

INTERVIEW: COUNCILMEMBER JEFF PREPTIT ON THE GREEN HILLS EAST OVERLAY

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COMPANION TO "VENEERS OF HISTORY IN GREEN HILLS EAST", NASHVILLE SCENE

FINDING

Jeff Preptit, in a June 1, 2026 interview, said he was unaware the Green Hills deeds carried racial covenants, withdrew the overlay after a poll tabulation error he called his own, and described white neighborhoods receiving greater historic preservation than Black ones as 'simply a fact.'

SUPPORTS IN THE ARTICLE

- *Preptit was not aware of the subdivision's racial covenants and had not reviewed the deeds*
- *Preptit withdrew the overlay after a polling error in his community-engagement process*
- *Preptit's view that white neighborhoods receive greater historic preservation than Black neighborhoods*

ABSTRACT

Councilmember Jeff Preptit, legislative sponsor of the proposed Green Hills East historic zoning overlay, sat for a recorded telephone interview on June 1, 2026. He described withdrawing the overlay legislation after making a tabulation error in a community poll and outlined the paper-ballot process he has since launched, with steering-committee oversight. Asked directly whether he was aware that deeds in the Plan of Green Hills carried racially restrictive covenants, Preptit said he was not and had not reviewed the deeds of any property. He expressed the view that white neighborhoods across Nashville receive greater historic preservation than Black and brown areas — calling that “simply a fact” — and argued for an honest reckoning with the city’s segregated history. The transcript is from automated speech recognition, edited for filler words only.

INTERVIEW

PEMBERTON: Little message. So, if we could start — I think I outlined a little bit about what the article’s about. It’s about the Green Hills East overlay, which I know has been a hot topic for you. What’s the status? Last I heard — last I know — you were taking it back to the community, going through the process again, and doing a new sort of voting process that I think was supposed to finish up maybe right about now. What’s the status?

PREPTIT: Yeah. So I think it would be helpful to sort of do just like a broad overview of sort of each thing that sort of happened up until this point and sort of how we got to that, which I think will be very helpful and informative for sort of the current status of things, if that’s alright with you.

Yeah. That's that's fine.

Okay. Perfect. So yeah. So we're obviously talking about the Green Hills East proposed historic zoning overlay, which includes a portion of a neighborhood that's just to the west of Lipscomb University. And so the idea for this overlay was brought to me from a group of neighbors who had been concerned with some of the trends of development that they've seen in Nashville and across Davidson County, and also wanting to make sure that they are preserving some of the housing stock that they have in the neighborhood. And so I told that group of folks, like, I think this is appropriate for our area. But for me, the most important thing is making sure that there is community support for these kinds of proposed zoning changes. Because one of the things — and one of the conversations that I've always had with folks — is about how whenever we're talking about things that are happening here in Nashville, we wanna make sure that things are happening for the folks of Nashville and not to the people of Nashville. So I told them point blank period that my position is I just wanna make sure that there is community support for this. And so if you all have the requisite amount of community support, then it's something that I'd be willing to help with and move forward legislatively. And if there wasn't community support for it, then that is the wishes and the wills of the community.

And so based off of that, we had — so I held a number of smaller intimate meetings with — I would describe them as, like, small groups of neighbors, usually 10 or 12 at a time — who wanted to discuss it with me, both folks who were in favor of the overlay and folks who were in opposition of the overlay. We also had a number of community meetings where folks from historic came and presented information on the zoning overlay. And so in the original process, the way that I went about trying to see what that level of community support was was, one, again, sending everything out, sending everything about the meetings out via my newsletter, making sure that they were publicly announced meetings that everybody was invited to. And as part of that process, I had been sending out — I sent out a survey via SurveyMonkey to folks on my mailing list. And I particularly asked folks — so let me let me back up and say this as well. So at the community meetings, I had sign-up sheets so that folks who were present could write down their name and their contact information so that they could be on the mailing list and put all of the information of folks who attended, who signed up. And whenever I sent out that original poll, I had asked folks, like, if there are people that you know who are interested in this, who want to register their vote, either email the survey to them or email me, and we'll get it out to folks. And so if I'm recalling correctly, I'd sent either two or three rounds of emails for making sure that folks had access to it and held it open. If I'm not mistaken, held that survey open for about two and a half months to just give people ample opportunity.

And so once I got the results of that survey back, I had went through, calculated what the results were. And in that initial tabulation of the votes, I made a mistake. That was — and, again, I've said this to the community — that it was 100% my mistake and not on the part of anybody else in calculating those poll results. And so based off of that mistake that I made, I had reported some numbers both to the community and to the historic zoning commission, and those numbers were

incorrect. And so because of that mistake that I had made, I took a step back, withdrew the legislation, and now where we're at is we are — I have appointed a what I've been calling a steering committee to help guide a community engagement process. So part of that community engagement process is gonna be providing materials on both the historic zoning overlay and the alternatives of a contextual design overlay, providing them a comparator document that states what each one does, providing them all that information. It will also include a paper ballot that will be pre postmarked and be able to pre postmarked to be sent into the council office so that we've got every single person who submits a ballot into the council office and providing the steering committee the ability to audit that just to make sure that all the information, all the ballot tabulation is correct.

And so going back in the previous poll, the SurveyMonkey poll — so what the correct information shows on that poll is that there were 58 — and this is just the raw numbers, and then I'm gonna filter it down for you. So the raw numbers are that 58 people responded. Of those responses, 34 people voted yes, 13 people voted no, three people were undecided, and eight people had incorrectly filled out the ballots. And so that's sort of just the raw number. So if you filter down for all of the folks who had input incorrect ballots and everything, the more accurate filtered down numbers are that 26 people voted yes — and these were the qualifying votes. So filtering down, these are the most accurate from the SurveyMonkey poll. So of those, 26 people responded yes, 12 people responded no, three people were undecided, and there were 17 votes total that were not qualifying votes either because they did not enter in their address or because they were duplicate votes. And so based off of that, the percentage wise from the poll is 63% of respondents voted in favor, voting yes; 29% voted no; and 7% were undecided.

And so based again, based off of the mistake that I made, I am going back through making sure that we have a robust community process where everybody has input, everybody has say, everybody has a free and fair opportunity to participate, has access to the information, and making sure that there are those safeguards in place to make sure, like, that the tabulation is accurate, that there's oversight of it, and that people can have confidence in this community process.

PEMBERTON: So that's kind of — appreciate that background. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Thanks. So what's the status now? Where are you in that process, and what's the timeline?

PREPTIT: Yes. So we — so I've been in discussions with both the planning department and with historic zoning, making sure that we have the most accurate information. I just got some of the doc — I just got one of the documents back that I'll be sharing with the steering committee. So here in a little bit, I'll be sharing out all of the documents with the steering committee for them to review, provide input on. And then once we finalize all those documents, they'll be going to the printer, and then we will be engaging in that sort of canvassing process where the steering committee will appoint canvassers to hand out that material information with the goal of having people submit their ballots by the second week of July so that those can be — so that there's plenty of opportunity to do that

canvassing so people can get that ballot so that it can be tabulated and so that we can know with certainty what the community wants.

PEMBERTON: Appreciate that. Yeah. I appreciate the background on the political process, and I know that you're careful about, you know, having a good clean record there. I think what I'm interested in and what the piece is really about is the historical record. You mentioned the conservation overlay versus the contextual overlay. What do you understand about — and you're a lawyer, so you know, I know that this isn't your specialty area, but you understand a little bit about the legal basis for each of those. Right? What do you understand in terms of the legal basis for the history aspect of that conservation overlay?

PREPTIT: Yeah. So and let me just let me make sure that I'm fully understanding the question. So is it more about, like, sort of the qualifying nature of — right. Historic preservation?

PEMBERTON: Right. Because they're similar mechanisms, it sounds like, to do what the neighborhood wants to do, which is, you know, kinda control development. In terms of that, they operate similarly, but one has this historic merit aspect to it and the other doesn't. Right?

PREPTIT: Yes. Exactly. So, with this particular neighborhood, so whenever it was subdivided and began developing, it was the original neighborhood within Green Hills. So it was sort of the course of development that started the Green Hills neighborhood. So that's sort of just like the foundational basis. But looking at the particular eras of development and looking at whether or not there is a cohesive story of that process of development. And so looking at the fact that this area was the original Green Hills neighborhood is sort of the basis upon which the neighborhood has looked into whether or not historic preservation would be appropriate in preserving that story of the original Green Hills subdivision or neighborhood. So that's sort of the historic basis for a historic zoning overlay, if that makes sense, if I explained it well enough.

PEMBERTON: Uh-huh. Yeah. That makes sense. So another piece of it, as I understand it, was really centered on this model home. It was, I think, the first home constructed in the neighborhood. And this is a central piece of my reporting. We found that the home that was identified by MHZC staff was not the correct home. Are you aware of that?

PREPTIT: So I've been told a couple of different things. I'm not fully aware of the home being misidentified. I haven't heard that in particular, but I can recall — and apologies if I'm misremembering this — but I can recall folks stating to me something along the lines of — what was it? Sorry. I'm — because I can recall somebody stating to me essentially along the lines of that — I think the issue that I'm remembering is that there was a home that was included in a presentation about sort of just the historic development of it. And the issue that was raised to me was that that particular homeowner wasn't aware that their home was gonna be included in that packet. That's what I'm recalling off the top of my head. To the best of my recollection, I don't recall any

conversation particularly about that home being misidentified, but that's what I'm remembering right now.

PEMBERTON: Uh-huh. Got it. Yeah. So we did conclude — and this has gone through the Scene's fact checking and everything. We've got it triangulated by more documents than you can name — that the home was misidentified. I know that there was a question at the time about whether it was contributing, given that it didn't look anything like the home, but it was actually the wrong home. And one of the ways that we determined this was that the reported buyer — we linked to the original deed that placed it at 1612 North Observatory. Are you aware that the deed for that house, and for all of the houses in the subdivision and neighborhood — the Plan of Green Hills — contained racial covenants?

PREPTIT: Contained what? Sorry. Could you repeat that?

PEMBERTON: Racially restrictive covenants.

PREPTIT: So I am not aware of that. I have not reviewed the deeds of any property in particular. Really, my focus has been and continues to be on making sure that this is something that the community actually wants, which is part of the reason why we're going through to make sure that as many people who want to participate can participate and that they have as much information as possible and that they have as much opportunity to register their opinion and make sure that this is something that they actually want for their neighborhood.

PEMBERTON: Do you think that having the accurate history would influence that perhaps?

PREPTIT: Yeah. So I wanna make sure that we have the most accurate up-to-date information as possible, which is part of the reason why I have been going through this process of making sure that all the material is objective and reasonable, making sure that again, going through and making sure that both planning and historic have provided input to make sure that the documents are accurate, making sure that all of that information is, again, as up to date and accurate as we possibly can. So I wanna make sure that folks have as much information as possible.

PEMBERTON: So what's the working relationship with the historic commission been like? I mean, you know, you've obviously — you're running the community engagement process, you're rounding up the neighbors, and you're doing all of that. But I wanna understand a little bit more about how the production of the historical narrative and the dissemination of that sort of fits in or factors into your side of the process.

PREPTIT: Yeah. So I will say I've had a really good working relationship sort of across the board, stepping apart from this particular legislative issue. But I've had a good working relationship across the board with both folks in planning and historic. Because throughout this process, I've been having conversations with both folks. Because, again, looking at wanting to make sure that folks have as much information and have a comparator document that compares a contextual design overlay to a

historic zoning overlay. I've had a really good relationship with folks and have been able and feel as if we've worked really well with making sure that we are getting all of that information out. I will note that there are folks who have raised concerns about whether or not there have been folks within historic zoning who have had a conflict of interest. And so, like — so I know one of the folks that we worked with early on is Robin Zeigler. And knowing that, again, she's relatively high ranking within the Metro Historic Zoning Commission — or within their historic zoning staff, because with the way that it's been reorganized with being under planning — we'll get into the minutiae there. But all that is to say is so folks have raised those concerns. And so part of what I have done is making sure that I'm working with a broad base of people who have that experience and who can help make sure that the neighborhood is as informed as possible. So I've been working with a good amount of folks who have helped to advise and guide us in this process. And so I feel as if I've got a really good working relationship with folks and able to ask those questions and get as much information as we possibly can.

PEMBERTON: Do you recall off the top of your head any of the other MHZC staff members or commissioners or whomever else that's been instrumental?

PREPTIT: Yeah. So my two primary points of contact have been Brett Withers with the planning department and Melissa Baldock with historic zoning.

PEMBERTON: Uh-huh. Got it. Got it. Excellent. Thank you. So, yeah, I'm looking again more at the more on the historical side and more on the structural side. And one thing that we found in addition to some of the errors and omissions within the Green Hills history is that there's really quite a large distinction between how some of these foundational issues of the neighborhood — or all of the neighborhoods, really, under overlays — are discussed and how those histories are narrated. To say it way too shortly, white histories are narrated as architectural achievements, you know, sort of like Green Hills — its contributions to nomenclature and things of that nature. Black neighborhoods are narrated essentially only for their, you know, role or response to segregation and racialized histories. Right? What we found is that 19 of the 27 overlays contain racial covenants. Those were foundational to the neighborhood. Right? That is part of white history, even if it's not talked about. Right? It wasn't talked about in Green Hills. It's not talked about in any of the other overlays. So I think what I'm wondering is, you know, there's a conflict of interest maybe with Robin — I think that's a little bit conspiracy-theory stuff. I've always known Robin to be honest. But I think there's potentially a larger conflict of interest in that the narratives are written to support the overlay adoption. Right? Like, the neighborhood comes to the MHZC and they say, we want an overlay. The MHZC says, okay, let's help you do it. Do you see that, or am I off base with that characterization?

PREPTIT: So the way that I view this process and the way that I view the role of the historic zoning commission rather is that their role in particular is to determine whether or not an application for installing or creating a historic zoning overlay is looking at the particular code section and the legal guidance as to whether or not they fit in minimally. So just the way that I view their role is sort of just

making that minimum determination as to whether or not they qualify, not necessarily a policy recommendation on whether or not it's a good idea or a bad idea. So that's one part of it — what I view their role is. Now I will say more broadly when it comes to historic preservation across Nashville, I think the way that you've categorized it is not inaccurate. What we have seen and what the data shows and what you pointed out is that oftentimes — and putting it frankly — is that white neighborhoods are granted greater historic preservation than Black and brown areas of the city have. That's simply a fact. That doesn't necessarily mean that we should not be doing more, that we should not be doing historic preservation. I think part of what we need to do is do a reckoning with that and tell an honest story of the history of Nashville and the history of development in Nashville, which includes the fact that Nashville, for a large portion of its history, was a segregated city. And to a certain extent, Nashville does have — had certain pockets of populations that people could argue that the city, to a certain extent, is still, to a certain extent, segregated because you've got different hubs in different areas of population. And, like, I will say, I fully recognize, like, even though I am a young Black immigrant civil rights attorney, I also recognize that I represent one of, if not the, widest districts in Nashville. And so I think it's really crucial for us to be honest about what our history is and tell that story and provide equality of opportunity for preservation across the board. So that's that's my view on historic preservation and the importance of it because it does need to be applied across the board and not only tell the story of white areas, but also preserve the history of Black areas in Nashville. And not just the story of the systemic oppression and racism that these neighborhoods have had to overcome, but also how they have triumphed and how they have built out of really, out of nothing in areas that other folks in Nashville didn't find desirable. So, yeah, that's my position is that I think that we need to do a better job of the historic preservation across the board.

PEMBERTON: I appreciate that. So, we've got just a few minutes left. So why don't we talk now about, you know, knowing this? And again, I know that I gave you the very high-level summary version of this, and that's almost unfair. And I'm happy to send a little bit more documentation of some of these findings so that you know them before the story runs. But, knowing what I've told you and sort of the direction that this is going, how do you think that that changes how you approach the overlay process going forward?

PREPTIT: Yeah. So I think the really important portion of this, I think, is making sure that we have an accurate reckoning and telling an accurate story of not only just the development in Nashville, but what that development meant for Nashville. I still think it is crucially important to listen to the voices within the community. If particularly, if this is something that they want to continue moving forward with — with telling that particular story of preservation and telling the whole story — I think that that is, again, a decision for the community to make. Because throughout this entire process and what I continue to endeavor to do is reflect the voices of those who live in the neighborhood and those that are gonna be the most affected by it. And so really just making sure that this is something that the community wants and making sure that we are having an accurate telling of what that story is.

PEMBERTON: Okay. Well, I've been driving this. I'll leave the last couple minutes to you. If there's anything that you thought of along the way, anything else that you wanna say — what should people know about this, about this process, about you, about what you're doing here?

PREPTIT: Yeah. So I'd say, really, the — and I'll just reiterate what I've been saying. The most important thing for me is making sure that, again, that it is accurate, that people are getting the best information possible, but enabling and empowering the folks in the community to be able to, one, tell their story, but, two, decide what happens with their neighborhood. Because, again, like I stated, for most of the folks in Nashville, we wanna make sure that what is happening here is happening for us and not just to us. And so my goal, again, is just making sure that this is something that the community wants and making sure that it is that they are getting the best possible information to make an informed decision on whether or not they wanna move forward with the historic zoning overlay.

PEMBERTON: Excellent. Well, thank you again. You've been wonderfully candid, and appreciate you carving out the time to have this conversation. Like I said, I'm happy to, you know, provide any additional information via email or what have you so that you know — my deadline for the story is Wednesday morning, the third. And then it will run in the June 11 issue. So that's what the timeline looks like. Like I said, if I could be of help in any way, I'm happy to.

PREPTIT: Yeah. Absolutely.

[The call concluded with an exchange Councilmember Preptit asked to keep on background; it is omitted here.]

SOURCES

A recorded telephone interview conducted by Alex Pemberton on June 1, 2026; transcribed with Deepgram Nova-3 (automatic speech recognition with speaker diarization) and edited for filler words only. Spans marked [?] are uncertain transcriptions.

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