpret their surroundings differently.

The WESTSONG Sensory Garden presents Canadian values of representation in that our belief that marginalized groups deserve prominent understanding and acceptance in our communities. For people with Vision Loss and Indigenous Nations involved with WESTSONG Sensory Garden, construction of this garden will be built with them, not for them. In such a way it will welcome people from South Vancouver Island, Canadians and Worldwide visitors.

Our proposal today will focus on the first phase of construction. This phase will give the garden its mobility and accessibility requirements in a contained area that can be expanded for additional gardens and artistic inclusions, with consideration of time and funding.



New 23'x28' Hardscape

Raised Bed (6' Round)
with Water Bubbler

Raised Bed (6'x6')
with Plants

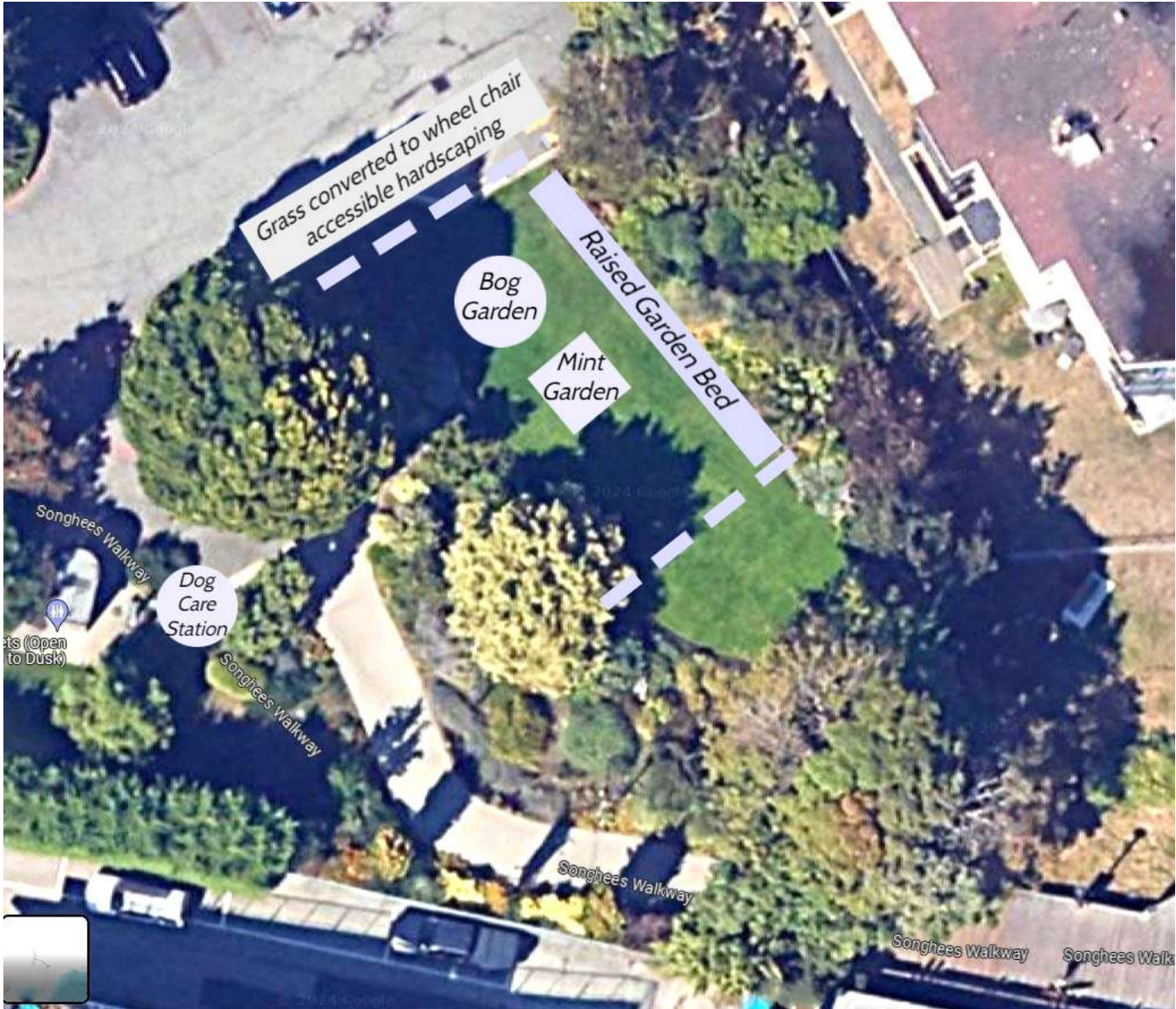
Shade Cloth
Structure

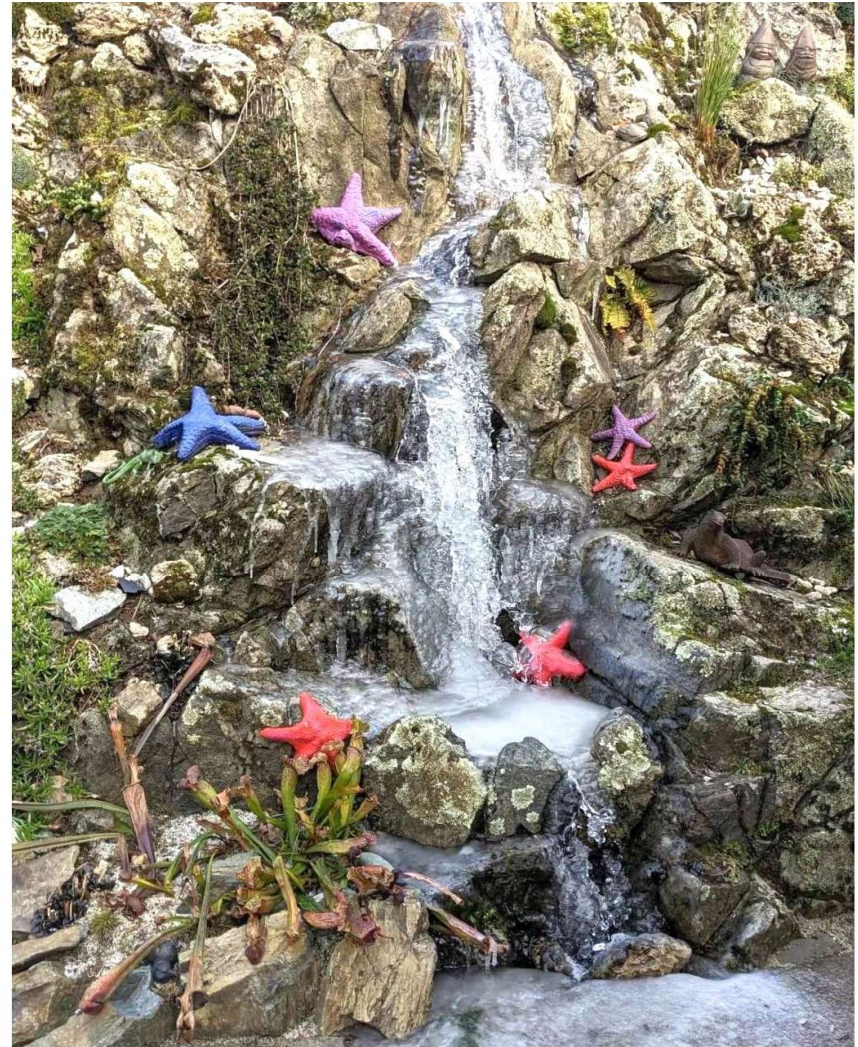
In Phase 1, hardscaping and construction of two raised beds will be completed including a path directly from the Songhees Walkway to the garden. Expanded hardscaping around the site map area and a white post to aid guide dogs to the pathway entrance will be included.

Electrical and irrigation access will be implemented (before hardscaping) for the use of both raised beds and connection terminals to be added for ease of access for the next phase of additional gardens.

Shading over the proposed gardens will make it easier for those with Vision Loss and will be incorporated during construction.

This initial phase will adhere to the safety needs of visitors while allowing us to demonstrate the use of plants and artistic depictions of the flora and fauna in our region. The purpose of tactile site map at the entrance will be to welcome and introduce people to the history and existing community of Esquimalt, including the recognition that Lekwungen people are and have existed as a Nation on this land before and after the creation of Canada.





Examples of concrete animal sculptures; Octopus, Otter, Sea Stars

Garden 1: Bog Garden

A raised 6'x6' garden, round, 28" high will be lined to retain water and will include a circulating water system for a Vancouver Island stone bubbler.

This is a freshwater garden that will showcase plants that grow in lakes and seepages and may include some saltwater plants. All native plants will be specifically indicated; it will also include sensory plants of interest that are non-native. Both types of plants will have identification in Braille with Indigenous language, English and French. A QR indicator code will encourage the use of cell phones to gain further information details about the plants and it's growing conditions.

As an artistic element in the bog garden, we will have a water bubbler from stone natural to Vancouver Island functioning for sound enjoyment and for water maintenance filtering. Within this garden various natural rocks to Vancouver Island can be identified to inform how the Island and surrounding areas were created and continued to change. Adjacent to the bubbler a rock garden will be constructed using native succulents and plants to indicate how dryland/high elevation plants survive extreme conditions here.

Artistic elements also include concrete sculptures, such as sea stars, a seagull, river otter, and an octopus, etc. Shell midden (refuse pile of shells after harvesting) to indicate what type of shellfish exist and are consumed.

Garden 2: Mint Garden

Raised 6'x6' garden, square, 28" high to have dividers (to preserve the different varieties of mint) between plants.

This garden will be of use as a sensory exploration with mint, a durable deer resistant type of plant with many variable species to explore. All native species will be specifically identified, and this garden will include non-hardy species to our climate, therefore will have a period during the winter months where a full exhibit will not be available.

There are sensory plants already existing, such as Edgeworthia, Azora, Alpine Mint, which provide scent.

All plants for both gardens will be tended by Esquimalt Parks for maintenance. We will work closely to create an appropriate schedule throughout the year to provide a consistent attraction. Replacement plants will need to be in production and available through Esquimalt Parks propagation facilities.

The entrance to the Songhees Walkway in Esquimalt is the ideal site location as it allows accessibility by multiple forms of transportation from downtown Victoria, and this site has existing amenities, being designated and in use as a public space. We will be conscious of any plants needing to be relocated due to WESTSONG Sensory Garden construction, as we understand that current plant selection has been thoughtfully designed.

For an urban area this garden location is relatively quiet as traffic is only from one road and the park opens onto the waterfront. This is important when desiring to explore our other senses.

There are multiple ways to access public or private transportation to reach this location. Busing to and from downtown Victoria by BC Transit is a one-minute personal journey from the existing bus stop to the park entrance.

The Songhees Walkway extends from the entrance of this park to the Blue Bridge in downtown Victoria for personal independent travel. The harbor ferry connects from Victoria Harbour to West Bay Marina which is also a 5-minute personal journey accessible from the West Bay Marina to the park entrance. Harbour accessibility may allow for Songhees Tours to be available if a visitor seeks further exploration. The parking lot allows for taxis or Uber drop off and allows for additional parking. A loading and unloading zone allow for a larger bus to safely unload.

Additional inclusions for creating a safe and independent space to explore will include:

- *painting the bathroom door a different bright color to indicate where the handle is and including a large universal bathroom logo

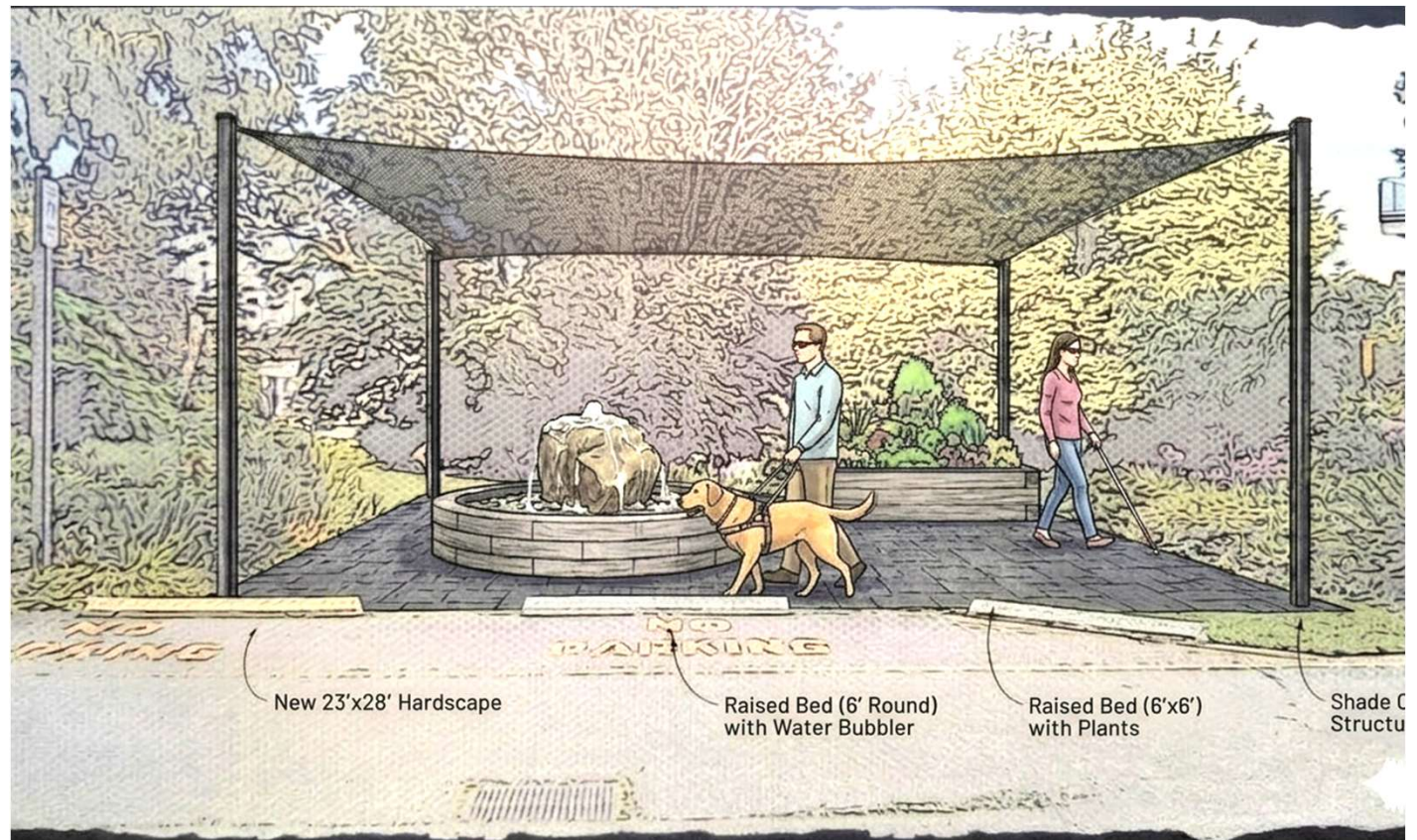
- *electronic aid for door opener, for wheelchair accessibility



*a white post for Guide Dogs to direct visitors to the WESTSONG Sensory Garden pathway entrance off the Songhees Walkway, and to where the site map is located

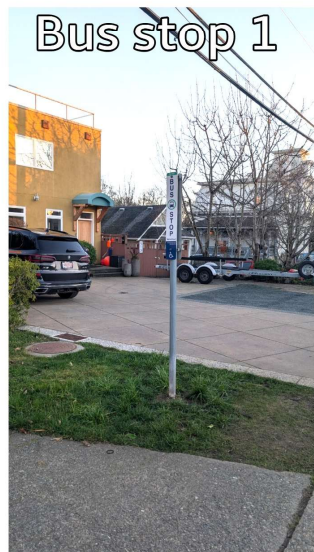


*to increase security for individuals entering from the parking lot, metal columns need to be constructed at the unloading zone



* a crosswalk addition on Paradise Street, so both crosswalks will have verbal indication and lights

*both bus stop locations will have clear signage and seating/shelter



*seating and waste disposal for the Guide Dog station area



Hardscape cost:

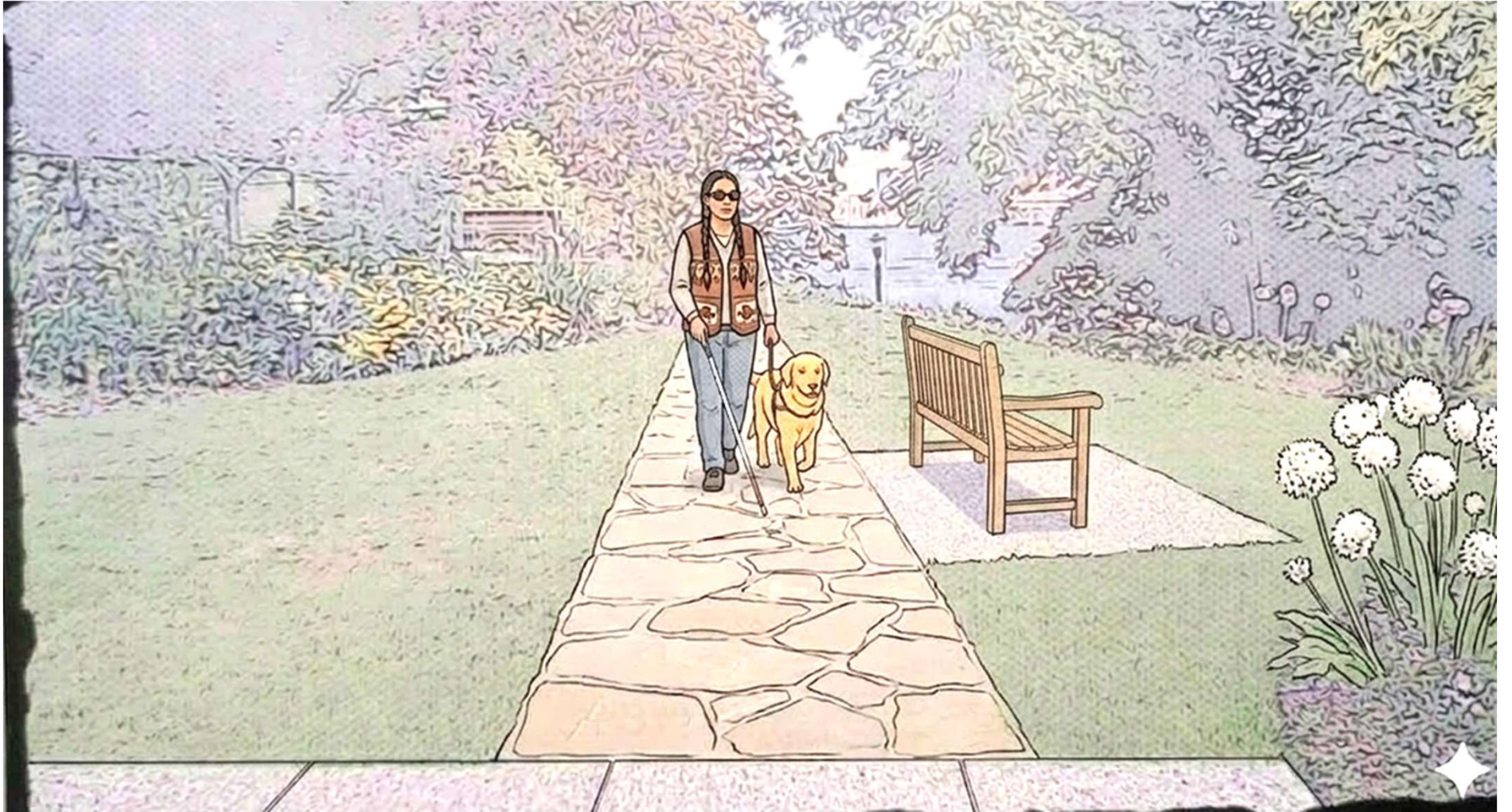
- *644 square feet of hardscaping for pathways, excavation and materials for phase 1. Hardscaping, using various types of hardscape textures to create definitive areas and guide visitors along different garden pathways on site from Songhees Walkway or parking lot.
- *Shade cloth structure 24'x24' , to be removed during winter months.
- *Electrical and irrigation construction and materials
- *Tactile site map with directions, naming garden beds

Starting present and future funding, our organization welcomes all contributors who also accept and agree with the volunteer conditions for the WESTSONG Sensory Garden. Avenues for revenue may be from Provincial and Federal grants such as Pacifican or BC transit. Group organizations such as surrounding Indigenous communities, garden and art groups, historical or nature groups, West Bay Residents Association and independent business contributions will be encouraged, including those in Esquimalt and Southern Island surrounding area. Contributions can include time, money or materials. Masonry engraving donors' names in their choice of language and in braille can be incorporated widely in our construction plans. We believe that creating a welcoming public space will encourage involvement within our community and governments. Here are the letters and signatures of organizations and individuals who support the construction of the WESTSONG Sensory Garden.

The WESTSONG Sensory Garden is a space designed to welcome community members of all abilities, including those experiencing vision loss. Vision loss can occur at any age, and many of our Elders will encounter it as part of their life journey. This garden provides a safe, inclusive, and engaging space where people can enjoy plants, explore gardening, and connect with the natural world through multiple senses.

Through mobility instruction, accessible design, and meaningful displays, the garden becomes a key resource for independence and confidence. Strong Indigenous representation and values of inclusion ground the project, ensuring that community members and visitors alike feel the warmth and strength of Indigenous ways of knowing and being on these lands.

The garden recognizes and celebrates the Lekwungen people and their enduring presence. It provides opportunities to explore different ways of experiencing, viewing, and communicating within our shared environment — reflecting how we interact with each other and the land as a community.



For many visitors, this may be the first time encountering someone with vision loss, offering a chance to shift perspectives. In a society shaped by visual dominance and colonial influence, the WESTSONG Sensory Garden invites everyone — especially those not in a minority group — to experience alternative ways of perceiving and engaging with the world.

This space is both a learning environment and a living expression of inclusion, where we can test new ideas for accessibility, garden maintenance, and communication. Through touch, scent, sound, and community, the garden celebrates multiple ways of seeing — and being — in connection with the land and one another.

We are truly excited for Esquimalt becoming the future home of the WESTSONG Sensory Garden. This meaningful project represents not only growth and community connection, but a lasting space where people of all ages and abilities can engage, reflect and thrive. We look forward with great anticipation to the positive impact it will have for years to come.

Reference:

Esquimalt Council Priorities Plan 2023-2026

“Esquimalt has over 40 hectares of parkland, many of these parks overlooking waterways along the Strait of Juan de Fuca and the Gorge Waterway.”

This piece of parkland would be valuable as public access to those who are marginalized.

“VISION, MISSION & VALUES Esquimalt skyline VALUES Accountability - We are transparent and take responsibility for our policies, our decisions and our actions. Integrity - We demonstrate high standards of ethical behavior and open communication that inspires trust. Respect - We value people and treat everyone with dignity and fairness. Service Excellence - We meet community needs and achieve high-quality results through responsiveness, creativity, teamwork and partnerships. Passion - We approach our work with conviction and enthusiasm. Equity, Diversity and Inclusiveness - We share in the responsibility to create a positive culture, honour differences, and safeguard equity, inclusion and dignity for all.”

We believe that WESTSONG Sensory Garden adheres to this vision of Esquimalt.

<https://www.esquimalt.ca/sites/default/files/2025-06/Council%20priorities-202505.pdf>