

Joint news release
For immediate release



October 10, 2025

Tillicum Elementary Students Plant 1,200+ Shrubs and Trees to Complete Planting Phase of Green Infrastructure Project

Saanich, BC — The Greater Victoria School District, in partnership with the District of Saanich, is celebrating the start of the planting and implementation phase for green infrastructure improvements at Tillicum Elementary School, situated on the land of the ləkʷəŋən People, known today as the Esquimalt and Songhees Nations.

“The Tillicum Green Infrastructure Project aims to mitigate growing climate change impacts while integrating Indigenous knowledge of natural systems, Indigenous plant species, and sustainable practices,” says Rebecca Newlove, Manager of Sustainability, District of Saanich.

The landscape design for the school site incorporated feedback gathered during a public engagement session held on March 11, 2025, as well as from Tillicum Elementary staff, School District staff including the Facilities Department and the Indigenous Education Department, as well as from the Elder’s Advisory Council.

The planting phase was preceded by a blessing of the land held on September 29, 2025, and led by Elder Maryanne Thomas of the Esquimalt Nation, who opened the ceremony with “Today we are going to be marking the ground and asking our ancestors if we can borrow the land for the plants to have a bed to grow in.”

“Our school community has been learning about native planting and climate change through in-classroom activities,” says Aaron Parker, Principal of Tillicum Elementary School. “It has been such a heartwarming experience to see all of our students helping to plant hundreds of plants on the school site within new natural areas, as part of a rain garden, and around a new outdoor classroom.”

The Greater Victoria School District and District of Saanich extend their gratitude to the project’s working group including the school’s administration, the school district’s Indigenous Education Department and Facilities Department, the Sustainability, Engineering and Parks teams at the District of Saanich, and MDI Landscape Architects.

Project details

As part of the District of Saanich’s and Greater Victoria School District’s commitment to climate resiliency, the broader Project includes the creation of rain gardens and extensive tree and vegetation planting at Tillicum Elementary School and on the road right of way around Albina Street, Maddock Avenue, and Orillia Street. More information can be found on the District of Saanich project webpage [here](#) and the Greater Victoria School District webpage [here](#).

The green infrastructure and landscape design improvements coming to the school grounds incorporated feedback from Tillicum Elementary administration, School District staff including the Facilities Department and the Indigenous Education Department, and the Elder’s Advisory Council.

As part of the project, students received lessons about the importance of Indigenous knowledge in caring for and restoring green infrastructure such as trees, rain gardens, and natural areas.

Project background

The Tillicum Green Infrastructure Project is a partnership project between the District of Saanich and the Greater Victoria School District, intended to mitigate climate change and upgrade the Tillicum-Burnside area with more tree canopy cover.

The Tillicum-Burnside area has been identified in the [Urban Forest Strategy](#) as a neighbourhood with one of the lowest tree canopy covers in Saanich and highly vulnerable to extreme heat, as shown in the [Capital Regional District's Extreme Heat Information Portal](#). The site also lies near important natural ecosystems such as Portage Inlet and Cuthbert Holmes Park and is in Primary Growth Area of Saanich that is expected to see community development in the coming years.

The project is intended to support multiple goals and targets within the Saanich Climate Plan, Official Community Plan, Active Transportation Plan, Urban Forest Strategy, and Biodiversity Conservation Strategy.

The project is supported by a \$396,865 grant from the Province of British Columbia's Disaster Risk Reduction-Climate Adaptation (DRR-CA) funding stream, administered by UBCM and funded through the Ministry of Emergency Management and Climate Readiness' Community Emergency Preparedness Fund (CEPF).



A blessing of the land was held at Tillicum Elementary School on Monday, Sept. 29, 2025.



Saanich Mayor Dean Murdock joined students and staff on campus for planting activities on Friday, Oct. 10, 2025.



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Green infrastructure improvements are underway at Tillicum Elementary School.

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Media contacts

District of Saanich
media@saanich.ca

Kelsey Moore (she/her)
Communications Specialist
Greater Victoria School District
kemoore@sd61.bc.ca