



## METROPOLITAN GOVERNMENT OF NASHVILLE AND DAVIDSON COUNTY

Metropolitan Historical Commission  
Metropolitan Historic Zoning Commission  
Sunnyside in Sevier Park  
3000 Granny White Pike  
Nashville, Tennessee 37204  
Telephone: (615) 862-7970

To: Metropolitan Council  
From: Metropolitan Historical Commission, Staff  
Date: June 15, 2020  
Re: BL2020-326

An ordinance to amend the Geographic Information Systems Street and Alley Centerline Layer for the Metropolitan Government of Nashville and Davidson County, by renaming a portion of Old Elm Hill Pike between McGavock Pike and Ermac Drive to “Sims Branch Way.” (Proposal Number 2020M-001SR-002).

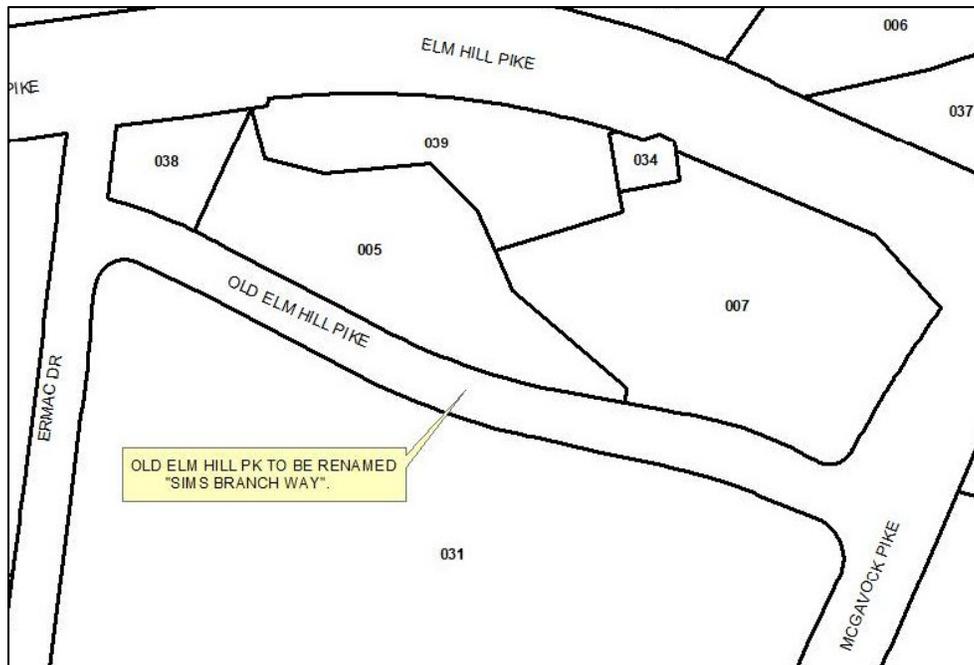


Figure 1: Sketch, Metro Public Works.

Elm Hill Pike is one of the oldest thoroughfares in Davidson County. According to writer Ann Moss Betts, “It has been called ‘the mother of all the roads’ in Middle Tennessee, because it predated Lebanon, Murfreesboro, and the other major highways which now spread out from

Nashville.”<sup>1</sup> Local historian Leona Taylor Aiken claimed, “Elm Hill Road is the oldest road in Middle Tennessee. Pioneers came over it from Virginia and the Carolinas. Perhaps it was the longest road in the United States at that time, for it ran from Philadelphia, Pa., to Nashville and all merchandise was transported over it by wagon.”<sup>2</sup>

The road was not always called Elm Hill Pike. Passing through the Mud Tavern/Hite community easterly towards the Stones River, it has been called Lebanon Road (before the construction of Lebanon Turnpike) and Stones River Road. More recently, it was known as “Chicken” Road or Pike. Historical Commission staff did not determine when the road was first called “Chicken Pike,” but it is clear that by 1910, residents along the pike were tired of the “homely moniker.”<sup>3</sup> In its accounting of the April 1910 quarterly session of the Davidson County Court, the *Nashville Banner* reported, “Squire [W.G.M.] Campbell submitted a petition from numerous citizens along [the pike] requesting that the court restore the name of the pike ‘Elm Hill.’ The petition recites that the name, ‘Chicken Pike,’ is not the right name, but that the general public has followed in the use or [of] the erroneous synonym. The petition was granted, and hereafter the ‘Chicken’ Pike will be known as the ‘Elm Hill Pike’ or ‘Elm Hill’ Road.”<sup>4</sup> From this point forward, maps and newspapers, which had been varied in their use of the names Elm Hill and Chicken Pike, appear to consistently use the name “Elm Hill.”

In 1919, Davidson County officially included Elm Hill Road among the list of pikes comprising the county’s general road system.<sup>5</sup> The county prepared the "General Road Map, Davidson County, Tenn.," in accordance with Senate Bill No. 494 of the Private Acts of the State of Tennessee passed by the Sixtieth General Assembly in 1917. The act aimed "to provide for a system of good public roads in counties having a population of not less than 149,000, not more than 190,000 inhabitants by the Federal Census of 1910." It also included requirements for counties "to create a Board of Highway Commissioners, to have charge of the building and repairing of all the highways of said counties," and to designate, classify, and map public county

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<sup>1</sup> Ann Moss Betts, “Elm Hill Pike: The Mother of All Roads,” *The News Herald*, August 15, 1991.

<sup>2</sup> Leona Taylor Aiken, “Donelson Has History of Famous Names,” *The News Diary*, February 20, 1980. Aiken’s quotes closely resemble those provided in “Elm Hill Community Wants Better Roads,” *Nashville Tennessean*, February 27, 1921.

<sup>3</sup> “Homely moniker” from Betts. For the scope of this project, Historical Commission staff did not research the complete history of the road, such as when it was first established. Although unlabeled, the road appears on Wilbur F. Foster's 1871 Map of Davidson County. Wilbur F. Foster and G.W. & C.B. Colton & Co. *Map of Davidson County Tennessee, from actual surveys made by order of the county court of Davidson County*. New York: G.W. & C.B. Colton & Co., 1871. Map. <https://www.loc.gov/item/2006626025/>. Accessed April 24, 2020.

<sup>4</sup> “Occupies New Courtroom, April Term of Davidson County Court Transacts Lot of Business,” *Nashville Banner*, April 4, 1910. “Solons Meet in Courthouse,” *The Nashville American*, April 5, 1910.

<sup>5</sup> Davidson County Highway Commission, *1936 Code*, 8. The 1936 Code Book provides additional details that were not included in the earlier 1931 Code Book, including this reference to the 1919 Map. The 1936 Code also corrects the length to 8.1 miles.

highways and roads.<sup>6</sup> By 1931, the road's official history as Chicken Pike began to disappear. The 1931 Code book of the Davidson County Highway Commission reported that Elm Hill Pike, running 8.2 miles from Murfreesboro Road to Fuqua Road, was previously known as Elm Hill Road, with no reference to its term as Chicken Pike.<sup>7</sup>

The subject road segment, Old Elm Hill Pike, was created when the route of Elm Hill Pike was adjusted to accommodate the construction of nearby entrance/exit ramps for Briley Parkway. According to Metro Public Works staff, the State of Tennessee realigned and widened Elm Hill Pike as part of the Briley Parkway construction.<sup>8</sup> Comparison of 1957 and 1968 topographic maps provides the best visual for understanding these changes (Figures 2 and 3).<sup>9</sup> By 1968, as shown in Figure 3, Old Elm Hill Pike runs westerly from McGavock Pike, crosses Ermac Drive, and terminates near the Briley Parkway exit ramp.<sup>10</sup> The new route of Elm Hill Pike is located about 150 feet north of the intersection of Old Elm Hill and Ermac Drive.

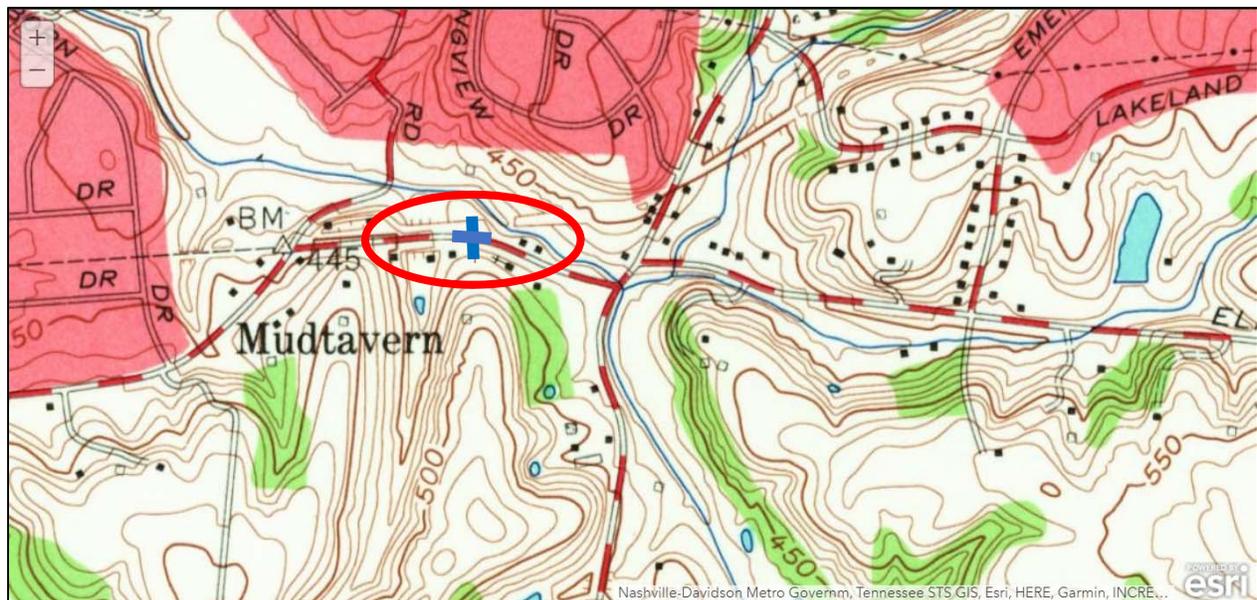


Figure 2: 1957 USGS Topographic Map. Intersection of present-day Old Elm Hill Pike and Ermac Drive marked with "+".

<sup>6</sup> County Committee (Finley M. Dorris, Samuel G. Douglas, James R. Allen, and John Langham) and Engineers (Freeland, Roberts & Co.), *General Road Map, Davidson County, Tenn.* 1919. Metropolitan Government Archives. Tennessee, *Senate Bill No. 484, Private Acts* (1917), 441: 1375-1390.

<sup>7</sup> Davidson County Highway Commission, *1931 Code*, 10.

<sup>8</sup> Email correspondence, April 24, 2020.

<sup>9</sup> USGS topographic maps, Nashville East quadrangles: 1957, 1968.

<http://historicalmaps.arcgis.com/usgs/>. Accessed April 27, 2020.

<sup>10</sup> Ermac Drive platted by *The Highlands*, recorded May 1, 1959, Plat Book 2663, Page 127, RODC.



Figure 3: 1968 USGS Topographic Map. Intersection of present-day Old Elm Hill Pike and Ermac Drive marked with "+".  
"New" Elm Hill Pike route visible just north of the intersection.