

# Departure Bay Neighbourhood Safety Audit 2025



Nanaimo Community Policing

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# Introduction

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The Nanaimo Neighbourhood Safety Audit is a hands-on crime prevention initiative undertaken by the Nanaimo Community Policing program in collaboration with the RCMP, Neighbourhood Associations, Vancouver Island University, and many other people and organizations in Nanaimo. Safety audits are a useful tool which have been used in many cities throughout Canada and the U.S to help address safety challenges in neighbourhoods.

Safety Audits work to promote neighbourhood safety by identifying factors relating to safety and crime. Safety Audits allow neighbourhoods to work with residents, businesses, police and other agencies to find ways to reduce the opportunities for crime and incorporate relevant crime prevention programming. The findings of the Safety Audits are based on residents' and business owner's experiences and perceptions of crime and safety, crime statistics, social contexts of the local neighbourhood and Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED) assessments of problematic locations found in the neighbourhood.

Safety Audits have the potential to bring about a wide range of benefits, including:

- Reduction in opportunities for neighbourhood crime by working to address criminogenic factors.
- Identify a neighbourhood's strengths and weaknesses in regards to crime and safety, and work with neighbourhoods to incorporate community safety and crime prevention tools.
- Increase residents' awareness of neighbourhood crime and crime prevention, as well as reduce levels of fear of crime through the spread of information.
- Reduces isolation and creates opportunities for residents and businesses to share their experiences of crime and vulnerability.
- Strengthens connection between residents as they work together to build a strong and healthy neighbourhood.
- Creates a strong relationship between residents, RCMP, neighbourhood associations, and other organizations through collaboration and communication.

The Neighbourhood Safety Audit seeks to give residents an opportunity to have their voices be heard, and prioritizes effective collaboration between neighbourhoods and other aspects of the community. The recommendations presented in this report are based on the needs of neighbourhood residents, and are intended to work towards effective, long-term interventions to address issues of safety and crime. Safety Audits are a tool that can greatly contribute to safer and healthier neighbourhoods in Nanaimo.

## Background

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The Departure Bay neighbourhood of Nanaimo was one of two neighbourhoods selected to be audited by the Nanaimo Community Policing Program project team in 2025. Departure Bay represented a promising location for a Safety Audit for a variety of reasons.

Residents from Departure Bay were highly receptive to initial inquiries about their interest in participating in such a project. Many residents were proactive in reaching out to the Community Policing Coordinator, to express their desire to contribute to improving neighbourhood safety. This high level of motivation among residents was important in deciding to conduct a Safety Audit in Departure Bay, as it clearly demonstrated that the neighbourhood's inhabitants were invested in the outcome of the project, and would be effective partners to work with.

Departure Bay also has a strong neighbourhood association, which connects many of the area's residents. The Departure Bay Neighbourhood Association President, aided the project team in a variety of ways, which helped to ensure that the audit could be conducted effectively. This further demonstrated the investment that Departure Bay residents have in the safety of their neighbourhood.

## Pre-Audit Survey Results

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The results of the pre-audit survey which was distributed to Departure Bay residents directed efforts during the Safety Audit, and gave a more complete picture of the perceptions and experiences of Departure Bay residents. A total of 115 individuals responded to the survey.

An overwhelming amount of those surveyed felt safe within the Departure Bay area, 94% (108 respondents) felt safe within this area. Additionally, 92% (106 respondents) encouraged people to work or reside within Departure Bay. This was paired with a strong sense of belonging within Departure Bay; when asked their feelings on if they had strong connections with people within this community, 69.3% (79 respondents) agreed, 26.3% (30 respondents) remained neutral and 4.4% (5 respondents) disagreed. A large majority of respondents stated that they had people in the neighbourhood they could rely on, and felt satisfied or very satisfied with the quality of their relationships with friends, family, and neighbours. They also demonstrated an overall high level of trust for neighbours, work colleagues, and businesses in the neighbourhood.

Those surveyed gave mixed responses in relation to their perception of frequency of crime within the area. 51.3% ( 58 respondents) categorized the rates of crime as low, 43.4% ( 49 respondents) as moderate, 4.4% (5 respondents) as high, and 0.9% (1 respondent) as extreme. When asked about their perception on severity of crime within the area, 65% (74 respondents) categorized the overall severity of

crimes in the area as low, 28% (32 respondents) as moderate and 7% (8 respondents) as high. Furthermore, 100% of those surveyed (115 respondents) felt safe walking alone in the area during daytime hours. This number shifted to 63.5% (73 respondents) when regarding walking alone at night.

Overall Residents were satisfied with their feelings surround their personal safety within the area. 20.9% (24 respondents) were very satisfied, 55.7% (64 respondents) were satisfied, 19.1% were neutral (22 respondents) and 4.3% were not satisfied (5 respondents). When asked what crime the residents felt that they would be prone to 67% (77 respondents) believed they would be victim of theft, 10.4% (12 respondents) robbery and 8.7% (10 respondents) mischief to property.

When residents were asked their views on how important policing was in ensuring neighbourhood safety within their neighbourhood 88.7% (102 respondents) believed it was important with 8.7% (10 respondents) remaining neutral. An increased police presence was also a relatively common priority by respondents in a later question.

Residents were also given the opportunity to provide their views on what could help in improving safety within the area, responses ranged from calling for more police presence, better lighting within the area, flashing lights on crosswalks, more speed enforcement on Departure Bay Rd., more mental health and addiction supports, volunteer patrols including speed watch.

A large majority stated their belief that more efforts need to be taken to reduce the homeless population the area, and reduce the prevalence of property crime and substance use. Some respondents believed that more effective community collaboration would have a positive impact on their feelings of safety, including the implementation of more comprehensive neighbourhood watch programs, and greater community participation in addressing identified problems.

Demographic characteristics of the sample group were also collected in the pre-audit survey. Departure Bay is a very diverse neighbourhood with a variety of ages. 14.7% (17 respondents) were aged 30-39, 20.7% ( 24 respondents) were 40-49, 23.3% (27 respondents) were 50-59, 20.7% (24 respondents) were 60-69, 16.4% (19 respondents) were 70-79 and 1.7% (2 respondents) were aged 80+. Furthermore 67% (77) of respondents were female 32.2% (37 respondents) were male.

The concerns of the Departure Bay survey respondents offer a clear look into the perceptions and experiences of the neighbourhood's residents. This was highly valuable in guiding how the Safety Audit was conducted, and the recommendations that were made in response to the findings.

# Departure Bay Safety Audit Summary

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On March 15<sup>th</sup> at 9:00am 2025, neighbourhood residents gathered to conduct a safety audit along a route that was composed of high crime areas and recommendations from the residents through both an online survey and a meeting with residents by the Nanaimo Community Policing coordinator, Daniel Hopkins. Fourth year Criminology practicum student, Harvey Smyth, worked alongside Daniel Hopkins in collecting the resident’s thoughts and concerns. 10 residents participated in this walk, each giving their own perspective on issues within their neighbourhood.

The residents that participated represented other key groups in the neighbourhood, specifically, the Departure Bay Neighbourhood Association, and several Block Watches within the area. The route chosen, as mentioned previously, was largely based on feedback from those living and working in the Departure Bay Neighbourhood. The route included a commercial hub, scenic attractions, trails/pathways and many residential areas. (See Appendix A for specific route information)

### *Bay St. / Centennial Park entrance (Location #1)*



This audit began in front of the 7-Eleven location on Departure Bay Rd. There were comments made that this is where a lot of people would get off the bus. This became a concern as some who would get off the bus would walk up Bay St towards Centennial Park and Wood Stream Park to camp overnight. Other concerns regarding homeless people frequenting the area were common amongst residents, however, a lot of these concerns surrounded events that occurred during the evening rather than during the day.

It was noted that there was no lighting in this area, causing residents to feel unsafe at night. These concerns were also paired with there being no “no overnight parking” signs present here. Whilst this is a municipal by-law it could be beneficial to have these present given people have a habit of parking here.

### *Bay St. / Woodstream Park (Location #2)*



The next location was slightly farther down Bay St. alongside Woodstream Park. There is a fenced off area for the drainage facility near a body of water, hidden by trees and bushes which makes it easy for people to remain hidden. Residents noted that this was a frequent area for overnight camping as it provided shelter due to the trees.

The residential streets adjacent to Bay St. were well maintained, and easily visible with little to no obstructions of vision, providing excellent crime prevention in this area.



Woodstream Park was well maintained and there was no obvious signs of unlawful activity or any signs of camping within the park. Residents mentioned that kids would walk through this park to get to Departure Bay School, however they still noted they would not walk through here at night due to poor lighting and people loitering.



### *Centennial Park (Location #3)*



Within Centennial Park, there were a handful of spots that people could hide from sight. Past the entrance on the left, it was noted that people would camp in the bushes frequently. It was also noted that people would camp alongside the concrete fenced wall behind the tree.



There was little to no lighting within the park and surrounding the tennis court which could be attractive to people who want to remain hidden during the night. However, there were tall chain-link fences within the area which provided good visibility making the area feel much more open and allows for people to see exactly what is going on during daylight hours. Furthermore, there was graffiti in this area which could signal that this area is not cared for by the city and isn't well monitored. This facilitates a fear of crime within the area. This graffiti was present on private property and isn't something that the City of Nanaimo can address.



Farther into the park, it was noted by residents that people would hide behind the public works building, this was a frequent spot for overnight camping as well. There was evidence of someone starting a small fire in the doorway of this building. It was also noted that people could hide amongst the bleachers and within the huts overnight. The park was well maintained and there was no litter or drug paraphernalia found during the walk.



*Departure Bay Rd. (Location #4)*



Many residents were concerned about traffic safety on this road. Claims were made of street racing that occurs on this road, one resident mentioned a bike group that would meet at the 7-Eleven and would proceed to drive recklessly, engaging in stunt riding.

Other residents raised concerns of motorists speeding down this road intentionally but also due to not adequately controlling their speed whilst descending the steep hill. This road has 3 cross walks, one at the bottom of the hill adjacent to Loat St., next to the playground, one on the corner of Wingrove St. and one towards Drip Café. Given that this is a high foot traffic area with both the tourist attraction of the beach and also by having a children’s park right at the bottom of this hill, it is essential for public safety that motorists follow the posted 40kmh speed limit.

It is worth noting that only the crosswalk towards the café farther down Departure Bay Rd. has a flashing pedestrian crossing signal however the crosswalk at the bottom of the hill right next to the children’s park, and the one on the corner of Wingrove St. do not. Given that the one adjacent to Loat St. is on a curve at the bottom of the hill, visibility is limited and this crosswalk would benefit from having these flashing signals installed to increase pedestrian safety allowing for drivers to be more aware of pedestrians in the area, especially given the close proximity of the Children’s park.

Another traffic safety measure that could be implemented on this road is the installment of a speed monitoring board to remind drivers to be mindful of their speed, this could be placed at the top of the hill close to the “Departure Bay Beach Area” sign at the top of the hill and at the start of the blind curve.





*Kin Hut, Departure Bay Beach. (Location #5)*



It was noted by multiple residents that this building was a frequent spot for substance use and people staying overnight. Residents were rightfully concerned due to the very close proximity of the children's park right next to the building. This area is also a high foot traffic area during the summer as it is right on the main strip of Departure Bay Beach



Residents were also concerned that people would illegally park on the slip road used for launching kayaks late at night and would frequently cause a disturbance by doing things such as blasting loud music or other nuisance activity. One resident mentioned the possibility of a gate being installed farther up this slip road on the corner of Christie Street and Loat St to prevent this from being a problem in future.



*Randle / Battersea Road (Location #6)*



Battersea Road is a residential road however, this road is also used for beach access particularly during the summer months. Residents were concerned of cars parking in the emergency turnaround area. One resident claimed that they witnessed a fire truck having to reverse down the tight road due to this.



Residents were also concerned that many motorists would speed around the first bend on this road. Given that there is both limited visibility and many parked cars on either side of the road, this could be a dangerous situation particularly if someone happened to be out walking their dogs for example.



There is another blind bend farther down this road where visibility is incredibly limited. Residents claimed there have been many near misses on this bend. The hedges on this bend used to be overgrown however they have since been trimmed back in an attempt to increase visibility. A traffic mirror could be installed on this bend to allow for better visibility.

### *Other Observations and Comments*

Overall the consensus amongst the residents was that normally this area was a very safe and pleasant area to be in. A large majority of the concerns surrounded night time activity and traffic safety within the area.

Residents appreciated the installation of flashing crosswalk indicators on Departure Bay Rd. and would like to see more traffic safety measures in place within this area. Many residents called for more traffic enforcement by the RCMP, However, with the department being short staffed resulting in having only one traffic officer, it would be more effective to have other measures in place within this area.

Another resident mentioned the possibility of installing a traffic controlling island on this road at the bottom of the hill before the children's park, this could also be an effective traffic control measure.

## Crime Statistics Summary

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The Uniformed Crime Reporting Survey (UCR) was developed and designed as a tool for communities to measure the incidence of crime. This information taken with other indicators can be used by federal and provincial policy makers as well as other agencies. Official UCR statistics provided by the Nanaimo RCMP offer some insight to the extent to which the Departure Bay Neighbourhood is affected by neighbourhood crime. This data outlines the rate at which a wide range of crimes and other incidents occurred in the Departure Bay neighbourhood between January of 2019 until December of 2024.

Overall, reported crime in Departure Bay appears to be on the decline. However, this downward trend is possibly due to a growing sense of apathy among residents. As certain crimes become more frequent, people are becoming desensitized, leading to a reduction in reporting. As a result, the decrease in reported crimes may not accurately reflect a true reduction in criminal activity.

Trespassing in Departure Bay has remained relatively steady with a large majority of the reported cases involving unhoused individuals. This number is still low in comparison to surrounding areas. This information, combined with residents' reports from the survey and neighbourhood walk, suggests that homeless individuals primarily stay within the area's parks for shelter seeking purposes.

The significant decrease in theft from vehicles is particularly striking, likely a result of successful public awareness campaigns and improved security measures. This drop could also indicate a

shift in criminal tactics, with potential offenders moving away from vehicle-related crimes due to better prevention strategies.

Mischief to property has remained consistently high, through looking at the UCR data, these cases typically involve teenagers or unhoused individuals. This could be addressed by installing more lighting in high traffic areas such as Centennial Park where many tend to gather.

DEPARTURE BAY	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	Trend	Average
ARSON	3	0	4	4	1	2		2
AUTO THEFT	12	8	3	9	3	14		8
BIKE THEFT	13	14	6	7	6	2		8
BREAK & ENTER - BUS	4	10	4	1	3	1		4
BREAK & ENTER - OTH	7	7	1	3	0	2		3
BREAK & ENTER - RES	7	9	6	5	2	2		5
CAUSE DISTURBANCE	52	64	57	59	33	35		50
COUNTERFEIT CURRENCY	11	2	2	3	1	0		3
FRAUDS	30	30	28	26	25	29		28
MISCHIEF TO PROPERTY	89	90	113	76	70	71		85
MUNICIPAL BYLAW	22	17	9	5	8	7		11
OTHER GO	76	49	40	35	45	55		50
OTHER THEFT U/5000	40	35	17	21	15	9		23
POSSESS STOLEN PROPERTY	4	1	5	6	5	2		4
PUBLIC MISCHIEF	0	0	2	2	1	3		1
ROBBERY	0	3	1	3	2	1		2
SHOPLIFTING	36	14	21	14	14	16		19
THEFT FROM VEHICLE	125	72	54	36	10	24		54
THEFT UTILITIES	0	0	1	1	0	0		0
TRESPASS	51	38	31	27	36	45		38
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>582</b>	<b>463</b>	<b>405</b>	<b>343</b>	<b>280</b>	<b>320</b>		<b>399</b>

# Crime Prevention and Community Safety Recommendations

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The purpose of the Neighbourhood Safety Audits is to support local neighbourhoods in building resiliency and increase safety. Work is done by activating the neighbourhood by capturing their real lived experiences through tools such as the pre audit survey, the group audits and/or self-directed audits. Engagement of the neighbourhood is important to help co create safety and connect agencies that can provide support in developing and carrying out community safety initiatives or appropriate crime prevention activities.

Crime and community safety issues are complex and are often a symptom of a lack of access to the social determinants of health for not only individuals but neighbourhoods and communities. The root causes of crime are often the results of adverse social, economic, cultural and family conditions (Waterloo Region Crime Prevention Council, 1996). The recommendations made here are suggestions on activities that neighbourhoods can do to contribute to the overall safety and security of the neighbourhood. They do not guarantee that crime will never happen as a result of implementing these recommendations nor will the following recommendations solve complex problems such as homelessness, the opioid crisis or the lack of resources around mental health services.

## *Departure Bay Neighbourhood Recommendations:*

1. Departure Bay has a very robust Neighbourhood Association and several block watches set up. Having relationships with neighbours is a positive indicator for increasing neighbourhood safety. These associations could take advantage of city funding to expand what they hope to accomplish. The various Neighbourhood Associations, Nanaimo Community Policing department and Nanaimo RCMP can take a collaborative approach in promoting the establishment of new block watches within the area. Cst. Gary O'Brien can attend annual Neighbourhood Association meetings to help accomplish this. Nanaimo Community Policing and the Nanaimo RCMP will continue to support established block watches within this area. Having these systems in place will allow for the Nanaimo RCMP to have more eyes and ears on the streets allowing for them to have a much better response plan to crime. Communication between the various block watches and neighbourhood associations is also crucial for crime prevention and reporting crime effectively to the RCMP.

2. Knowledge around who to call and when to call to report criminal or nuisance activity is very helpful in proactively addressing safety issues. Reporting all incidents of suspicious, criminal or nuisance activity help to bring awareness to the problems happening in the neighbourhood and can directly protect family, neighbours and business owners. Community Policing Services can work with the City of Nanaimo to deliver the “Who to Call and When to Call” pamphlets to residents, and ensure that residents are familiar with the resources available to them. Nanaimo Community Policing can also provide information regarding the details that are needed when sharing information with departments such as police, bylaw, sanitation, during Neighbourhood Association meetings. Nanaimo Community Policing will also ensure that community policing volunteers have this pamphlet on hand to be able to share with residents when they are on crime watch patrols within the neighbourhood to further spread awareness of the available resources.
3. Nanaimo community policing will continue to provide speed and crime watch services across Departure Bay, paying close attention to Departure Bay Rd. This will assist the Neighborhood associations and RCMP in having additional eyes and ears allowing for crime and speeding in the area to be better addressed. Having this presence in the neighborhood will also serve as a deterrent for potential crime.
4. Community safety officers could potentially expand their area of patrol towards Departure Bay, focusing on the main parks and the Kin hut, to allow for more eyes and ears to be present and to provide services within Departure Bay when needed. Municipal by-law officers will also continue to patrol these areas and enforce laws when necessary.
5. Traffic safety is a big concern along Departure Bay Rd and one of the initiatives that can support the reduction of speed is to deploy Speed Watch programming. Speed Watch is a program that is delivered by Nanaimo RCMP Community Policing Services with the support of ICBC. Trained Nanaimo Community Policing volunteers set up speed monitoring equipment that serve to educate drivers on the local speed limit and provide a general deterrent to speeding for most motorists. Statistics are also collected and passed along to ICBC and our local Traffic Unit to help bring forth problematic areas helping to provide focus areas for enforcement strategies, especially where excessive speeding is a problem.

*Opportunities for Change:*

1. As mentioned, traffic safety is one of the biggest concerns in this neighbourhood. Speed monitoring and traffic enforcement is just one approach to traffic safety. Linkages to the City of Nanaimo and the Ministry of Transportation and Infrastructure will be important to create proactive structural change along Departure Bay Rd. Such as including flashing pedestrian crossing indicators on the remaining crosswalks. This Neighbourhood Safety Audit Report will be shared at the Nanaimo Road Safety Committee where local and provincial agencies are involved in traffic safety are represented to help inform any initiatives they may be working on. Nanaimo

Community Policing will also recommend traffic calming measures for Departure Bay Road to the city's engineering department, in an attempt to increase traffic safety for this area.

2. A significant concern expressed by Departure Bay residents reflects a broader issue faced by many communities nationwide: the growing prevalence of homelessness and visible substance use. This concern is compounded by an increase in the discovery of drug paraphernalia in public spaces, including parks where children play. These factors cause residents fear of crime to increase. UCR data confirms that these issues are in fact on the rise, making the residents' fears both valid and widespread.

To address these challenges, it is essential to foster stronger connections and collaborations between neighborhoods, particularly through neighborhood associations, and the health and housing task force. Such partnerships would enable the task force to gain the community support necessary for implementing their action plan. Additionally, these collaborations play a crucial role in reducing stigma and addressing harmful misconceptions, while utilizing evidence-based strategies to address homelessness and the ongoing mental health crisis effectively.

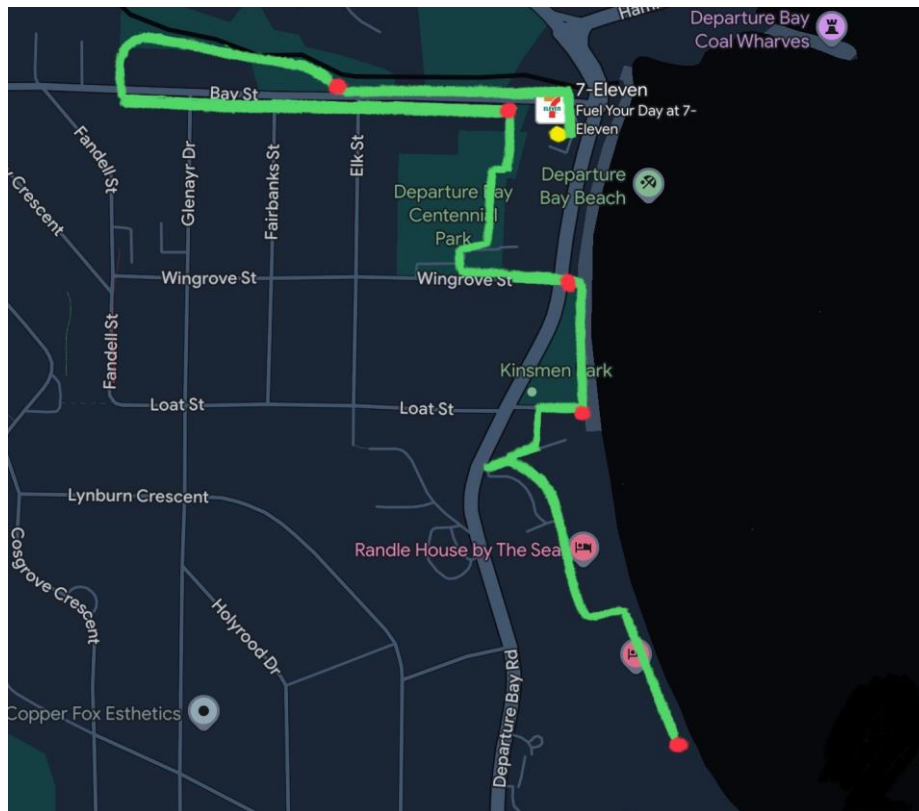
## Summary

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The Departure Bay Neighbourhood is one of the older neighbourhoods in Nanaimo with lovely historical character. The neighbourhood is in close proximity to downtown Nanaimo and is the arrival point for many tourists visiting Nanaimo. There are multiple parks and a beautiful beach with countless communal gathering areas scattered throughout the neighbourhood. The residents have done an amazing job in making Departure Bay a great place to live. The residents' commitment and dedication to safety and wellbeing to their neighbourhood is apparent through the networks they have built with one another and their willingness to get involved. Nanaimo Community Policing Program is honored to have such a valuable working partnership with the Departure Bay Neighbourhood. It would be very beneficial to revisit the Departure Bay Neighbourhood again in 2 to 3 years to see what crime prevention and traffic safety programs / initiatives have been implemented and what positive impacts have been made in the neighbourhood.

## Appendix A

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1. Start at 7-Eleven on Departure Bay Road
2. Walk west down Bay St. towards Centennial Park, Stop #1 will be on the left hand side of the road.
3. Continue west on Bay St. towards Woodstream Park. Stop #2 will be on the right hand side of the road. The water treatment facility is just prior to the Woodstream park entrance.
4. Turn back and head east on Bay St. towards centennial park and enter the park. This will account for stop #3.
5. Exit the park from the Wingrove St. this exit is on the South side of Bay St. Walk East down Wingrove St. crossing over Departure Bay Rd. This will account for Stop #4
6. Then head south along the foot path overlooking the ocean towards Kinsmen Park. The Kin Hut will account for stop #5.
7. From the south side of the Kin Hit, walk east on Loat St., then onto Christie St. Continue south on Christie St., towards Seaview Pl., then turn West onto Seaview Pl. Once on Seaview Pl., turn east onto Randle Rd. and continue South. This road will eventually change names to Battersea Rd. and will lead to a dead end. This road will account for Stop #6.