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CITY OF VICTORIA | Engineering and Public Works

# Neighbour Hubs Information Guide





## About this Guide

This guide intends to help neighbourhood associations, community organizations and residents understand what is involved in bringing a Neighbour Hub to life. For additional information on Neighbour Hubs, email [engage@victoria.ca](mailto:engage@victoria.ca).



# Neighbour Hubs Overview

## What are Neighbour Hubs?

Neighbour Hubs are dynamic gathering spaces, built in public places, that help to foster community connections. The structures combine seating and playful design elements, and feature shared resources such as storage for emergency supplies, bulletin boards and local emergency information. Neighbour Hubs are a resource for residents to help each other during and after emergency events and support community resilience. Hubs are owned and maintained by the City and cared for by the community.

## Why are Neighbour Hubs Important?

Neighbour Hubs offer a tangible way for neighbours to get to know each other and be involved in their community. Hubs can animate the street or boulevard, spark dialogue amongst residents and help to create lasting social connections that ripple out into other community building activities.

## Emergency Preparedness

During emergencies, our neighbours often become our first responders. Research shows that when communities are well connected they are more likely to work together and help protect those around them. Neighbour Hubs help meet Victoria's emergency management goals by educating residents on local hazards and emerging threats, encouraging connections among neighbours and storing small quantities of emergency supplies.

During an emergency, a Neighbour Hub might be used as a:

- Muster point or meeting area
- Resource or supply distribution site
- Off-grid device charging station
- Communication centre
- Exchange site for sharing resources or skills





## Community Building & Placemaking

Neighbour Hubs contribute to making Victoria a vibrant and healthy community. Hubs are placemaking features which enable residents to be informed, empowered and involved in their community. Hubs provide increased safety and crime prevention in the neighbourhood through more eyes on the street and can also provide a benefit to businesses in the area.

## Traffic Calming

When placed on a roadway, Neighbour Hubs are an attractive and effective way to support traffic calming by narrowing the street and providing visual cues to help reduce the speed of motor vehicles. Improved road safety supports the City's goals to make it easier to choose walking, rolling or cycling for everyday trips.

## Where did the Neighbour Hub model come from?

In 2018, the City of Victoria partnered with [Building Resilient Neighbourhoods](#) to deliver Connect and Prepare, a pilot program focused on resilience and emergency preparedness. Through this experience, and in collaboration with [Neighbour Lab](#) – a grassroots urban design studio – the Victoria Neighbour Hub model emerged.

Neighbour Hubs have proven to be a successful way to engage neighbours to promote thriving, caring communities. The first Neighbour Hub was installed on Leonard Street near Cook Street Village in 2019 followed by a second Hub on Harbour Road in Victoria West in 2021.

With the goal to grow the program and build a Hub in every neighbourhood, the City engaged Building Resilient Neighbourhoods and Neighbour Lab in 2022 to develop three design templates. In spring and summer of 2022, over 250 people took part in a public engagement process to inform the Hub design templates. In 2022, the City's third Hub was installed on Kings Road, in the Hillside Quadra neighbourhood, using the new Hive design template.



## How to build a Neighbour Hub?

Neighbour Hubs will be built, over time, in coordination with major infrastructure projects or as stand-alone initiatives funded through external grants or dedicated budgets. A successful Neighbour Hub relies on the community's involvement in the creation, activation and stewardship of the space. Residents or businesses who want to see a Hub on their street or in their neighbourhood should get involved with their Neighbourhood Association. Establishing a new Hub typically involves the following steps:

- City staff identify opportunities to build a Hub and formally reach out to a Neighbourhood Association with an offer to partner on the project. The Neighbourhood Association will act as the official host of the Hub.
- The Neighbourhood Association will assemble a volunteer Hub team to work with City staff to plan and deliver the Hub. The Hub team may be a group of individuals or a non-profit organization.
- The Hub team helps to spread the word and involve residents in providing input on the location, size, design and list of emergency supplies. The City will support engagement efforts and share ideas on how to reach people. In order to reach a wide range of residents, multiple promotional channels should be used such as dropping flyers door-to-door, neighbourhood posters, social media etc
- The City funds and builds the Hub.
- After construction, the Hub team continues to steward the structure and encourage residents and community groups to utilize the space for special events or projects.

## Community-led Customization

All Neighbour Hubs include central design elements that will make them welcoming and inclusive for people of all ages, backgrounds and abilities. While the design templates are already established, there are several other ways for the community to get involved in planning, customizing and delivering the Hub.



## Location

The City will identify candidate locations which could be on a roadway, boulevard or in a public park or plaza. Locations will be checked to ensure that they do not damage tree roots, block access to underground utilities and can facilitate operational needs like garbage or recycling collection. Ideally, Hubs are centrally located and connected to walking, cycling or transit routes. Using feedback collected from residents and input from the Hub Team, the Neighbourhood Association and City Staff will confirm the final location. When choosing the exact location, considerations include the size of the boulevard and characteristics of the street, including proximity to nearby homes, amenities and public spaces. If installing planters in the Hub, consider available water sources so neighbours can easy care for the plants.

## Emergency Supplies

Hubs are intended to securely store shared emergency response items. Every neighbourhood will get the opportunity to collectively determine what emergency supplies will best suit their needs with guidance from the City of Victoria who will provide the selected supplies. There will be three keys distributed which will unlock supplies - one will go to the Neighbourhood Association, one to a representative of the Hub team and one will be held by the City. Hubs do not store food or other perishable items.

Below are some examples of emergency supplies that can be stored for community use:

- Flashlights
- Camping stoves
- Pots or buckets
- Shovels
- Axes
- Water tabs
- Saline solutions
- First Aid supplies
- Emergency safety blankets
- Portable radio
- Multiple cases of plastic bags
- Tarps
- Solar charging lanterns

## Size

There are 3 Hub sizes - small, medium and large - ranging from 3m to 12m in length. Residents will be able to choose the size to suit candidate sites.

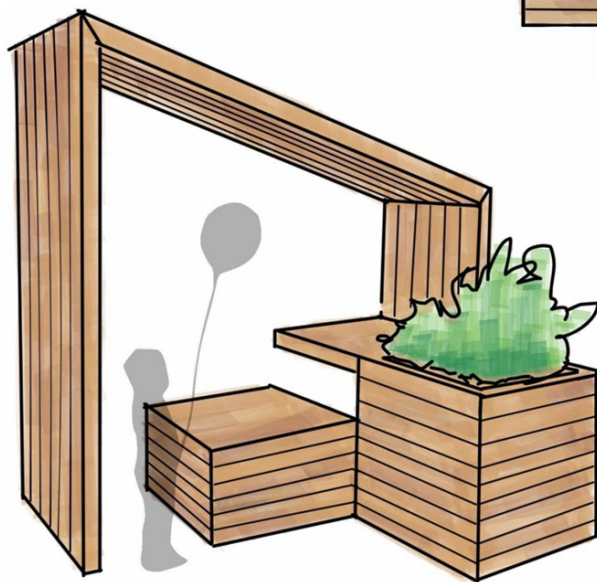
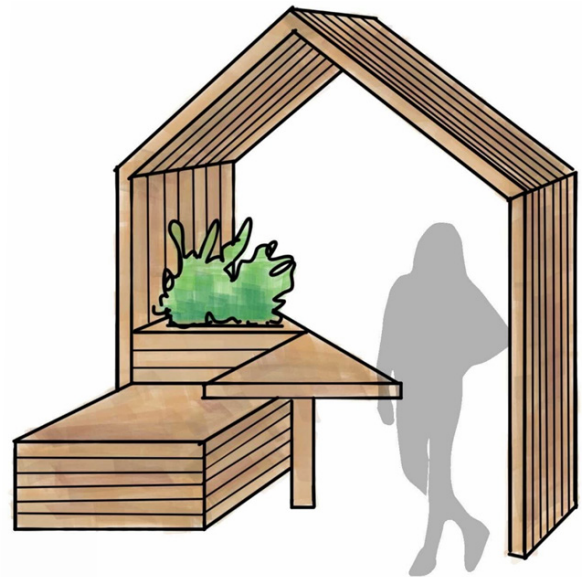
## Design

Each of the three design templates can be adapted for a street or boulevard and include opportunities for people to gather, sit, roll up to a table and explore community resiliency. Each design features planter boxes for greenery, charging stations, minor lighting, and a bulletin board for signage, community information, event advertising or maps.



## FERN

Grow connections within a community by spending some time at the Fern. The Fern design resembles the triangular edges of classic west coast ferns and will be the perfect environment to flourish resilience in any community.

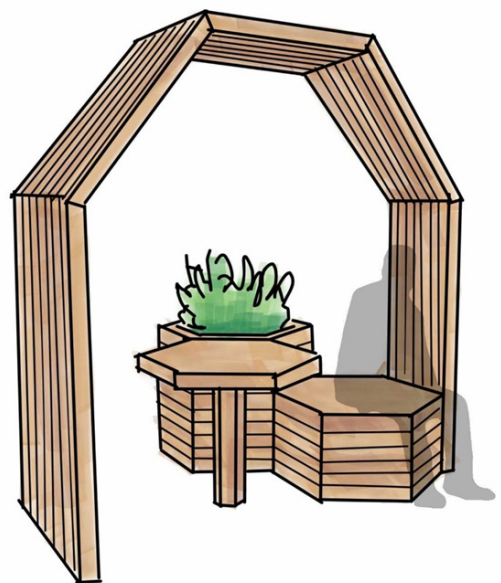


## JEWEL

Glistening with the promise of days lounging in the sun is the Jewel. The Jewel design brings together comfort and sociability through its diamond-like shape.

## HIVE

Drawing inspiration from the symmetry of a beehive, the Hive is buzzing with opportunities to build connections with neighbours. People will come together amidst the pollinators in this hexagonal design.





## Hosting and Maintaining a Hub

Hosting and maintaining a Hub is a collaborative effort and requires ongoing care and stewardship. The shared roles and responsibilities help ensure that the Hub is kept accessible to everyone, clean, barrier-free and can be used to its full potential for community events, activities or projects.

## Roles and Responsibilities

### Host Organization

- Approves the project in the neighbourhood
- Approves the recommendations on the Hub location
- Provides volunteers or designates a Hub Team to help plan and deliver the Hub
- Plays a role in overseeing day-to-day caretaking

### Hub Team

- Initiates and supports projects and events
- Plays a role in day-to-day caretaking and cleaning
- Identifies issues or support needs
- Engages residents in the Hub process
- Helps to plan and deliver projects, activities or events at the Hub

### City of Victoria

- Provides insurance and pays for construction of the Hub
- Undertakes major repairs or larger maintenance such as cleaning graffiti or replacing broken components
- Approves certain projects or events at the Hub





## Forming a Hub Team

The host organization is responsible for providing volunteers or assembling a Hub Team to care for the Neighbour Hub. Here are some suggestions to promote interest:

- Reach out to school groups, faith groups or sports teams
- Visit businesses in the area to invite them or their employees to get involved
- Go door-to-door with flyers and engage neighbours in conversation
- Share information on social media
- Post information at local community centres, library branches, coffee shops or in the lobby of apartment buildings

## Terms of Use and Maintenance

Each hub will include a sign with the approved terms of use, including established operating hours and prohibitions such as smoking or amplified music, for example. The Terms of Use may occasionally be ignored and is an expected reality for public spaces in any city. This is why the stewardship team is so important. A regular maintenance schedule will help with things like cleaning up litter and conducting a general review of the Hub to ensure it does not need any repairs. If repairs are needed, for graffiti removal or damage to the Hub for example, email [engage@victoria.ca](mailto:engage@victoria.ca) and the City will deploy crews as required.

## Promoting the Hub for Public Use

Social media is a great tool to keep people informed about the Neighbour Hub, recruit volunteers and promote Hub events. Consider starting a Neighbour Hub Facebook page, Instagram feed or using other social media platforms to help grow awareness of the Neighbour Hub beyond the community.

Advertising the Hub Team on the Hub's bulletin board is a great way to get new volunteers involved. Posters, postcards and flyers are also a great way to share information about the Hub and how to get involved.



## Neighbour Hub Projects & Events

Once the Hub is installed, the community is encouraged to activate the space by hosting small events or adding additional features. An opening celebration can be used as an opportunity to show off the new Neighbour Hub or as a way to engage more residents and individuals to join the Hub Team. Use our list below or host a meeting to come up with even more ideas.

- **Host a party with a purpose** as a way for neighbours to get together to learn and share about a specific topic or to brainstorm Hub project ideas. Examples include saving energy, improving accessibility, vegetable gardening, playing an instrument or learning a new language. Make it easy for neighbours to mingle, share food and talk about their interests and experiences.
- **Organize a paint-in** where the community is invited to collaborate on a mural adjacent to the Neighbour Hub or to paint select features on the Hub itself. Painting can help brand the hub to match the spirit of their neighbourhood. Make sure you are in touch with the City before undertaking any painting activity.
- **Prepare for emergencies together** by building household first aid kits or hosting an education event about fire or earthquake safety. Consider aligning such events with provincial programs and campaigns by Emergency Management BC.
- **Host a resilience walk** with the Neighbour Hub as the start and end point. While people walk and roll they can talk about the things they love about the neighbourhood and the things that they want to improve. When everyone returns to the Hub, create a neighbourhood map identifying assets, special places and zones that could benefit from investment.
- **Build a neighbourhood lending box** of everyday items such as books, seeds, toys or games.
- **Establish a boulevard garden** adjacent to the Hub for added greenery and to encourage pollinators. Grow perennials for year-round interest or plant herbs and vegetables that can be shared with neighbours.
- **Create a passive play space** by painting or fastening a chess or checkers board to the table.
- **Set up a dog water bowl station** to support furry friends who are walking by.
- **Add basic bike tools or a pump** by attaching them to the structure with stainless steel cables and tamper-proof fasteners.

## Funding

A small amount of funding can go a long way in planning and implementing activities or projects at the Hub. Here are some of the current grants available to help animate the Hub once built:

- **City of Victoria - My Great Neighbourhood Grants** support citizen-initiated projects and activities that animate community spaces and create gathering places to bring people together. Funding is available on an annual basis for placemaking projects or events at Hubs.
- **City of Victoria - Growing in the City Grants** support community-led urban agriculture programs and activities including community gardening, boulevard gardening, food tree stewardship and the City's seedling and garden material distribution program.
- **Victoria Foundation - Neighbourhood Small Grants** fund "people, ideas and activities that strengthen our community." Suitable projects, programs and initiatives that support community resilience align with the Neighbour Hub.







## Raising Funds

You might want to raise funds for special events or projects at the Hub. Here are a few ways to raise funds while building community where proceeds can be allocated to Hub improvements or special events.

- Ask businesses in the area to sponsor an event, activity or project at the Hub.
- Host a neighbourhood book or yard sale where residents sell usable but unwanted items and proceeds are collected for the Hub.
- Organize a service auction where residents identify their skills and talents and volunteer to provide services such as childcare, house cleaning, yard work or house painting. Have people bid on items with the service going to the highest bidder and funds allocated the Hub.
- Have someone lead an educational hike or nature walk. Ask participants for donations towards the Hub or to donate their time to help organize a future event.
- Find out if a few neighbours would be interested in teaching a workshop about topics they know: knitting, organic gardening, home organization, cooking, dog grooming, web design or car maintenance. Charge a fee to attend to support a future Hub event.
- Create a neighbourhood cookbook made up of a collection of favourite recipes from everyone in the neighbourhood. Sell the cookbook back to everyone in the neighbourhood or at other neighbourhood event.