

PARADISE PARKING PLOTS

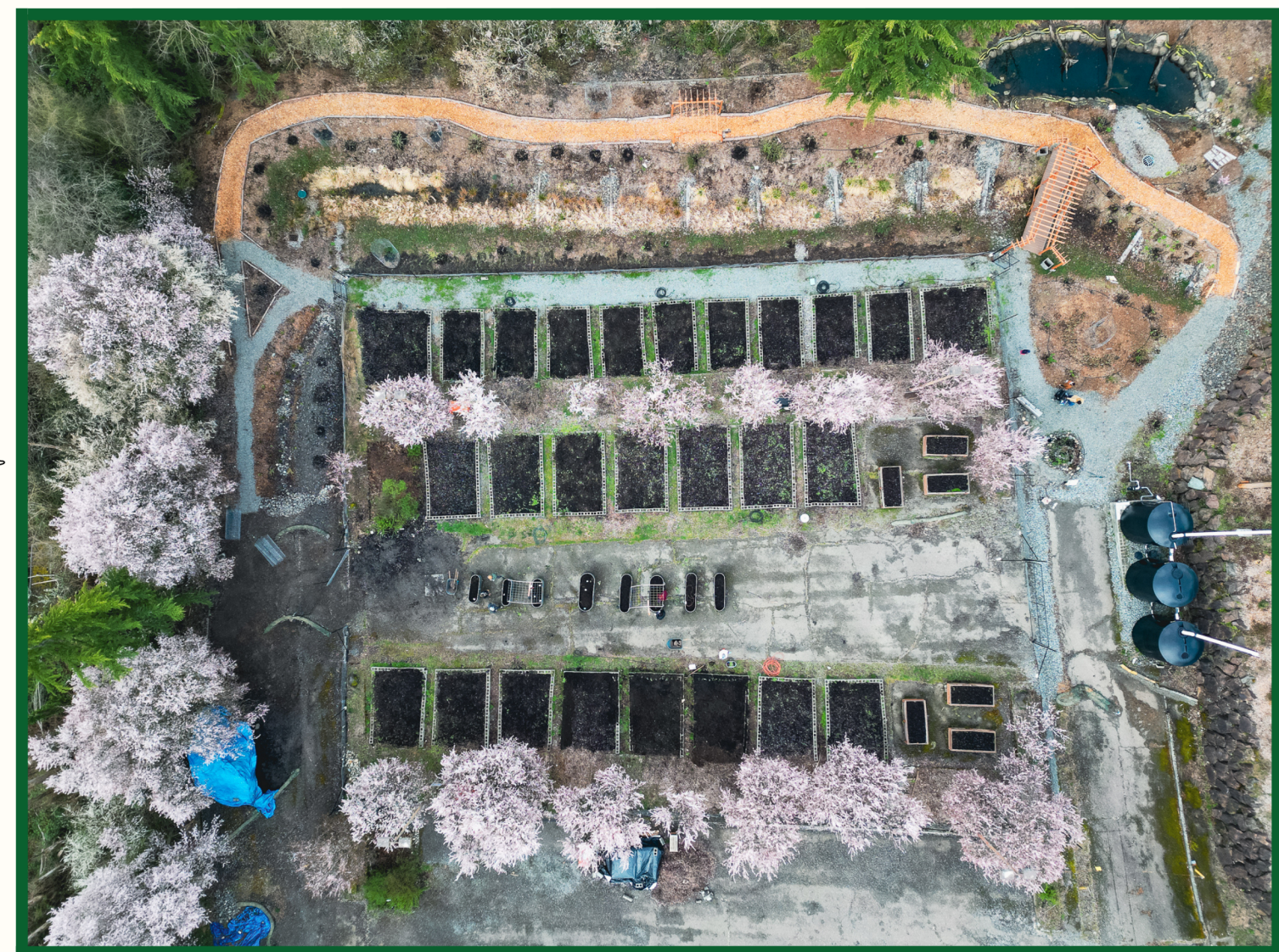


This is a snapshot of the incredible transformation story of one unused parking lot into a thriving **community garden**, **flood mitigating feature**, **food forest**, and **public greenspace**. This garden is the manifestation of a dream to improve **food access**, build community, and foster **economic independence**, all designed, planned, and led by **refugees**.

From pavement . . .



To abundance!



Hillside Church in Kent, Washington, USA donated a 1.5-acre parking lot to the refugee resettlement agency World Relief Western Washington. The organization went to the refugee and immigrant community and asked, "what do you need?". The resounding answer was land to grow culturally relevant food and outdoor space for their families and community to gather and socialize. And thus, Paradise Parking Plots was born in 2016. Over the next few years, thousands of people volunteered their time to demolish asphalt, build garden beds, compost bins, pathways, resting benches, create community spaces and art, install irrigation, a habitat pond, bioswale, rain gardens, and cisterns, move soil, and plant trees, shrubs, flowers, vines, and herbs.



2
Volunteers removed over 50,000 SF of pavement freeing the soil below and preparing the land for garden beds



3
The site is located near near multiple lines of public transit creating equitable access for car-less participants



4
People from 34 countries have had seasonal garden plots



5
Bioswales and rain gardens capture millions of gallons of stormwater, reducing urban flooding and protecting wildlife



6
Gardeners are growing familiar and healthy foods from their home countries within an urban food desert




7
Cisterns capable of storing 16,000 gallons of rainwater provide dry season irrigation



8
An industrial kitchen onsite is used to teach cooking and food business classes to participants to promote economic resilience and independence



9
The garden space is open to the public and hosts festivals where performers display dance styles and play music from around the world

 "[I enjoy the most] the sense of community and love among people from different nations and/or communities. This also mainly brought [those of] us from Africa together. We loved seeing flags from our mother land gathered together under farming." -John Bulinda

 "Farming is a part of me, if you denied me, if I stayed here five years without a plot to grow anything, I would say 'I am sick,' because it's a part of me." -Mary Masheti



I would like to thank World Relief Western Washington for supporting me in sharing this story at the 2023 Ecocity World Summit. A huge thanks to all of the participants, volunteers, and workers who dedicated their time, money, and hearts to making this project happen and continue to be a thriving and inclusive place for all. I want to acknowledge that the land where Paradise Parking Plots resides was and is inhabited and stewarded by the Coast Salish indigenous peoples.

Photo credit: Sean Puno, Talitha Consultants, and Tilth Alliance (1, 4), Hannah Letinich (2, 8), Esmeralda Manjarrez (3), World Relief Western Washington (5, 7), Yuichi Amano (6)