Continuous Waterfront Trail Concept Plan

University of Washington, Seattle
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2021

Project Background, Goals and Vision

2019 Campus Master Plan Guidelines for a Waterfront Trail

1. Support and prioritize the CMP Shoreline Public Access Plan to preserve the shoreline environment and enhance public access moments to the waterfront (pg. 108-111).
2. Respect natural, educational and “working” spaces alike.
3. Allow for flexible transportation choices/options.

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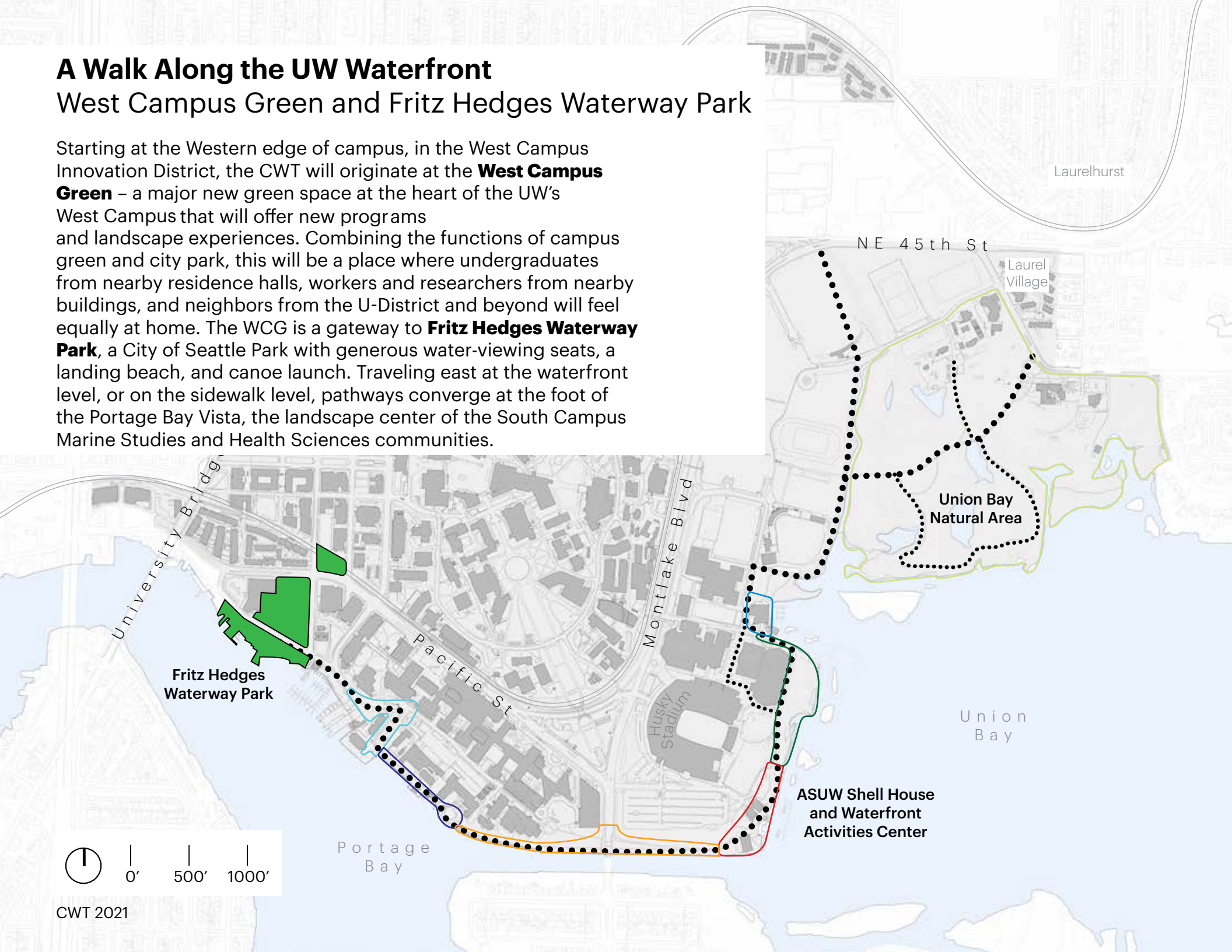
A Walk Along the UW Waterfront

West Campus Green and Fritz Hedges Waterway Park

Starting at the Western edge of campus, in the West Campus Innovation District, the CWT will originate at the **West Campus Green** – a major new green space at the heart of the UW's West Campus that will offer new programs and landscape experiences. Combining the functions of campus green and city park, this will be a place where undergraduates from nearby residence halls, workers and researchers from nearby buildings, and neighbors from the U-District and beyond will feel equally at home. The WCG is a gateway to **Fritz Hedges Waterway Park**, a City of Seattle Park with generous water-viewing seats, a landing beach, and canoe launch. Traveling east at the waterfront level, or on the sidewalk level, pathways converge at the foot of the Portage Bay Vista, the landscape center of the South Campus Marine Studies and Health Sciences communities.



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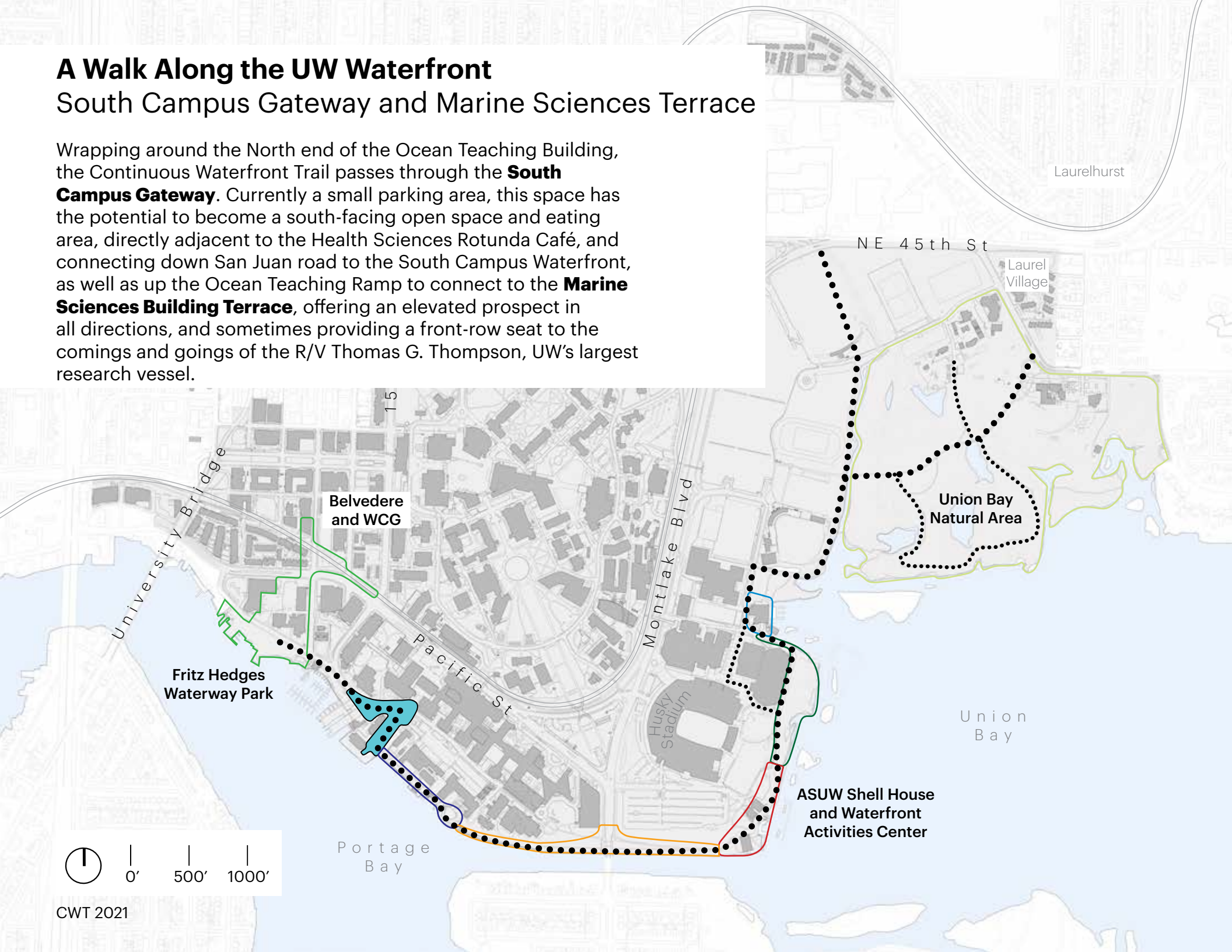
A Walk Along the UW Waterfront

South Campus Gateway and Marine Sciences Terrace

Wrapping around the North end of the Ocean Teaching Building, the Continuous Waterfront Trail passes through the **South Campus Gateway**. Currently a small parking area, this space has the potential to become a south-facing open space and eating area, directly adjacent to the Health Sciences Rotunda Café, and connecting down San Juan road to the South Campus Waterfront, as well as up the Ocean Teaching Ramp to connect to the **Marine Sciences Building Terrace**, offering an elevated prospect in all directions, and sometimes providing a front-row seat to the comings and goings of the R/V Thomas G. Thompson, UW's largest research vessel.



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View of Existing South Campus Gateway and Marine Sciences Terrace

Proposed South Campus Gateway and Marine Sciences Terrace

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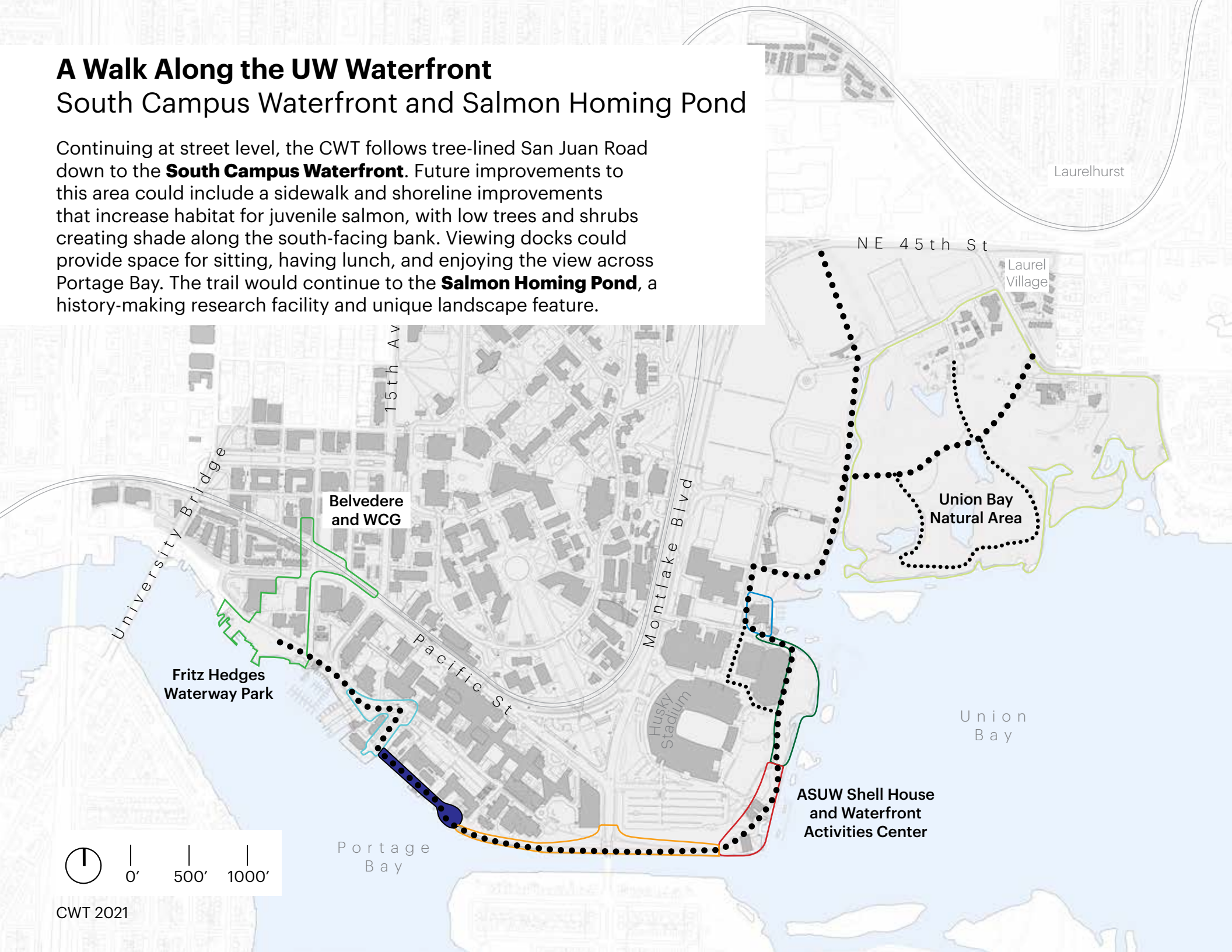
A Walk Along the UW Waterfront

South Campus Waterfront and Salmon Homing Pond

Continuing at street level, the CWT follows tree-lined San Juan Road down to the **South Campus Waterfront**. Future improvements to this area could include a sidewalk and shoreline improvements that increase habitat for juvenile salmon, with low trees and shrubs creating shade along the south-facing bank. Viewing docks could provide space for sitting, having lunch, and enjoying the view across Portage Bay. The trail would continue to the **Salmon Homing Pond**, a history-making research facility and unique landscape feature.



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View of Existing Waterfront Near Marine Sciences Dock

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Proposed Viewing Platform Near Marine Sciences Dock

View of Existing South Campus Waterfront

Proposed South Campus Waterfront

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View of Existing Salmon Homing Pond

Proposed Salmon Homing Pond

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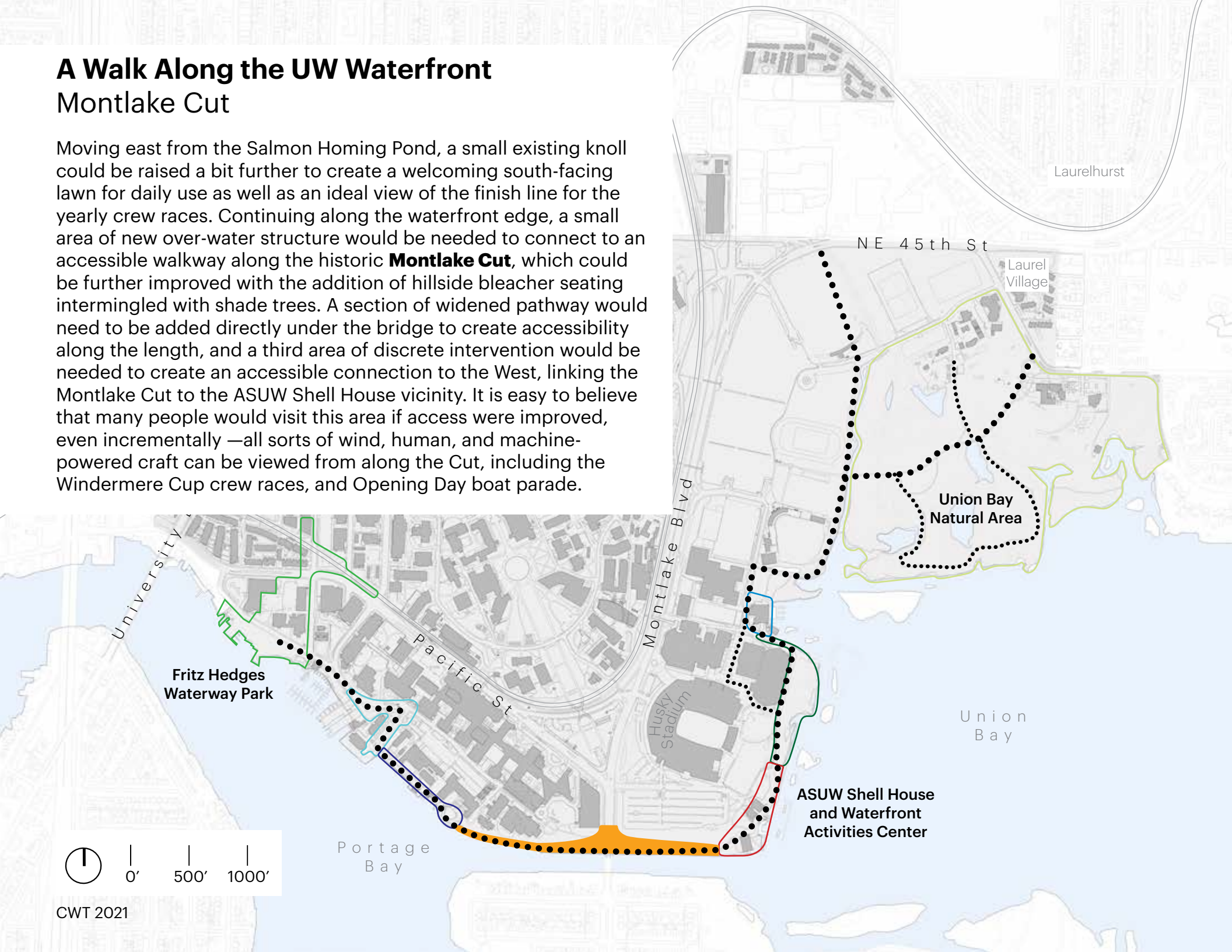
A Walk Along the UW Waterfront
Montlake Cut

Moving east from the Salmon Homing Pond, a small existing knoll could be raised a bit further to create a welcoming south-facing lawn for daily use as well as an ideal view of the finish line for the yearly crew races. Continuing along the waterfront edge, a small area of new over-water structure would be needed to connect to an accessible walkway along the historic **Montlake Cut**, which could be further improved with the addition of hillside bleacher seating intermingled with shade trees. A section of widened pathway would need to be added directly under the bridge to create accessibility along the length, and a third area of discrete intervention would be needed to create an accessible connection to the West, linking the Montlake Cut to the ASUW Shell House vicinity. It is easy to believe that many people would visit this area if access were improved, even incrementally —all sorts of wind, human, and machine-powered craft can be viewed from along the Cut, including the Windermere Cup crew races, and Opening Day boat parade.



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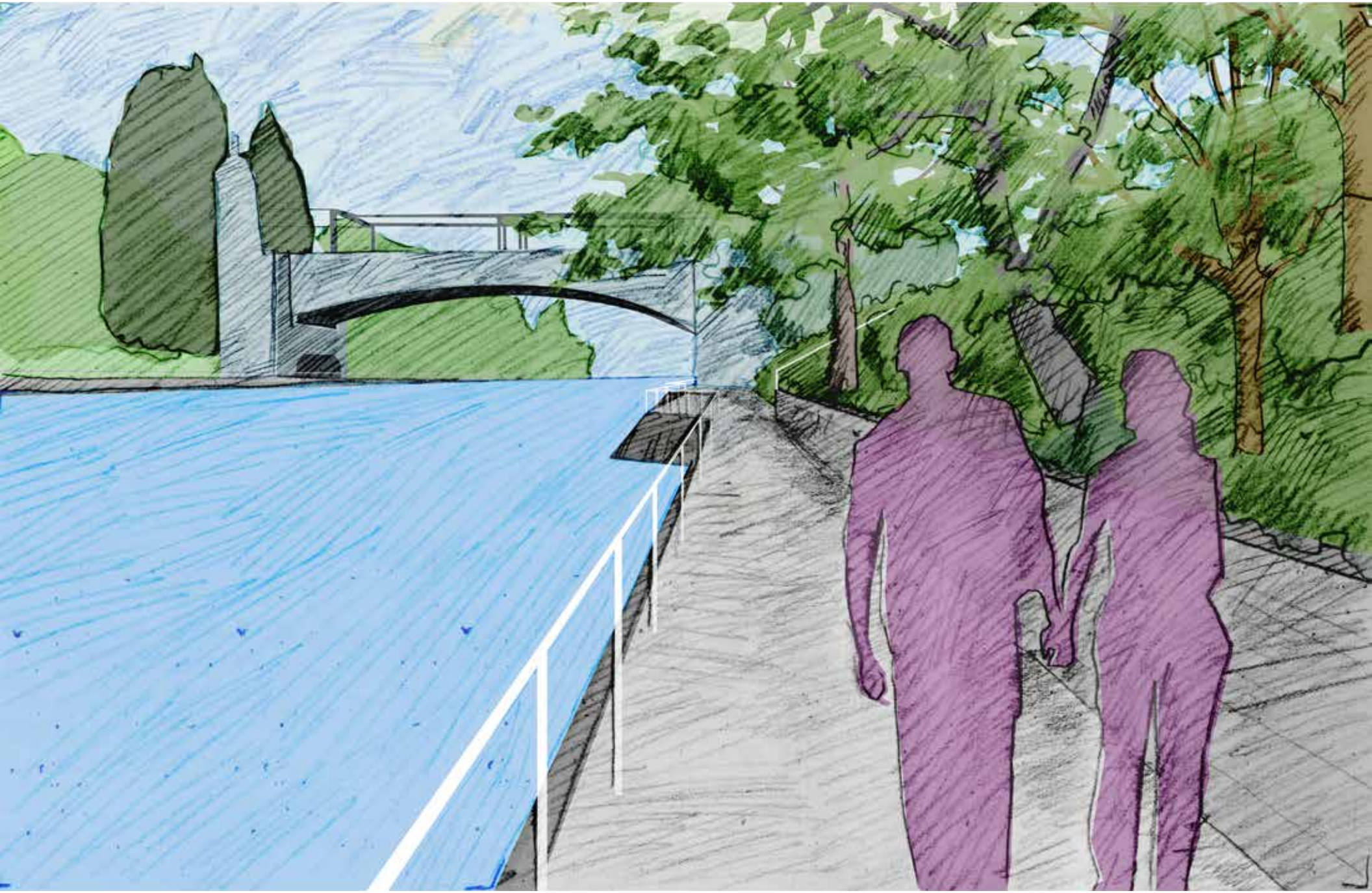
View of Existing Montlake Cut

Proposed Montlake Cut

View of Existing Montlake Cut

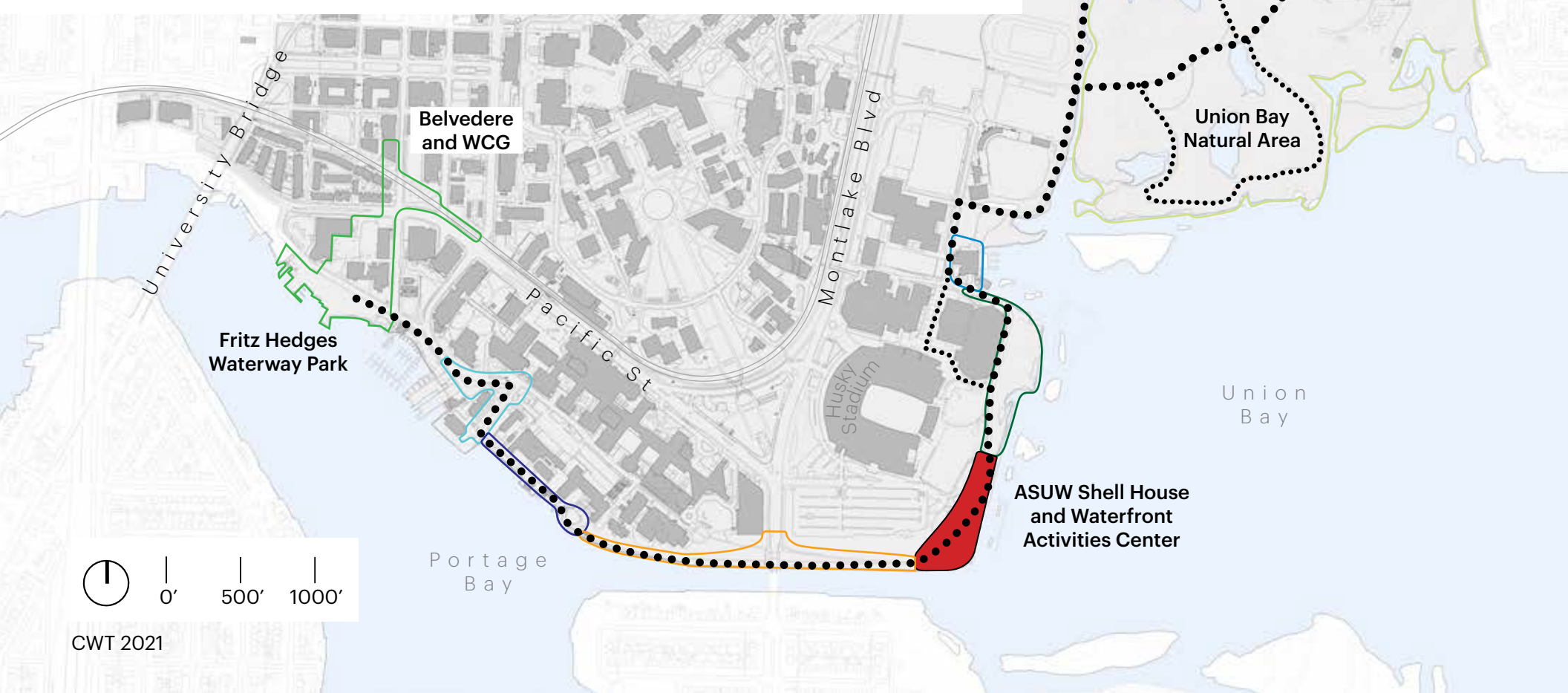
Proposed Montlake Cut



A Walk Along the UW Waterfront

ASUW Waterfront Plaza and Waterfront Activities Center

Emerging on the western side of the Cut, the waterfront trail connects to the **ASUW Shell House**. This building has traditionally hosted program that requires water access, thus preventing the trail from passing in front of the water-facing side. The campus-facing side of this building is fronted by a paved space that currently serves as a parking lot but could be re-structured to feel like a welcoming point of arrival, a gathering place for activities related to the Shell House and the Waterfront Activities Center (WAC), and an event space related to Husky Harbor and the Opening Day/ Windermere Cup activities. Coupled with improved wayfinding and signage, this location could serve as an exciting new connection between East Campus and the waterfront.



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View of Existing ASUW Waterfront Plaza and Waterfront Activities Center

Proposed ASUW Waterfront Plaza and Waterfront Activities Center

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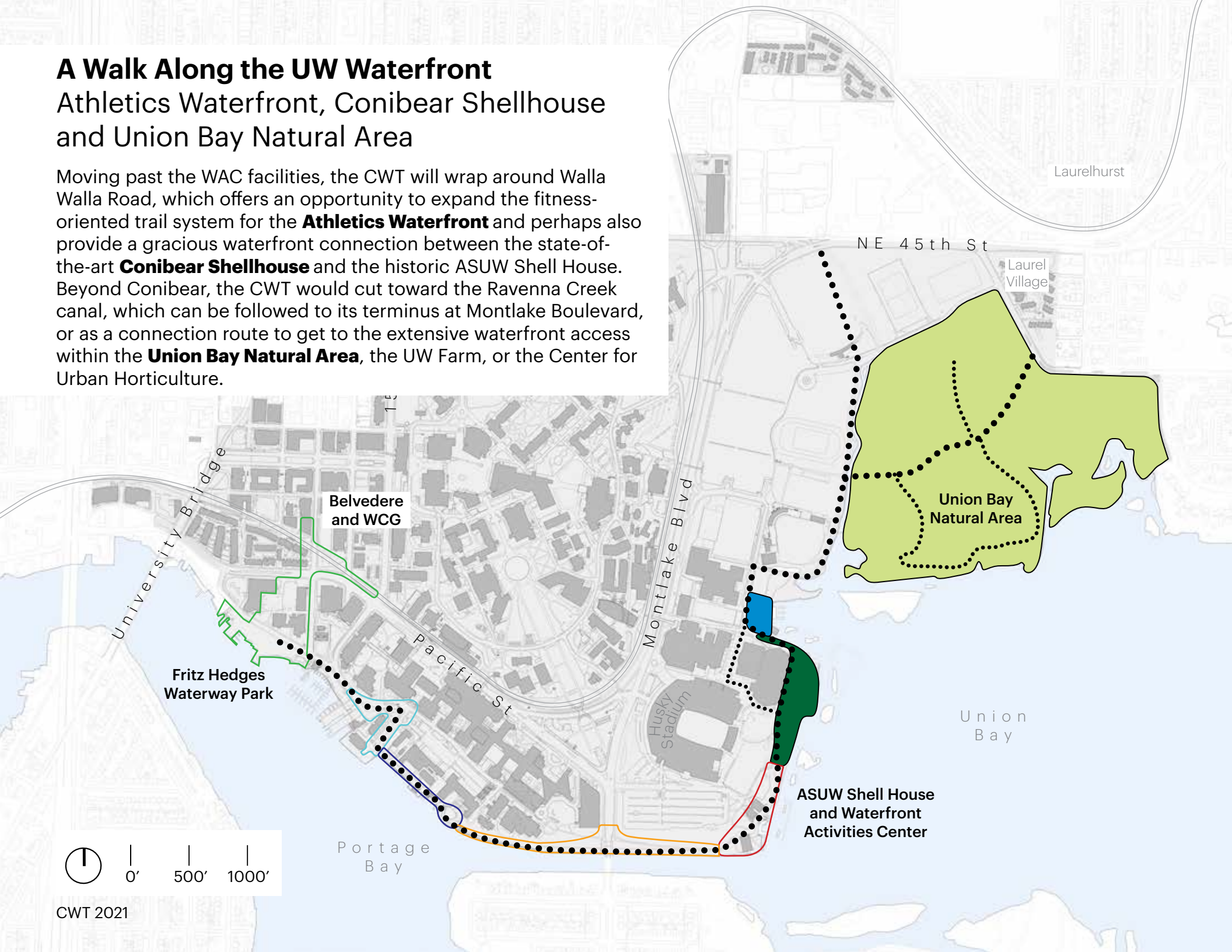
A Walk Along the UW Waterfront

Athletics Waterfront, Conibear Shellhouse and Union Bay Natural Area

Moving past the WAC facilities, the CWT will wrap around Walla Walla Road, which offers an opportunity to expand the fitness-oriented trail system for the **Athletics Waterfront** and perhaps also provide a gracious waterfront connection between the state-of-the-art **Conibear Shellhouse** and the historic ASUW Shell House. Beyond Conibear, the CWT would cut toward the Ravenna Creek canal, which can be followed to its terminus at Montlake Boulevard, or as a connection route to get to the extensive waterfront access within the **Union Bay Natural Area**, the UW Farm, or the Center for Urban Horticulture.



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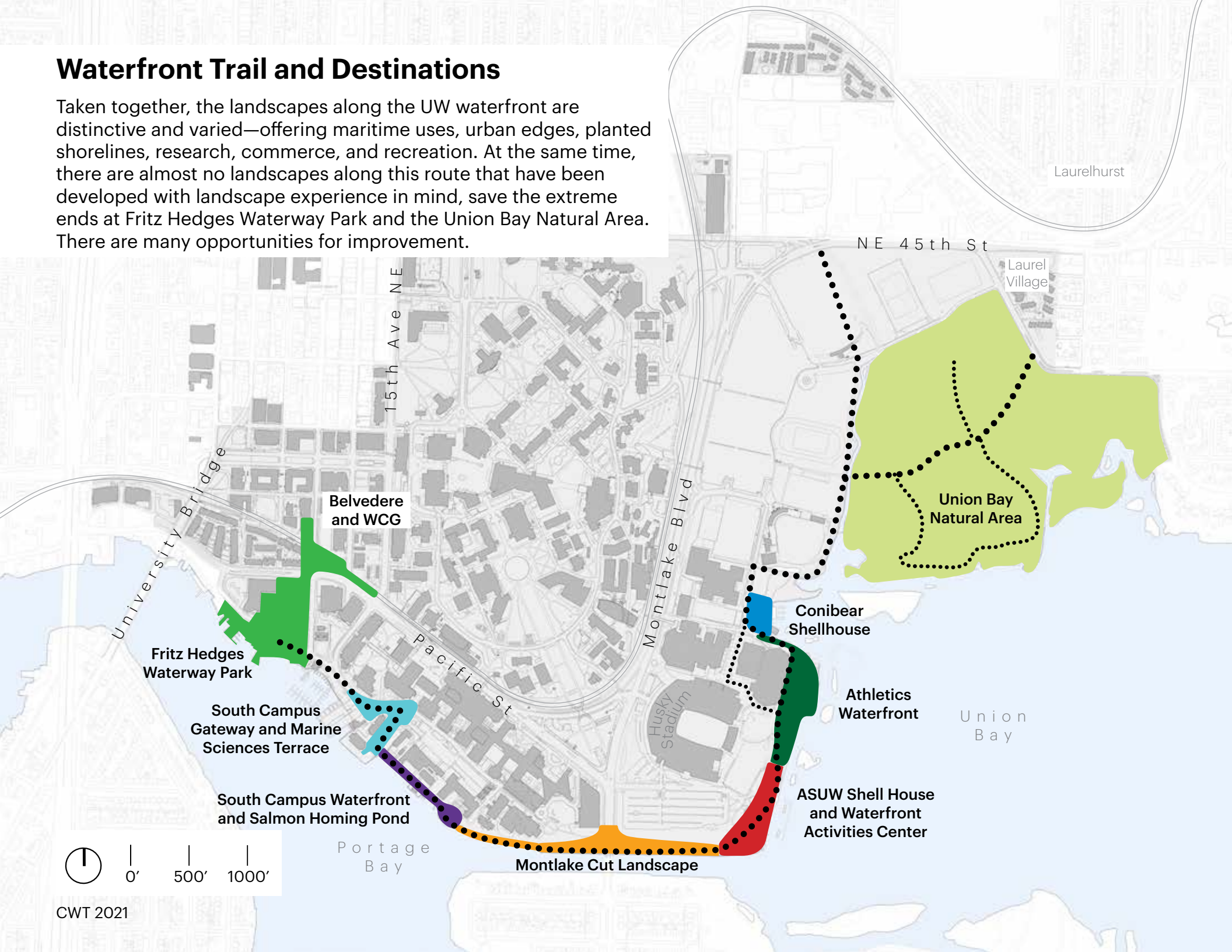
View of Existing Athletics Waterfront - Walla Walla Road

View of Existing Athletics Waterfront - Canal Road

View of Existing Union Bay Natural Area

Waterfront Trail and Destinations

Taken together, the landscapes along the UW waterfront are distinctive and varied—offering maritime uses, urban edges, planted shorelines, research, commerce, and recreation. At the same time, there are almost no landscapes along this route that have been developed with landscape experience in mind, save the extreme ends at Fritz Hedges Waterway Park and the Union Bay Natural Area. There are many opportunities for improvement.



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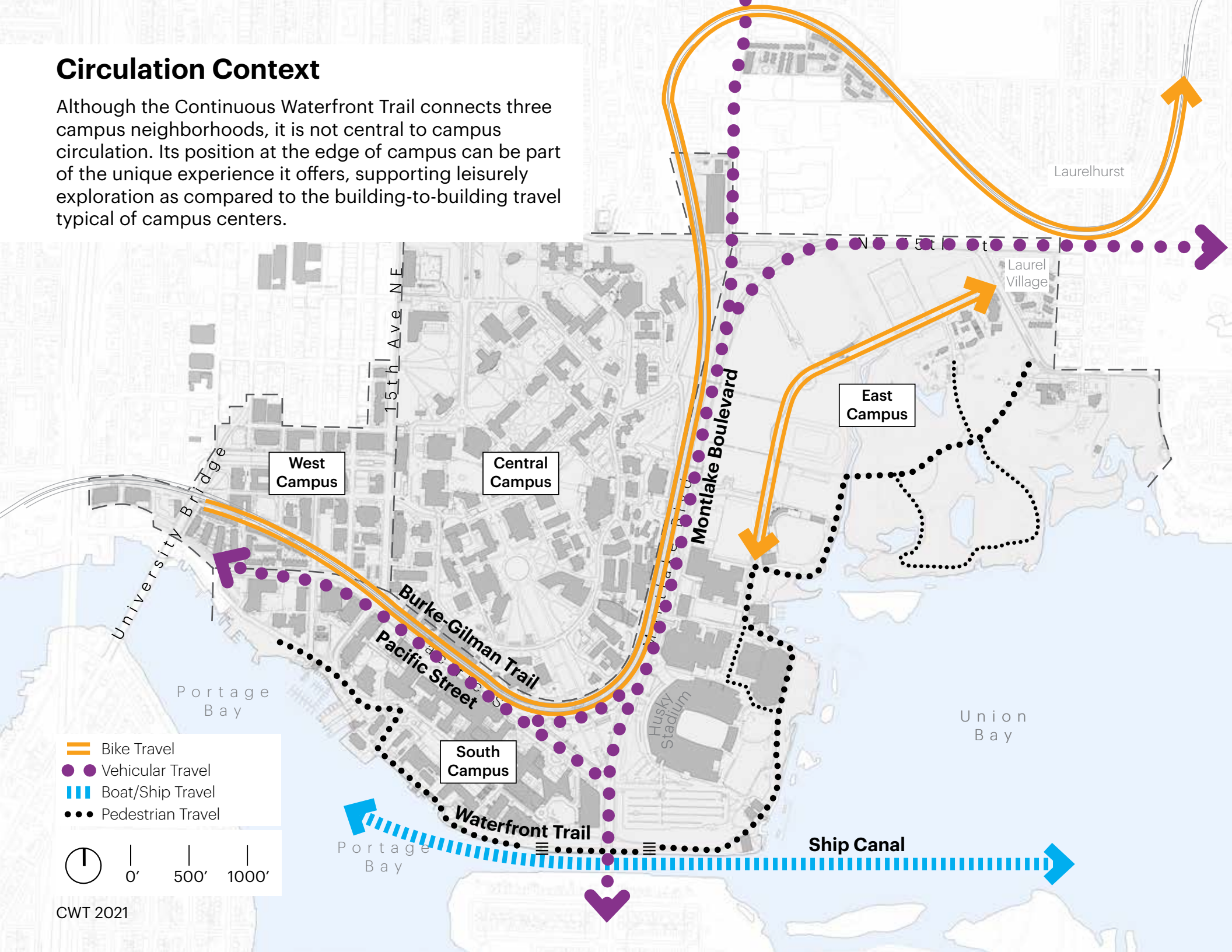
Continuous Waterfront Trail: Opportunities and Challenges

Circulation Context

Although the Continuous Waterfront Trail connects three campus neighborhoods, it is not central to campus circulation. Its position at the edge of campus can be part of the unique experience it offers, supporting leisurely exploration as compared to the building-to-building travel typical of campus centers.



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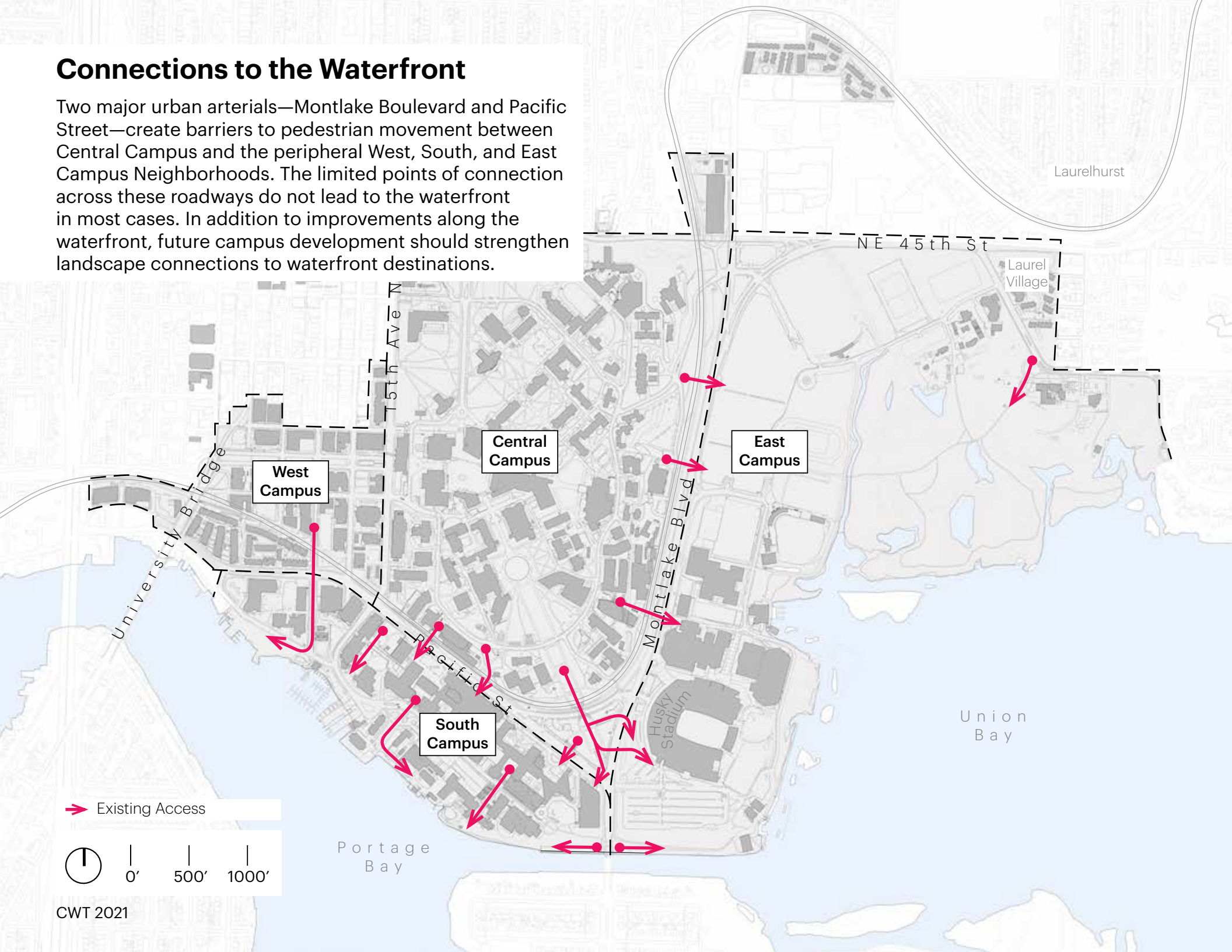
Connections to the Waterfront

Two major urban arterials—Montlake Boulevard and Pacific Street—create barriers to pedestrian movement between Central Campus and the peripheral West, South, and East Campus Neighborhoods. The limited points of connection across these roadways do not lead to the waterfront in most cases. In addition to improvements along the waterfront, future campus development should strengthen landscape connections to waterfront destinations.



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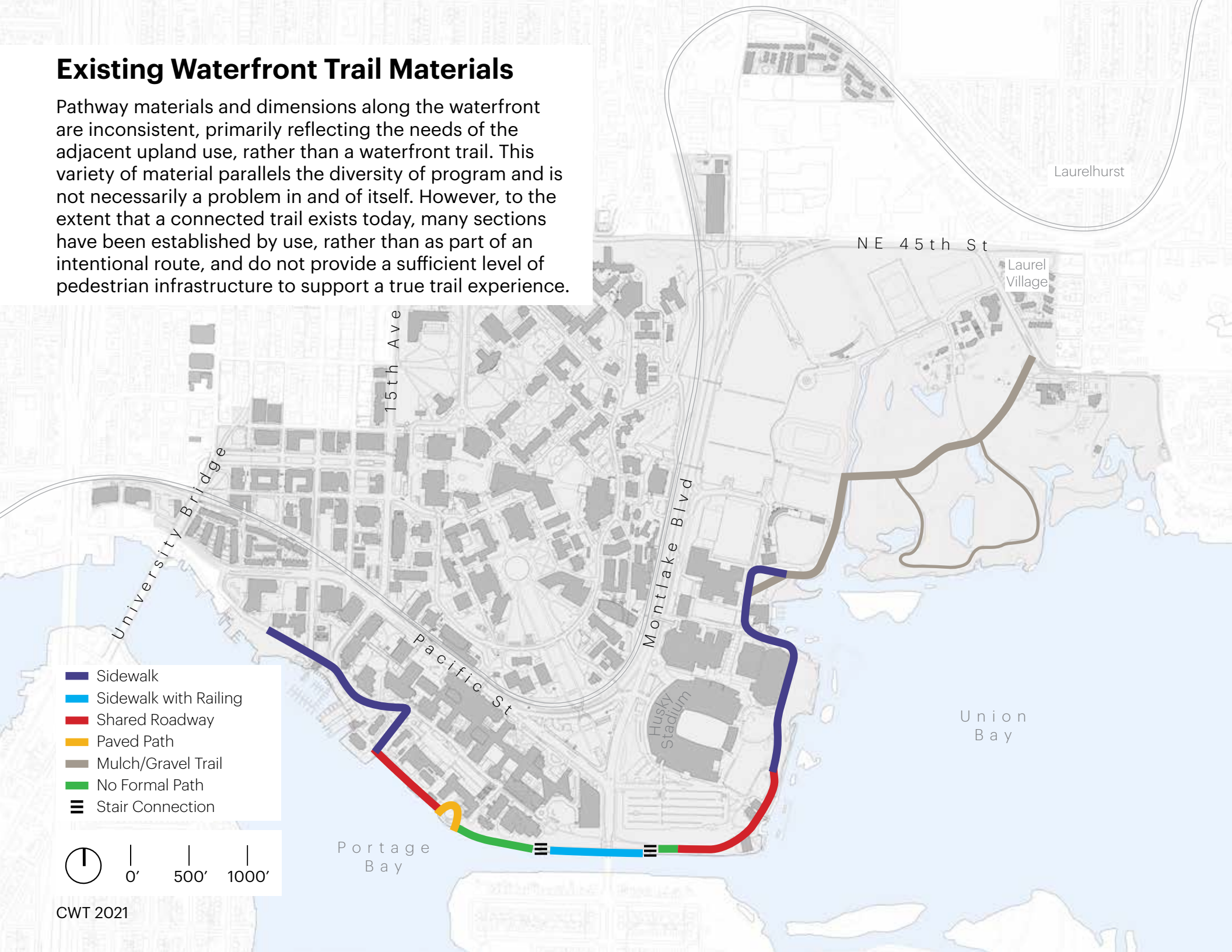
Existing Waterfront Trail Materials

Pathway materials and dimensions along the waterfront are inconsistent, primarily reflecting the needs of the adjacent upland use, rather than a waterfront trail. This variety of material parallels the diversity of program and is not necessarily a problem in and of itself. However, to the extent that a connected trail exists today, many sections have been established by use, rather than as part of an intentional route, and do not provide a sufficient level of pedestrian infrastructure to support a true trail experience.



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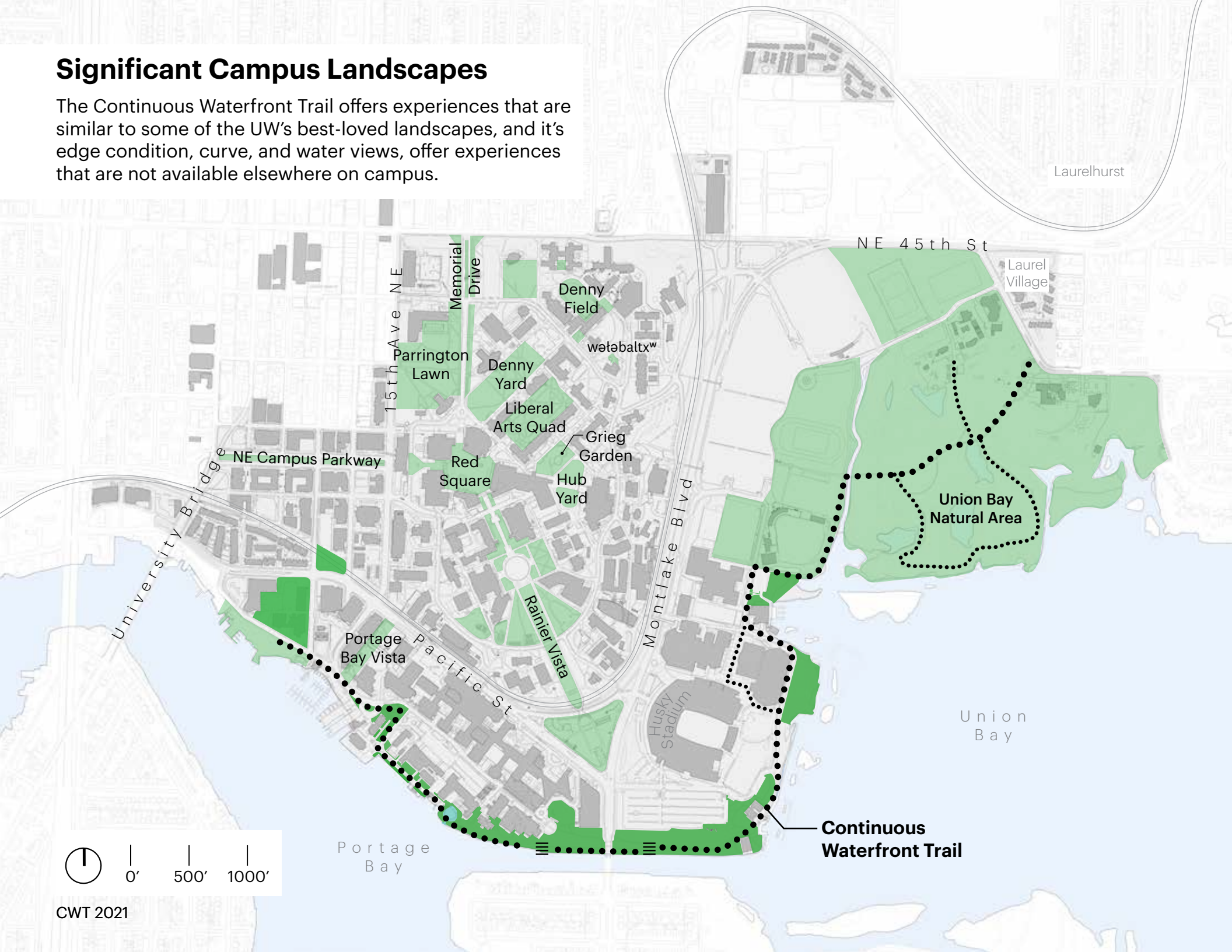
Significant Campus Landscapes

The Continuous Waterfront Trail offers experiences that are similar to some of the UW's best-loved landscapes, and it's edge condition, curve, and water views, offer experiences that are not available elsewhere on campus.



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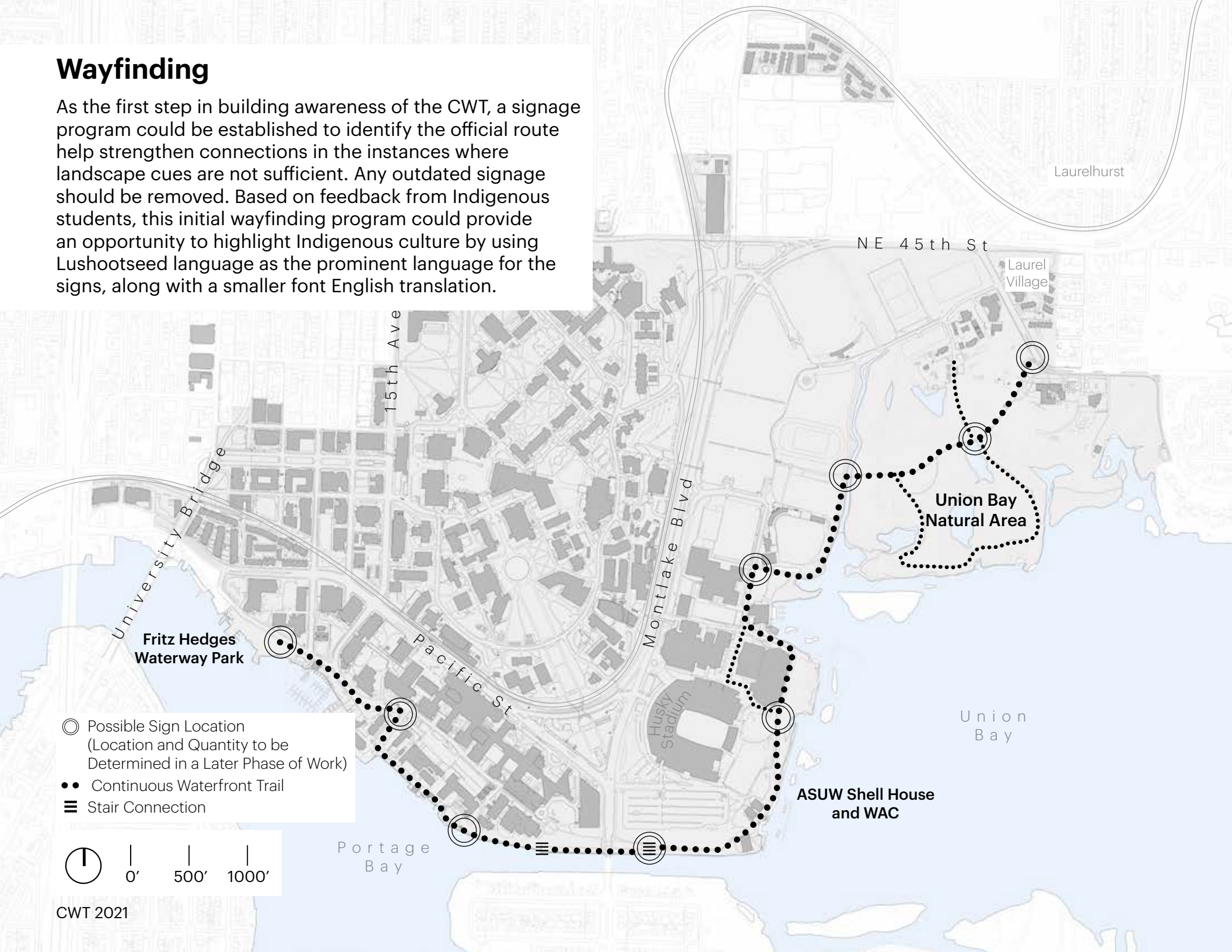
Wayfinding

As the first step in building awareness of the CWT, a signage program could be established to identify the official route help strengthen connections in the instances where landscape cues are not sufficient. Any outdated signage should be removed. Based on feedback from Indigenous students, this initial wayfinding program could provide an opportunity to highlight Indigenous culture by using Lushootseed language as the prominent language for the signs, along with a smaller font English translation.



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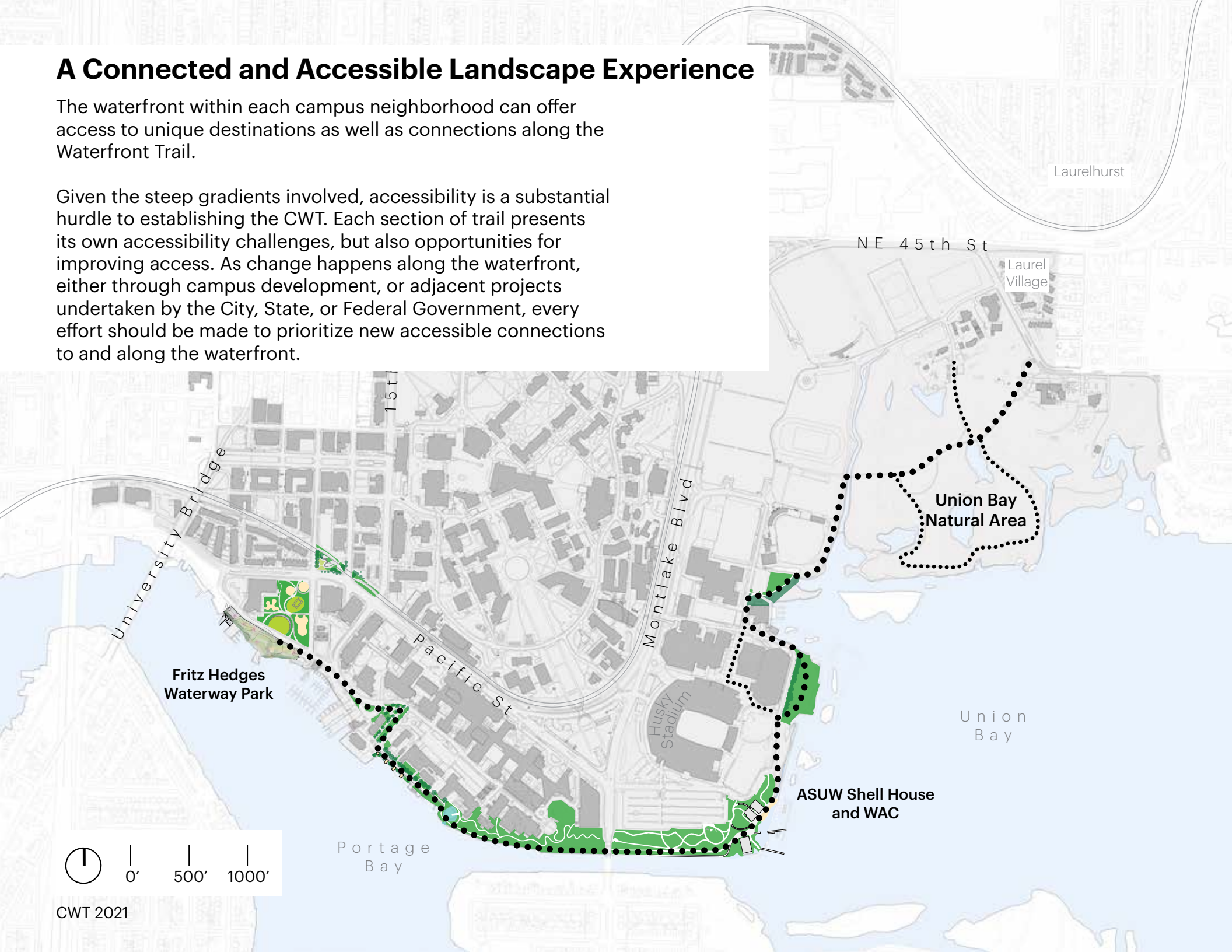
A Connected and Accessible Landscape Experience

The waterfront within each campus neighborhood can offer access to unique destinations as well as connections along the Waterfront Trail.

Given the steep gradients involved, accessibility is a substantial hurdle to establishing the CWT. Each section of trail presents its own accessibility challenges, but also opportunities for improving access. As change happens along the waterfront, either through campus development, or adjacent projects undertaken by the City, State, or Federal Government, every effort should be made to prioritize new accessible connections to and along the waterfront.



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Reflecting Indigenous Culture in the Continuous Waterfront Trail

Conversations with Indigenous Students at the UW resulted in a number of suggestions about how the Continuous Waterfront Trail could communicate different aspects of Indigenous Culture.

Indigenous language

- Southern Lushootseed (or Chinook jargon)
- Use prominently, look for ways to teach pronunciation
- Tell the story of the water and what occurs there (direction (N, S, E, W), ceremonies, canoe carry/journey)
- Use Lushootseed and Indigenous place-names for wayfinding signage

Look for ways to highlight Indigenous culture in a range of locations:

- East Campus (UW Farm and food sovereignty movement, canoe launch)
- South Campus (Salmon Homing Pond, Montlake Cut)
- West Campus (gathering, celebrations, canoe launch)

Non-place-specific elements that could be incorporated

- Spaces for ceremonies, celebration, and dance
- Native plants
- Canoe arrivals and landings
- Involve a Coast Salish artist

Shoreline Permitting Considerations

- Possible Seattle Shoreline Land Use Permit required
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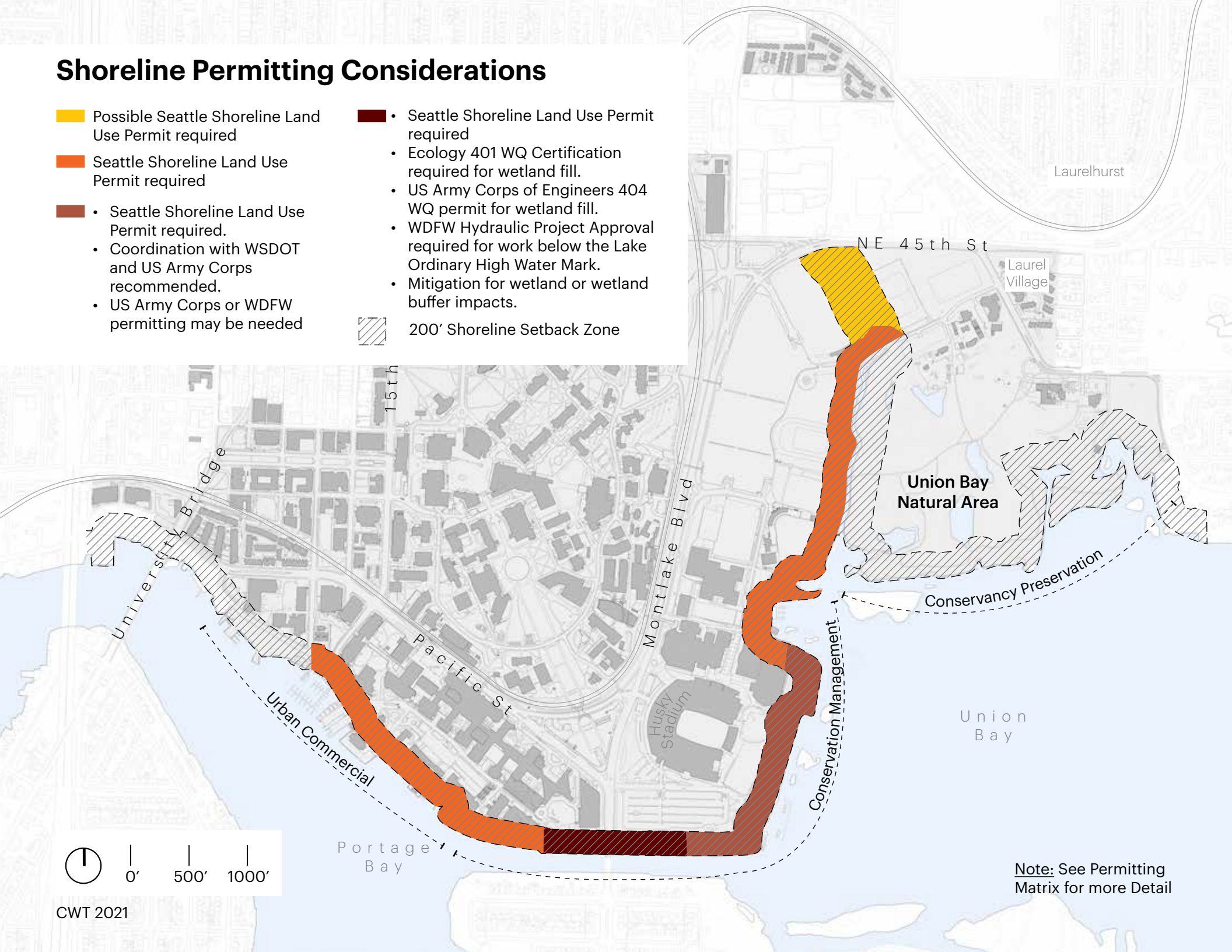
  - Coordination with WSDOT and US Army Corps recommended.
  - US Army Corps or WDFW permitting may be needed
- Seattle Shoreline Land Use Permit required
  - Ecology 401 WQ Certification required for wetland fill.
  - US Army Corps of Engineers 404 WQ permit for wetland fill.
  - WDFW Hydraulic Project Approval required for work below the Lake Ordinary High Water Mark.
  - Mitigation for wetland or wetland buffer impacts.
- 200′ Shoreline Setback Zone



Note: See Permitting Matrix for more Detail

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Next Steps in the Planning and Design of the Continuous Waterfront Trail

1. CWT Schematic Design Plan
   - Determine Wayfinding
   - Paving Study
   - Railing Study
   - Lighting Study
   - Inventory waterfront infrastructure and storage facility, and determine future needs
   - Plan for trail maintenance

2. Design Studies by Area
   - Advance design concepts by areas of implementation
   - Increase specificity about materials and program
   - Cost benchmarking
   - Identify possible partners/funding sources for implementing the CWT