

TOLLAND, CONNECTICUT

The likely route of the Old Connecticut Path crossed the town of Tolland from the Willimantic River at Nye-Holman State Forest to the Tolland-Vernon town line. Development over almost four centuries has erased most traces of the old Path. However, there are still places along the Path that connect the story of the Old Connecticut Path with the history of Tolland and Connecticut's heritage. The proposed Connecticut Path Heritage Trail provides a cross-town route that runs parallel with the Old Connecticut Path with some places touching the ancient trail.

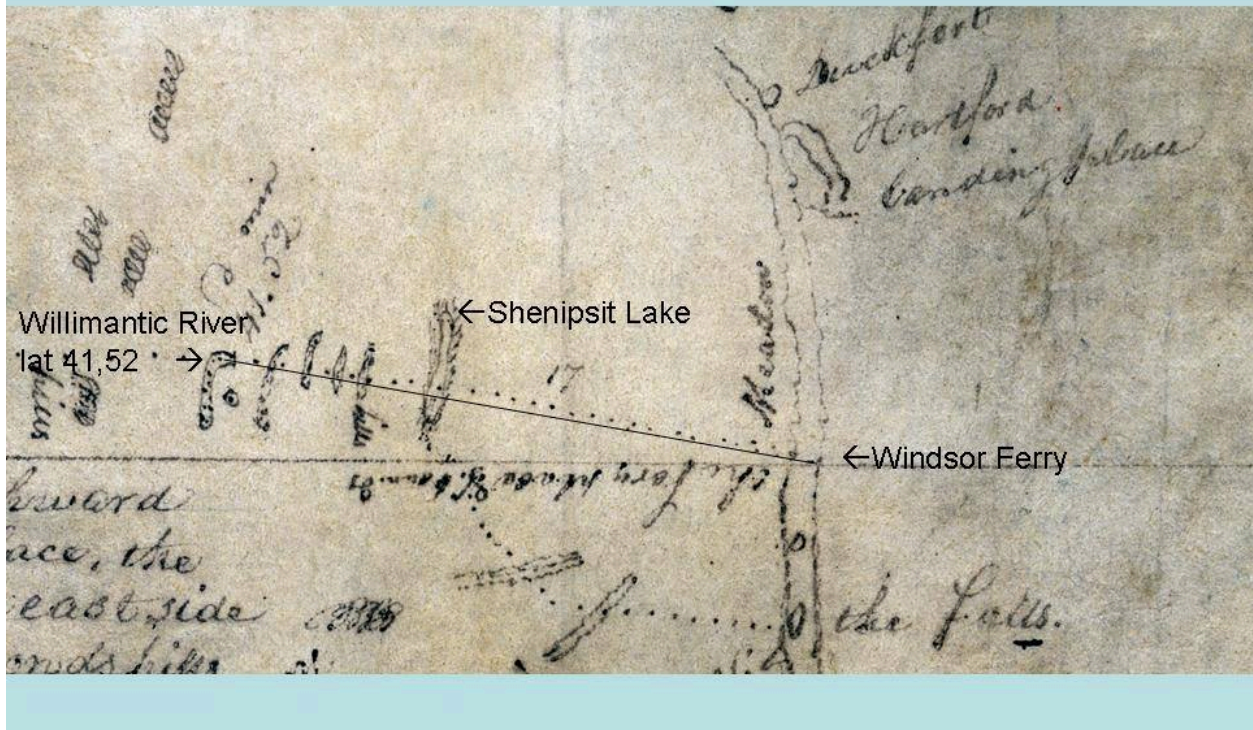
The proposed Connecticut Path Heritage Trail provides a route that could be implemented today along quiet roads and existing trails. A future alternative adds off-road sections to form a more complete greenway trail across the town from the Willimantic River to the Tankerhoosen River Greenway in Vernon.

Tolland Green



Tolland Green lays along the route of the Old Connecticut. The native trail likely reached the center of Tolland from the east along Torry Road from the Skungamaug River and the old trail from Providence to Windsor & Hartford.

Willimantic River to Windsor Ferry Woodward & Saffery 1642 Map: Distance 17 miles



A portion of the 1642 survey map by Nathaniel Woodward and Solomon Saffery shows landmarks along their route from the Willimantic River crossing to the first Windsor ferry. Tolland lays between the Willimantic crossing and Shenipsit Lake on their survey map.

The copy of the Woodward & Saffery Survey Map for the section from the Willimantic River to the west side of the Connecticut River at the first Windsor ferry shows the distance as 17 miles from the ferry to the Willimantic River. The process of measuring distances between all observation points using modern GPS tools indicated that the actual distance between points was 16.35 miles.

Considering that Woodward & Saffery calculated distances manually, the small difference in distances is remarkable!

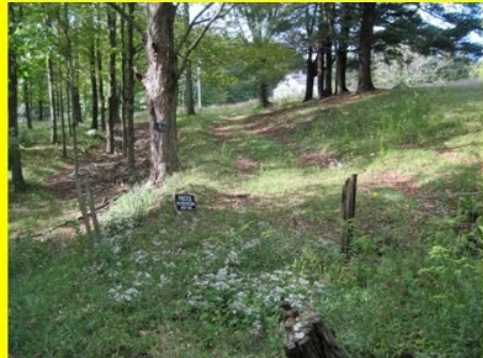
Willimantic River floodwaters



River crossings before the construction of bridges required careful selection of the time and place. The Willimantic River in during flood times is a powerful and dangerous river that can carry a life away in the blink of an eye.

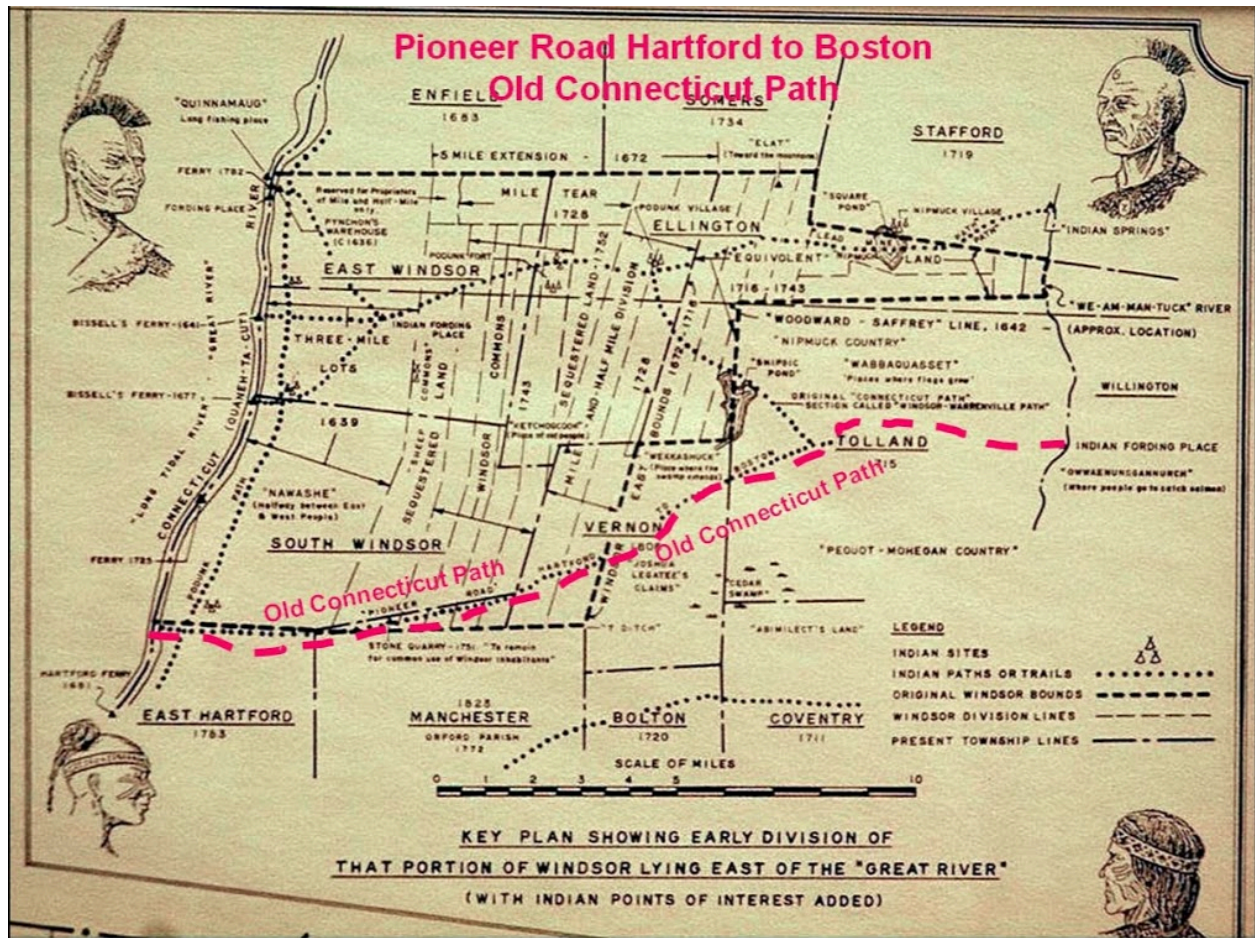
Crossing the river on foot requires knowledge of the river's flow and the places where the river is best suited to walk across. The Willimantic River flows through a flood plain between Wellington and Tolland that is almost perfectly suited for meeting the requirements for safe passage along a foot path.

Willimantic Crossing Nye Holman State Forest



At high water, the river overflows its banks and spreads across the low lying flood plain. The flooding lowers the level and angle of the river banks. While it is difficult to build bridges on a flood plain, this area of the Willimantic was perfectly suited for foot travel crossing at the fordways. Because the river changes course over time due to flooding, the precise location of the Willimantic fordway used for travelers on the Old Connecticut Path and Providence Path cannot be precisely located.

A local map of Windsor settlement shows early trails and landmarks in Windsor and adjacent areas. The Willimantic River crossing between modern day Willington and Tolland along RT 74 is shown as an "Indian Fording Place". The "Pioneer Road" linking Hartford and Boston likely followed the Native trail used by the first settlers of Hartford, Windsor and Wethersfield.



Matthias Spiess, Manchester CT historian wrote about the pioneers that "If they had gone to Tolland, then they would have followed the Nipmuck Trail to Hartford."

Old Connecticut Path Nye Holman State Forest Tolland, CT



Lifetime Tolland resident Madeline Regan shared her recollection of her family's long ownership of land between Evergreen Drive and RT 74 through which the Old Connecticut Path traveled. Ms. Regan recalled stories of her mother and grandmother walking the full length of the old roadway from their home down to the Willimantic River. She was especially pleased to learn from a 1982 survey of her land that the path she walked daily was the Old Connecticut Path. Ms. Regan shared her feelings for the land along the Path, "A quiet walk in my woods, observing and listening to the sights and sounds of nature, brings peace and tranquility to body and soul."

Hidden in the woods of Nye-Holman State Forest there is evidence of an ancient way to Tolland that had fallen out of use as a primary route. Over the past two centuries, this route has been both fragmented and forgotten. Some clues and field exploration helped rediscover the route and put the pieces back together.

Tolland Old Connecticut Path I-84 to CT State Police



East downhill towards I-84



West uphill towards CT State Police

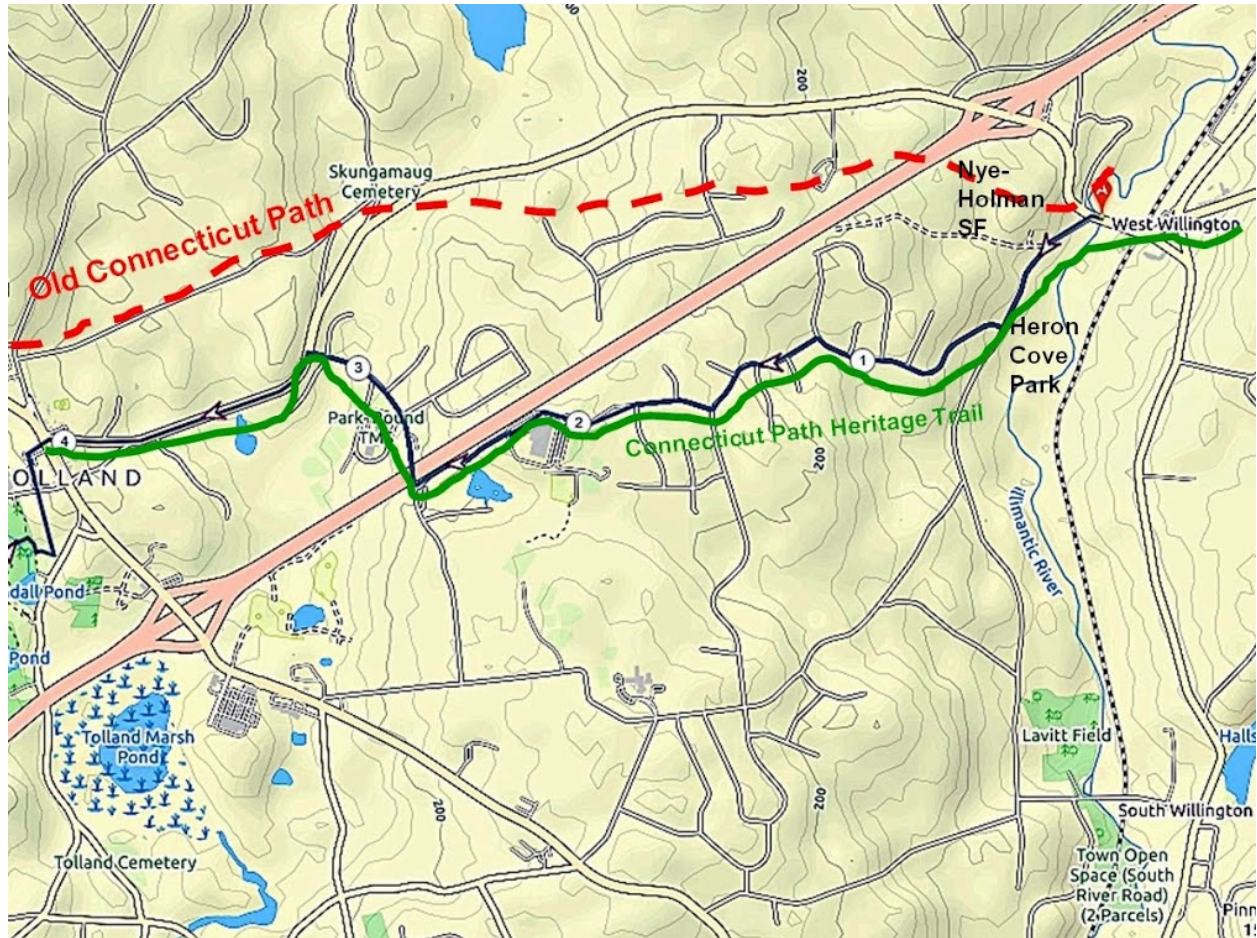


West to CT State Police



One of the best places to find a fragments of the old trail can be found in the state forest adjacent to the Connecticut State Police barracks on RT 74.

The likely route of the "Pioneer Road" or Old Connecticut Path from the Willimantic River crossing to the center of Tolland is shown as a red dashed line.

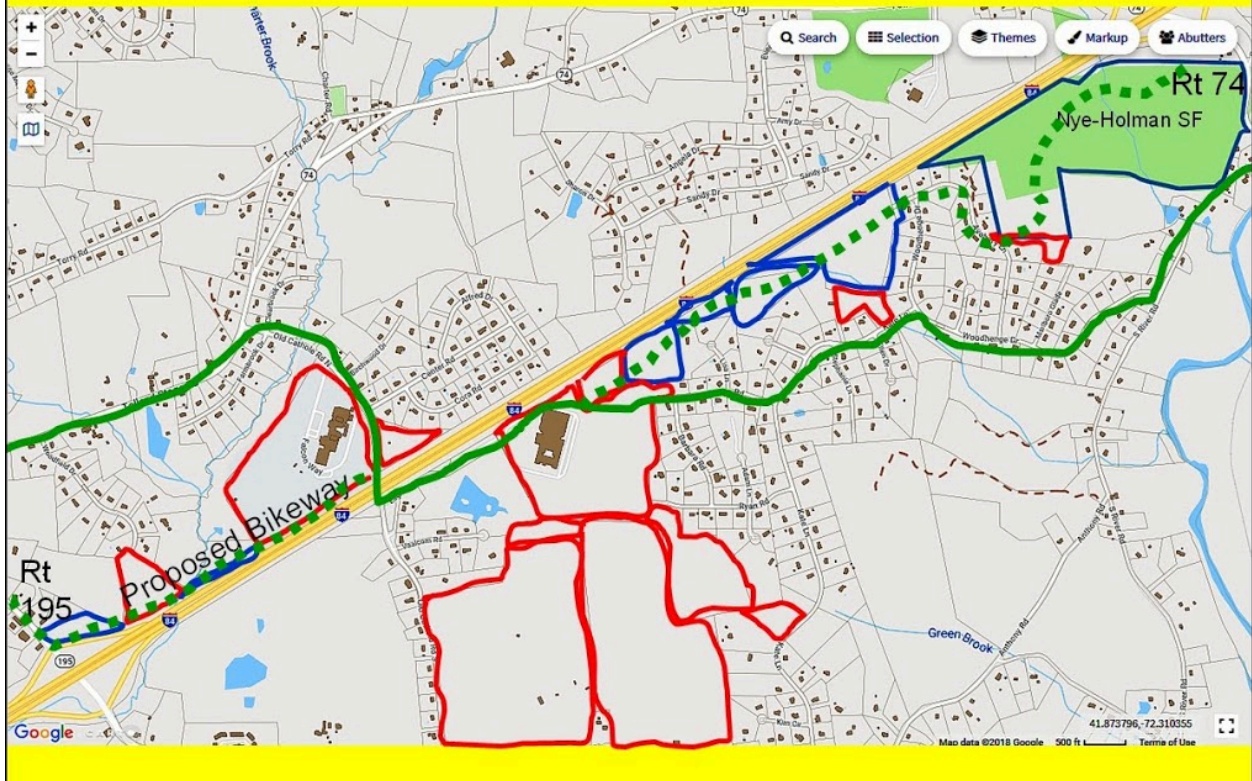


Modern development in Tolland currently limits the potential route of a Connecticut Path Heritage Trail linking Nye-Holman State Forest and Heron Cove Park on the Willimantic River with the center of Tolland. At this time, a lower traffic route primarily on town roads could be followed that parallels the Old Connecticut Path.

Although there is no current greenway corridor from the Willimantic River to Tolland center, there is potential for a future off road corridor (green dotted line) through state (outlined in blue) and town (outlined in red) owned woodlands that could serve as part of a future cross town trail.

Tolland –East

Owner Key: **Blue** = CT, **Red** = Town of Tolland

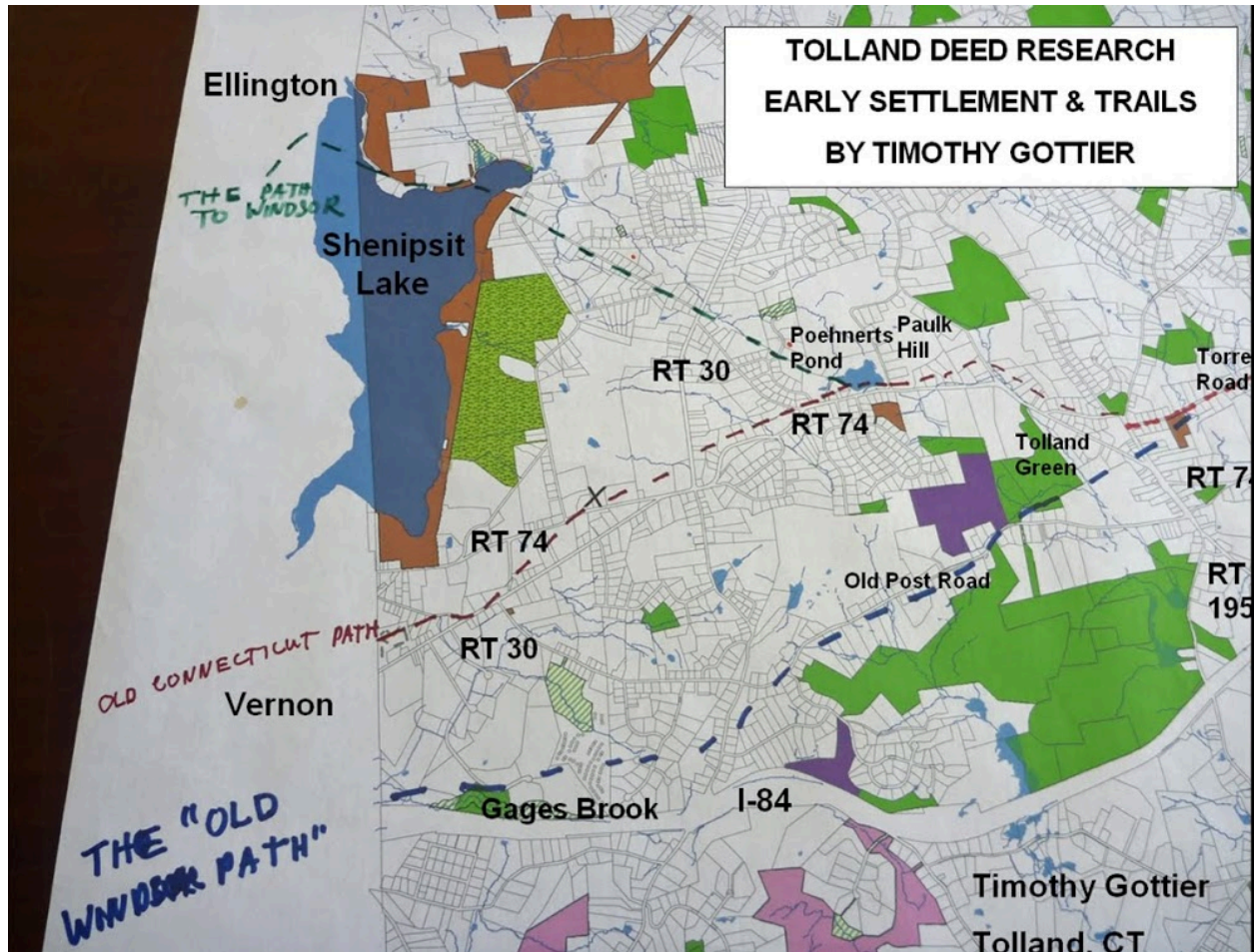


Tolland has significant preserved green space lands and extensive trail system to provide access. Community support for a future cross town trail that would be part of the proposed Connecticut Path Heritage Trail would add to Tolland's recreational opportunities and historic connection with Connecticut's heritage.



The Tolland Historical Society stands near the place where the "Pioneer Road" reached the center of Tolland. The Old Connecticut Path is most likely to have continued west from Skungamaug to Tolland Center along the upland route of Torry Road. The road stays to the high ground avoiding potentially difficult wetlands and stream crossings along RT 74/ Tolland Turnpike that were overcome during settlement of the town.

Two possible routes west from Tolland have been identified by Timothe Gottier, Tolland local historian, through analysis of Tolland's first settlement land records.



One route of the Old Connecticut Path heads west from Tolland Center along the line of the Tolland-Hartford Turnpike/RT 74 traveling through the pass in the line of hills west of Tolland Center. This has largely been developed along the old roadway that runs parallel to the modern highway.

Gottier identified a second route over Old Post Road and downhill to Gages Brook at the Tolland-Vernon town line. This route offers potential to connect existing trails and quiet roads for a proposed Connecticut Path Heritage Trail from Tolland center to the Shenipsit Trail at the Tolland-Vernon line.

The route of the Old Connecticut Path (red dashed line) over Old Post Road from Tolland center to the Tolland-Vernon town line approximates the route shown by Gottier as the "Old Windsor Path".



The proposed Connecticut Path Heritage Trail departs Tolland Center along a walkway connecting the common with Crandall Park, and existing foot trails across Crandall Park to Old Post Road/Old Kent Road North. The route proceeds along Old Kent Road North, Garnett Ridge Drive, and Mountain Spring Road across I-84. The route continues downhill along Loehr Road to CT RT 32 where it meets the Shenipsit Trail in Vernon.

**Old Post Road
Tolland, Connecticut**



Field exploration of the "Old Windsor Path" shown on Gottier's map was conducted to find evidence of the early route. A section was found hidden in the woodland behind the Tolland Recreation Center.

An ancient stone bridge across Paulk Brook can be still used to cross the brook behind the Tolland Recreation Center. An old cart road can be followed uphill through town forest land towards Old Post Road.

Old Post Road Tolland, Connecticut



Remnants of the Old Post Road that likely was built upon the earlier "Old Windsor Path" identified in the earliest property deeds of Tolland settlers.

**Old Post Road
Trail Remnants
Tolland, Connecticut**

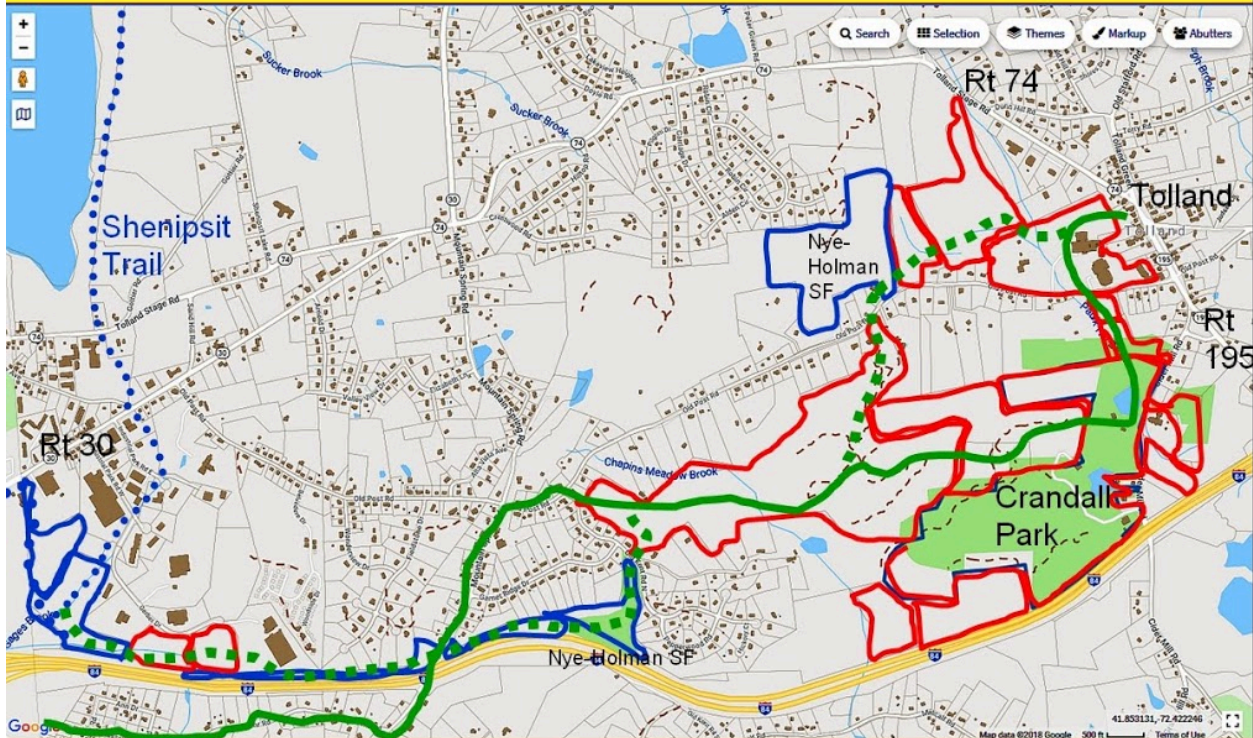


The old path intersects with Old Post Road near the top of the hill. Town owned forest that is part of Crandall Park lies across Old Post Road from the intersection of the old path. This provides an alternate connection for a potential cross town path.

An alternate route from the center of Tolland west to the Tolland-Vernon town line is shown as dotted green line. This route incorporates the section of the "Old Windsor Path" discovered next to the Tolland Recreation Center going uphill to Old Post Road, and joining with existing trails in Crandall Park to reach Old Post Road/Old Kent Road North. The route of the proposed trail follows Old Kent Road to a portion of Nye-Holman State Forest located along I-84 to reach Mountain Spring Road.

Tolland – West

Owner Key: **Blue** = CT, **Red** = Town of Tolland



Depending upon the width of the state owned I-84 right-of-way, the proposed Connecticut Path Heritage Trail could continue downhill in the woods along the I-84 corridor to town owned land along Gages Brook. This route would join the Shenipsit Trail with the Tolland County Agricultural Center.

The alternate route of the proposed Connecticut Path Heritage Trail between Mountain Spring Road and the Tolland County Agricultural Center follows the I-84 right-of-way along local paths and Gages Brook to reach the Shenipsit Trail. This potential route would provide a continuous primarily off-road trail from Tolland Center to the Tolland-Vernon town line.

