

AN OASIS – AT LAST!
A Senior-Friendly Park
at S.J. Willis School Field

WHAT

Several thousand senior citizens live in the vicinity of Hillside Ave. and Blanshard/Quadra Streets. We urgently need a senior/elder-friendly park for physical exercise, social interaction, and nature awareness. We're surrounded by major highways and buildings and need green space for some peace and quiet.

The unused playing field at S.J. Willis School would be an ideal "oasis" Located at the corner of Blanshard St. and Hillside Avenue, the site contains some beautiful century-old pine and oak trees on the perimeter. Seniors would be inspired by the endurance and resilience of these ancient trees.

The level field in the centre could easily be converted into wide pathways for wheelchairs, with elder-friendly benches, a water feature, activity space for seniors and kids, Indigenous artwork, a small stage, and attractive drought resistant landscaping.

A new elementary school may eventually supplant S.J. Willis, and this would offer a wonderful intergenerational opportunity. Seniors and kids go together! We could read to students, share our stories, and cheer them on as they play games. We could enrich their learning environment while enjoying the presence of young spirits.

WHY

Four facilities within a block of S.J. Willis School are home to more than 800 seniors at the Wellesley, the Summit, Ross Place, and Spaken House for Indigenous women. Thousands more live in neighbouring accommodation, and yet there is no accessible green space for seniors close by.

Topaz Park is currently being updated to include a large skate and bike park, pickle ball court, dog off the leash space, a new artificial turf soccer field, and updated baseball diamonds. We applaud this initiative by the City of Victoria, but we feel left out.

Topaz Park is too far away for us to access, and lacks accessible pathways and benches. We need something closer. It's time now to meet the needs of seniors in our neighbourhood.

As Victoria continues to attract an older demographic, such a park could be a showplace and enhance business for the existing retirement/care facilities.

Walkers and wheelchairs deserve the same consideration as cars, bicycles, and skateboards.

WHERE

The Park would be located at the northeast corner of Blanshard St. and Hillside Avenue on the S.J. Willis School playing field. Access is currently available at the southeast and eastern approaches to the field. Parking could be added off the Market St. entrance. Please see the attached drawing of the proposed park.

WHO

The Oasis would be a partnership between the Greater Victoria School Board, the City of Victoria, and community stakeholders. If the School Board would grant access to the land, the City of Victoria could build and maintain the park with community support.

WHEN

As seniors, we don't have many years left to participate, so we hope to see the park materialize by early 2024.

COST

A School Board/City of Victoria partnership should minimize costs, especially since the field is currently unused and level – ready for development. The provincial government could also be approached to support the park. Benches could be named in honour of seniors/elders to help pay for special initiatives such as flower and tree containers, a rain shelter, and outdoor artwork.

For more information, contact:

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