

MEGAN BARRY  
MAYOR



**METROPOLITAN GOVERNMENT OF NASHVILLE AND DAVIDSON COUNTY**

Metropolitan Historic Zoning Commission  
Sunnyside in Sevier Park  
3000 Granny White Pike  
Nashville, Tennessee 37204  
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**STAFF RECOMMENDATION**  
**1020 Gibson Drive, Smith-Carter House**  
**September 21, 2016**

**Application:** Historic Landmark Overlay for 1020 Gibson Drive, Smith-Carter Home

**Map and Parcel Numbers:** 05107004300

**Council Districts:** 08

**Applicant:** Councilmember Nancy VanReece

**Project Lead:** Robin Zeigler, [robin.zeigler@nashville.gov](mailto:robin.zeigler@nashville.gov), 615-862-7970

<p><b>Description of Project:</b> Councilmember Nancy VanReece requests that the Smith-Carter House property be adopted as a Historic Landmark.</p>	<p><b>Attachments</b> <b>A:</b> Map &amp; Photos</p>
<p><b>Recommendation Summary:</b> Staff suggests the Commission recommend to City Council that the Smith-Carter house be adopted as Historic Landmark District and that the existing Historic Landmark Design Guidelines be used to guide future alterations. The site meets the standards of the Ordinance for a Historic Landmark Overlay and is eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places.</p>	

## Vicinity Maps



## Aerials



## **Applicable Ordinance:**

### Article III. Historic Overlay Districts

17.36.120 Historic Districts Defined. B. Historic Landmark. An historic landmark is defined as a building, structure, site or object, its appurtenances and the property it is located on, of high historical, cultural, architectural or archaeological importance; whose demolition or destruction would constitute an irreplaceable loss to the quality and character of Nashville and Davidson County; and that meets one or more of the following criteria:

1. The historic landmark is associated with an event that has made a significant contribution to local, state or national history;
2. It is associated with the lives of persons significant in local, state or national history;
3. It embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period or method of construction, or that represents the work of a master, or that possesses high artistic value;
4. It has yielded or may be likely to yield archaeological information important in history or prehistory; or
5. It is listed or is eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places.

## **Background:**

The Smith-Carter house is located in Madison, Tennessee. According to records at the property assessor's office, the home was built in 1925.

On June 18, 1952, Comer Newburry sold the property to James R. and Margaret O. Denny. James (Jim) Denny was a long-time manager of Grand Ole Opry Artists Service. He went on to become one of the most successful talent agents and song publishers in country music, and later inducted into the Country Music Hall of Fame. During this time Jim Denny was the Opry's manager and had a rapport with Columbia Records artist Carl Smith. Just a week after acquiring the property, Denny sold it to Carl Smith for \$10.00 (June 25, 1952). A year prior in 1951, Carl Smith released *Let Old Mother Nature Have Her Way*, which hit number one on the country music charts. Carl Smith gained much fame in the 1950s and 1960s and became known as "Mr. Country." Smith was later inducted into the Country Music Hall of Fame in 2003.

Carl Smith purchased the home just weeks prior to his marriage with June Carter on July 9, 1952. Valerie June Carter Cash (1929-2003) was a singer, dancer, songwriter, actress, comedienne and author. She may be best known as a member of the Carter Family, a traditional American folk music group that recorded between 1927 and 1956. June Carter, as she was known professionally, won five Grammy Awards and was inducted into the Christian Music Hall of Fame in 2009.

Smith and Carter welcomed their daughter Rebecca Carlene Smith in 1955, but by this time Carl had already moved out of the Madison home; their divorce would be finalized in 1956. Photographs of June outside the home with Rebecca Carlene were published in the *Tennessean* on July 8, 1956. (See image right.) Carlene would become a singer-songwriter-musician as well.



June Carter's baby, Rebecca Carlene, swings on the lawn at home

Between 1956 and 1957 June and Carlene moved to New York. Shortly after she returned to Madison in 1957, June married local racecar driver Edwin “Rip” Nix on November 11, 1957. June would welcome her second daughter, Rosie, eight months later on July 13, 1958. Nix moved into the Madison home, using the barn as a garage for his car. Nix and Carter divorced in 1966.

June and Rebecca Carlene Cash in 1956. *Image from Tennessean*

The property served as a gathering point for friends and other musicians. “Hee Haw” star, Roni Stoneman remembers the “pickin’ parties” that were held at the barn on the property. Stories have passed through the country music community, which includes visits by Johnny Cash. A story about Elvis is chronicled in *Elvis and the Memphis Mafia* by Alanna Nash with Billy Smith, Marty Lacker and Lamar Fike. Elvis, who had toured with the Carter family, visited Nashville intending on staying at June’s home; however, she was out on tour. He and a friend broke a window, made themselves something to eat and went to sleep in the master bedroom. John Carter Cash writes in his book *Anchored in Love*, that after June’s divorce to Carl, June would sometimes let Elvis stay at the house to “rest” after the tour (Cash, 44). He also writes later that Johnny Cash moved to Madison primarily to be close to June (Cash, 49).

June Carter married Johnny Cash in 1968, but not before making Johnny clean up and quit drugs. Prior to their marriage when Johnny needed to get clean he would go to the Madison home to sober up. (Johnny Cash joined the Grand Ole Opry in 1956 and enjoying a string of hits including “Ring of Fire” in 1963.)



Johnny Cash and June Carter Cash in 1969. *Image from Wikipedia*

June Carter’s mother, Maybelle Carter made the home her primary residence until her death in 1978. Maybelle Carter (1909-1978)

was a member of the Carter Family act in the 1920s and 1930s and later the Mother Maybelle and the Carter Sisters group from 1946-1948. She influenced country and folk music for decades, continuing to perform throughout the 1960s and 1970s. According to biography.com, Maybelle Carter “was a key figure in transforming an oral tradition of folk songs into one of America’s most popular musical genres. As one of country music’s first great lead guitarists and the inventor of the “Carter Scratch,” she made a profound impact on the development of American popular music that shapes country, folk and rock music today.” The Carter Family was inducted into the Country Music Hall of Fame in 1970, and in 2005 posthumously honored with a Grammy Lifetime Achievement Award.



Maybelle Carter. *Image from Discogs*

The property transferred to John R. Cash ETUX in 1974. In 1983, June and Johnny sold part of the land for the Maybelle Carter Retirement Center. Carlene Carter would become sole owner in 1994.

*Information taken from a report by Ashley L. Brown, Field Coordinator for the Center for Historic Preservation at Middle Tennessee State University, with some notes by Scarlett C. Miles, Metropolitan Historical Commission.*

The property has an easement recorded on June 30, 1983. This easement, entered into by John and June Carter Cash and the Maybelle Carter Retirement Center, Ltd., aims to preserve the beauty and openness of the property at 1020 Gibson Drive by prohibiting additional buildings or structures or additions to existing buildings. As part of a concurrent request for a Neighborhood Landmark, the Planning Department is requesting that if any new construction is part of the plan for the Neighborhood Landmark that the final site plan be approved with the condition that the easement note is removed.

### **Analysis and Findings:**

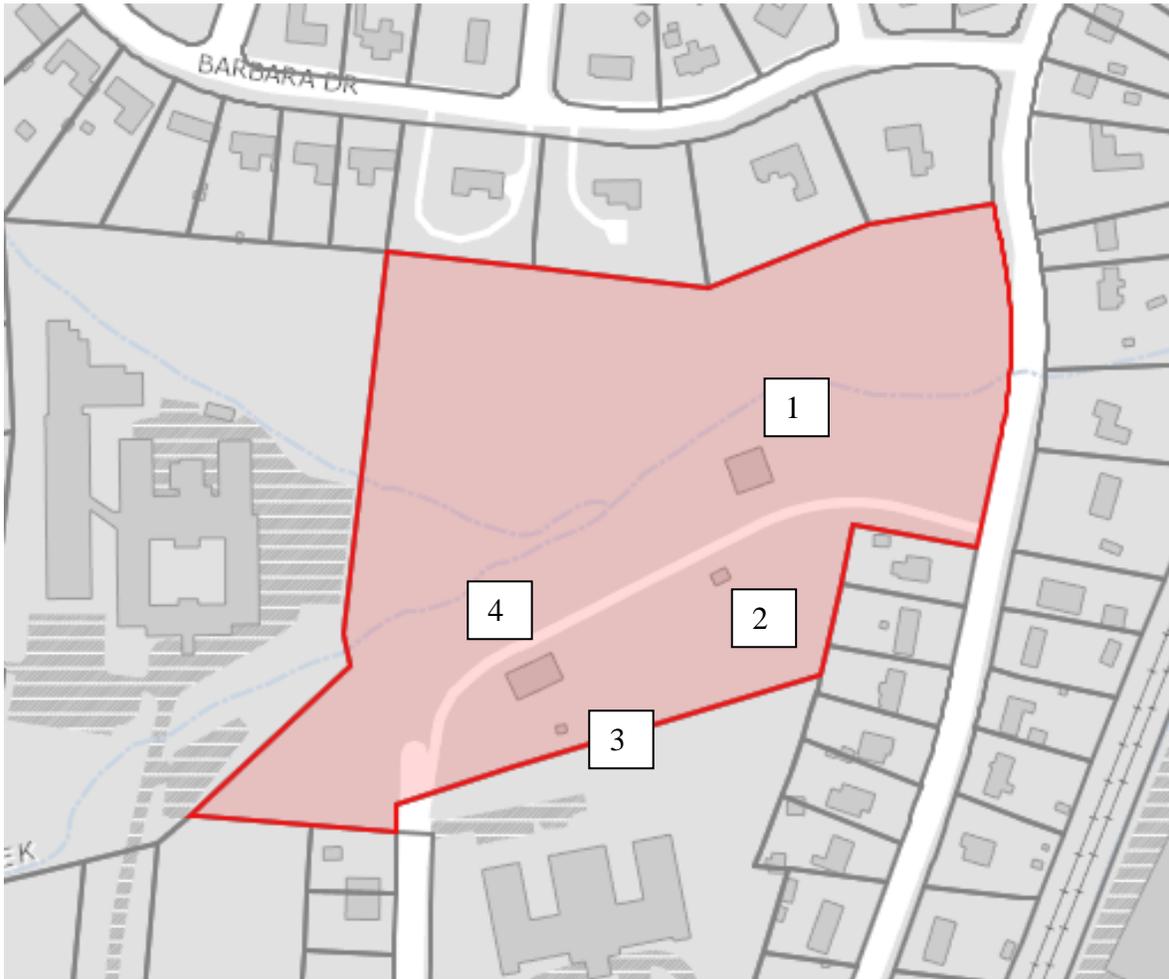
According to the National Register of Historic Places Multiple Property Documentation Form for Nashville’s Music Row, Nashville has a 200-plus-year musical history that has resulted in the City being known as “Music City.” The buildings that represent Nashville’s musical heritage are important reminders of how the music industry has changed over time from Nashville’s early days as “a fledgling town publishing its first music book in 1824, to its twenty-first century roles as the center of multi-million dollar music songwriting, recording, publishing and record manufacturing industry.”

The home is an important piece of Nashville’s musical history because of its association with music legends Carl Smith and the Carter family, specifically three generations of

Carter women, Maybelle, June and Carlene Carter. Because of this association, the property meets section 17.36.120.1 of the ordinance. The home has had few alterations and so also qualifies as eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places, section 17.26.120.5.

Staff suggests the Commission recommend to City Council that the Smith-Carter house be adopted as Historic Landmark District and that the existing Historic Landmark Design Guidelines be used to guide future alterations. The site meets the standards of the Ordinance for a Historic Landmark Overlay and is eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places.

## MAP & PHOTOGRAPHS



- 1: Historic Barn
- 2: Historic Chicken Coop
- 3: Contemporary Shed
- 4: Historic Smith-Carter House



Building #4: Historic Smith-Carter House, front



Building #4: Historic Smith-Carter House, left side



Building #4: Historic Smith-Carter House, right side



Building #4: Historic Smith-Carter House, rear



Building #2: Historic Smith-Carter chicken coop



Building #1: Historic Smith-Carter House barn



Based on the backgrounds, these photos of June Carter Cash may have been taken at the Smith-Carter home.



Image from [www.hometownlife.com](http://www.hometownlife.com), date unknown



Mother Maybelle Carter and Sara Carter in 1977 in the yard of the Smith-Carter home.  
[www.pinterest.com](http://www.pinterest.com)

