

FACT-CHECK: ZEIGLER'S ACCOUNT OF HER RESEARCH, AND THE DEPARTMENT'S CORRECTION

VERSION 1.0 · 2026-06-11 · ALEX PEMBERTON
 COMPANION TO "VENEERS OF HISTORY IN GREEN HILLS EAST", NASHVILLE SCENE

FINDING

Robin Zeigler claimed in a June 1, 2026 interview that she identified the model home by address, traced deeds to its buyer, and saw the cost–minimum covenant in a deed — claims the documentary record and a Planning Department correction, approved by leadership the next day, show were false.

SUPPORTS IN THE ARTICLE

- *Zeigler's interview account of her research was false in documented respects*
- *the Planning Department corrected its own employee and the public record*
- *the model home was identified without an address that could have existed*

ABSTRACT

Robin Zeigler — Senior Preservation Planner at the Metropolitan Historic Zoning Commission — researched and wrote the Green Hills East Short History, the document on which the commission's overlay case rested. In a recorded interview on June 1, 2026, she described how she did that research. She hedged on some details, but the claims she asserted as fact contradict the record. She said she identified the Tennessean Model Home by address, though no period source carried one. She said she traced the deeds to its reported buyer, who never owned the house she named. She said she saw the minimum–construction–cost covenant in a deed, though her own footnote sourced it to a newspaper. And she said she looked for racial covenants in the deeds and found none, though the racial covenant is printed on the same page as the cost clause she described. The Metro Planning Department confirmed all of it the next day in writing: chief of staff Richel Albright, her answers reviewed and approved by executive director Lucy Kempf, corrected both Zeigler's account and the public record. One claim holds — her authorship of the document. The interview statements are quoted from the recorded interview; the department's from the email chain.

FINDINGS

"BY ADDRESS" — BUT GREEN HILLS HAD NO ADDRESSES TO IDENTIFY IT BY

Asked how she identified the Tennessean Model Home, Zeigler said, "Through the newspaper articles," and, on whether those articles carried an address, "I believe it was by address and maybe by photos. I can't remember exactly. This was done a couple of years ago." The model home was built in 1927, and the *Tennessean* articles Zeigler relied on date from 1926–27 — before Green Hills

lots carried house numbers. The 1930 census still recorded the street name and not a single house number for any of the Observatory Drive households (see [1930 census enumeration](#)). A house number reaches the Bean home in the city directory only in 1944 — first as 1610 North Observatory, then settling at 1612 from 1946 — seventeen years after the model home was built. No period article could have assigned it a street address that did not yet exist. The reporting for this article found no addressed *Tennessean* article, and the department confirmed it could find none: in her June 2 email, Albright wrote, “I was unable to find any *Tennessean* article that assigns the model home an address,” and reported that, on review, Zeigler had based the location on the *Tennessean*’s April 3, 1927 map and on descriptions — “top of the horseshoe bend,” “one of the highest and most beautiful lots.” An identification “by address” was not possible.

“I DID” — BUT THE BUYER NEVER OWNED THE HOUSE SHE IDENTIFIED

Pemberton asked whether she had gone “through deed records ... to verify that ... the Holt Bean who they said was the buyer in the *Tennessean* owned this property.” Zeigler answered, “I did.” Asked, “And so you found Holt Bean owned Lots 12 and 13?” — the lots at 1637 South Observatory — she said, “That’s just a level of detail. I don’t remember. But I looked at deeds, directories, newspaper articles, maps, photographs.” Holt Bean never owned 1637. Lots 12 and 13 were bought in January 1927, while the model home was under construction, by Mizella Burton Grant, A. M. Burton’s daughter (see [The Misidentified Lot](#)); Bean’s deed is for 1612 North Observatory (Book 919, page 110; see [Identifying the Model Home](#)). A deed check of the reported buyer would have shown the house she identified was not his.

HER OWN FOOTNOTE SOURCED THE COST COVENANT TO A NEWSPAPER; SHE SAID SHE SAW IT IN A DEED

The Short History attributes the minimum-construction-cost covenant to a newspaper article — footnote to “New Subdivision Sells Rapidly,” *Tennessean*, February 6, 1927. Read the footnote, Zeigler confirmed it: “That’s right. That’s the one.” Asked whether the cost covenant “was determined through the *Tennessean*, not through the deed itself,” she first said the footnote was misplaced, then, asked directly where she had seen the cost restriction, answered: “In [the] deed.” The figures do not match a deed: the Short History gives the minimum as \$5,000, while the model home’s own deed, which Pemberton read aloud, sets it at \$7,500 — the document’s number follows the newspaper, not the deed. The department confirmed the newspaper source and reversed her: the covenant “was cited from The Nashville Banner ... A deed was not viewed for 1612 N Observatory,” and “her reference to the financial restriction was from the article, not from deed information.”

SHE SAID SHE LOOKED FOR THE RACIAL COVENANT IN THE DEEDS; IT IS THE NEXT CLAUSE ON THE SAME PAGE

Asked whether she had also seen the racial restriction, Zeigler said, “I didn’t.” Told it is “the line immediately below the minimum building restriction,” she said, “On the deeds that I looked at, I didn’t see it. It’s really common to have that, so I was actually kind of looking for it. But on the ones I looked at, we didn’t find it,” and, “I just looked up one yesterday and didn’t see it.” In the model home’s deed (Book 700, page 653, referenced by the Haile-to-Bean conveyance at Book 919, page 110), the racial covenant — barring conveyance to “persons of African blood or descent,” who may occupy “except in the capacity of servants” — is the fourth clause, immediately after the cost clause she said she saw. A deed showing one shows the other (see [Plat 1, Covenant 4](#)). The department confirmed it: staff “pulled a few deeds to double check, and we are not aware of any deed that ha[s] the financial restriction but do[es] not have the racial restriction,” and Zeigler “did look at a few deeds — but not all — as it relates to ownership ... and she simply did not notice the restriction.”

THE PLANNING DEPARTMENT CORRECTED ITS EMPLOYEE AND THE RECORD

The next day the Planning Department reversed Zeigler’s interview account on every contested point in writing. Asked whether 1637 and 1612 are different structures and whether 1612 is the Tennessean Model Home, Albright answered, “Yes.” The cost covenant came from the *Banner*, not a deed; no deed was viewed for the model home; no deed carries the cost covenant without the racial one; and the racial covenant on those deeds was “simply ... not notice[d].” The department committed to “review deeds to all parcels ... and reflect that as part of the Short Histories” if the overlay is refiled. Albright offered the corrections in her own name — “feel free to attribute all of them to me” — but they were not hers alone. She told the *Scene* she first needed to make sure “leadership is comfortable with responses” and to get “a review” done; the department’s executive director, Lucy Kempf, reviewed and approved the answers before they were sent. The record was set straight by the department’s leadership, not by the staffer who had researched and written the Short History.

WHAT HELD: AUTHORSHIP

One interview claim is corroborated. Asked who wrote the Green Hills East Short History, Zeigler said, “That was me.” Albright confirmed it: “Robin was the author and researcher for the GHE Short History, and the work was reviewed by another staff member.” The document’s research rests with one author.

SOURCES

The interview statements are quoted from the recorded telephone interview of June 1, 2026, transcribed in the companion brief [Interview: MHZC and Metro Planning Staff](#). The Planning

Department’s statements are quoted from emails sent by Richel Albright, chief of staff, Metro Nashville Planning Department, on June 2 and June 3, 2026, in response to written questions. The deed evidence is set out in Identifying the Model Home, The Misidentified Lot, and Plat 1, Covenant 4: the Haile-to-Bean conveyance at Davidson County Register of Deeds Book 919, page 110, which references the restrictions recorded at Book 700, page 653. The addressing chronology is drawn from the annual Nashville City Directory, which carries no house number for the Bean home until 1944 (listed then as 1610 North Observatory) and settles on 1612 from 1946. The document under examination is the Metropolitan Historic Zoning Commission’s *A Short History of Green Hills East NCZO*.

SUGGESTED CITATION

Pemberton, Alex. “Fact-Check: Zeigler’s Account of Her Research, and the Department’s Correction.” Research Brief E14, *Veneers of History in Green Hills East*. alexaustinpemberton.com/journalism/veneers-of-history/#zeigler-fact-check. Accessed [date].