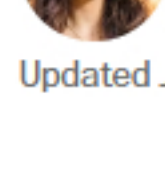


TRANSPORTATION

Construction work begins at infamous Dave Thomas Circle intersection

The project will address safety issues at one of D.C.'s most hazardous intersections, where a Wendy's restaurant closed two years ago



By Heidi Pérez-Moreno

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Mayor Muriel E. Bowser uses an excavator to partially demolish the former Wendy's restaurant at the intersection known as Dave Thomas Circle on Wednesday. (Minh Connors/The Washington Post)

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Construction began Wednesday on transforming “Dave Thomas Circle,” a confusing intersection in Northeast Washington that has long tested the patience of D.C. motorists.

The \$41 million project is aimed at improving safety for drivers and pedestrians who travel through the busy corridor, which straddles the Eckington and NoMa neighborhoods, while creating new public spaces. It also will add bike lanes and ramps that are compliant with the Americans With Disabilities Act, with construction expected to conclude by December 2024.

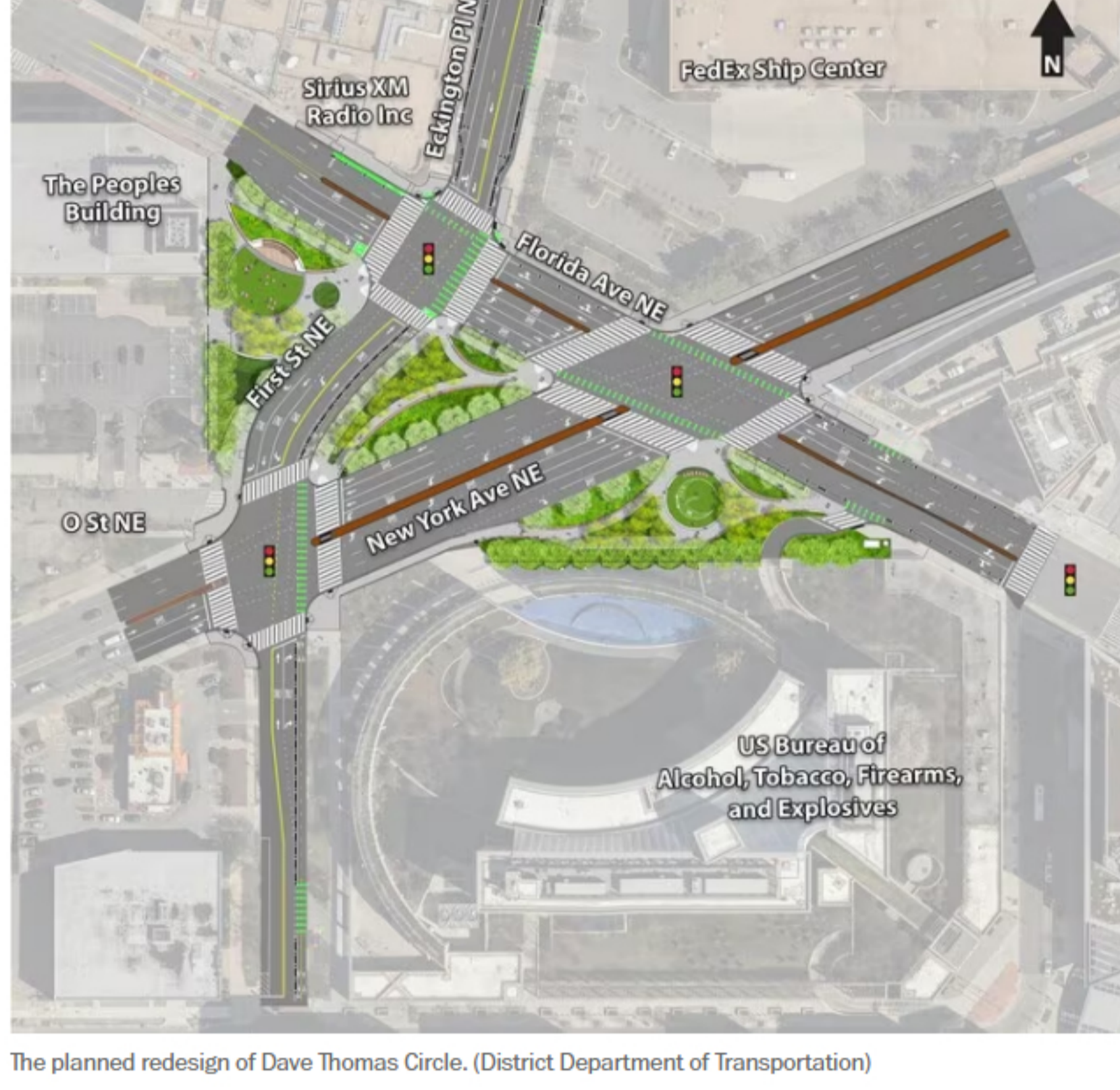
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“We all know that we could and should do better, so let’s say goodbye, Dave Thomas Circle,” D.C. Mayor Muriel E. Bowser (D) said at a news conference. “We are ready to transform this chaotic and dangerous intersection.”

[*The end of 'Dave Thomas Circle' arrives as Wendy's shuts doors at an infamous D.C. intersection*]

The construction work marks the long-awaited demise of a notoriously perplexing intersection that was colloquially named after the founder of Wendy’s, which had a restaurant at the center of the triangular block for decades before it closed two years ago. The intersection, where First Street NE and New York and Florida avenues converge, serves as a gateway to downtown Washington and draws about 80,000 vehicles daily, according to District Department of Transportation estimates.

The project’s price tag includes a combination of local and federal costs, including \$14 million spent to acquire the Wendy’s through eminent domain. D.C. officials originally budgeted \$35 million for the entire project, then allocated an additional \$6 million in unspent federal money this year.



The planned redesign of Dave Thomas Circle. (District Department of Transportation)

The treacherous crossroad has been the source of frustration for drivers, cyclists and pedestrians who travel through the area, which DDOT said is one of the city’s most hazardous intersections.

D.C. officials announced the redesign two years ago. The changes include reconfiguring roads, adding turn lanes on New York and Florida avenues, creating public parks, adding signage and making crosswalk improvements.

Officials say they also hope to strengthen the north-south connection between NoMa and Eckington by realigning and converting First Street NE into a two-way street.

The redesign plan calls for the Wendy’s site to become open green space, alongside two other parks that will be next to the Peoples Building and north of the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives building.

The project is also intended to improve safety for bicyclists by adding a continuous, protected bike lane along Florida Avenue. Plans also call for a two-way, protected bike lane on First Street NE, from M Street to Florida Avenue.



Mayor Muriel E. Bowser speaks about plans for transforming the intersection on Wednesday. (Minh Connors/The Washington Post)

In addition to the intersection being a traffic chokepoint, officials say nearly 80 percent of crashes there are sideswipes or rear-end collisions, which can indicate confusion among drivers. Congestion and the frequent sound of honking cars and blaring trucks are evidence of that confusion, residents said.

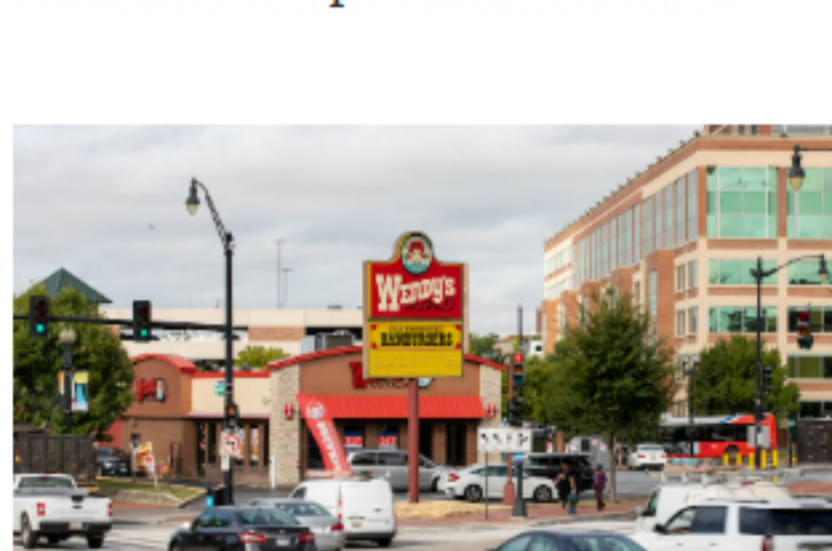
[*D.C. moves to remake infamous 'Dave Thomas Circle' in busy New York Avenue corridor*]

Christy Kwan, an Advisory Neighborhood Commission member representing the Near Northeast and Stanton Park neighborhoods, shuddered at the consistent traffic noise at the intersection.

Although she used to bike and walk along Florida Avenue, Kwan began driving when it came time to take her young stepson to school because she felt unsafe and disoriented. Her stepson, now in his teens, peered out the car window a few years ago to express confusion about navigating the roundabout.

“If my 8-year-old stepson is asking a bunch of questions as to why this is arranged this way, then it’s definitely something that we need to address,” Kwan said.

The area, near the NoMa-Gallaudet Metro station, is an epicenter of several private developments planned in the coming years. The Securities and Exchange Commission, near Union Station, plans to relocate its 4,500-employee headquarters near the New York Avenue NE and North Capitol Street area.



Vehicles pass the Wendy's in Dave Thomas Circle in its last day of operations. (Amanda Andrade-Rhoades for The Washington Post)



A traffic sign near the Wendy's in Dave Thomas Circle. (Amanda Andrade-Rhoades for The Washington Post)

DDOT Director Everett Lott said the redesign stems from seven public meetings the agency hosted to provide updates and receive feedback from the community.

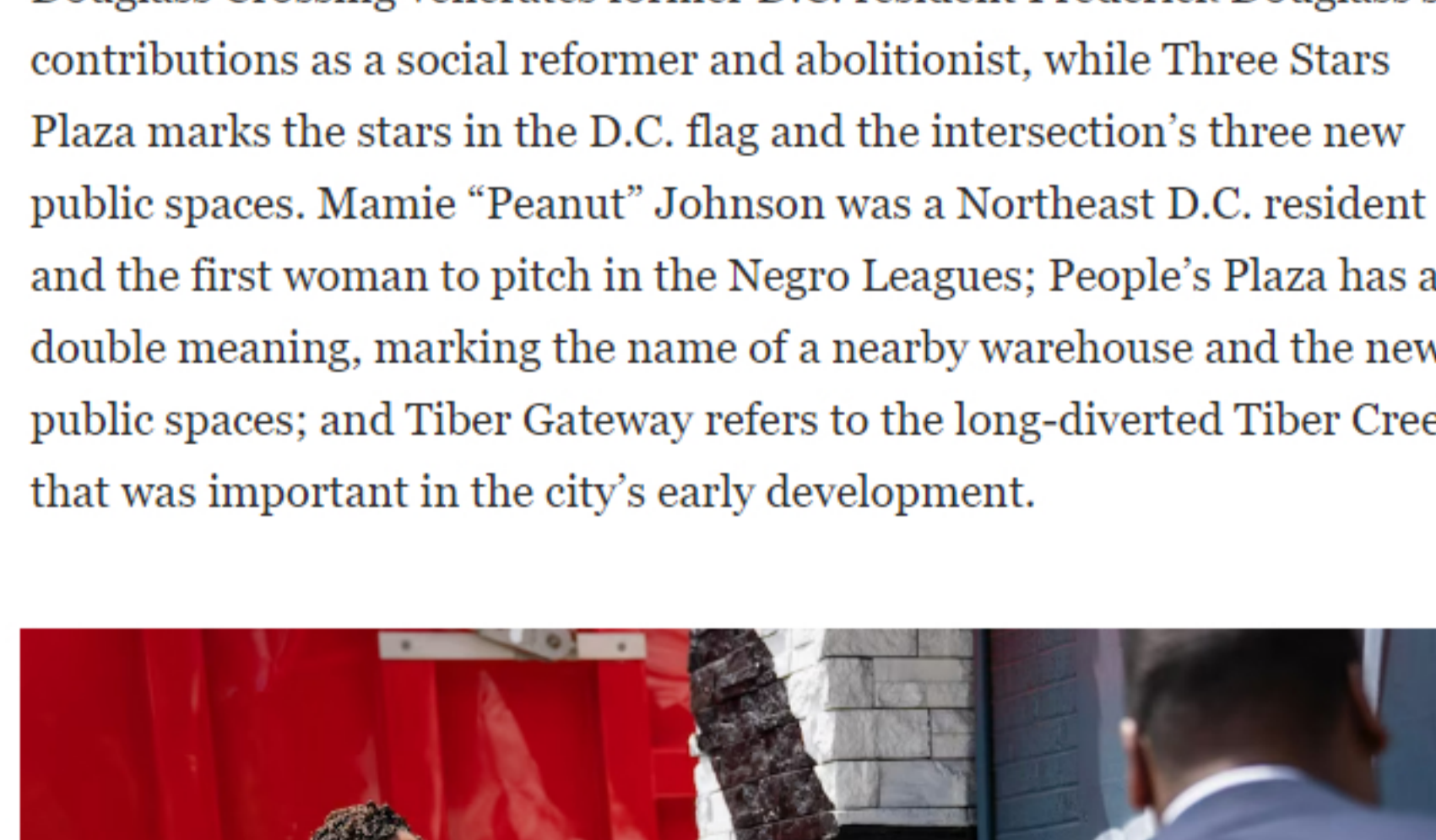
[*D.C. acquires 'Dave Thomas Circle' on New York Avenue through eminent domain*]

The NoMa Business Improvement District and the NoMa Parks Foundation are working with DDOT officials to redesign the space. The groups have also hired a landscape architecture firm to make the area more attractive to residents.

Officials said they hope residents will drop the “Dave Thomas” name in favor of something more fitting. Bowser announced Wednesday that residents can vote on the intersection’s new name among five options: Douglass Crossing, Three Stars Plaza, Mamie “Peanut” Johnson Plaza, Tiber Gateway and People’s Plaza.

Maura Brophy, president and CEO of the NoMa BID, said the list was prepared by five contenders and 1,200 submissions were received in recent months. She said she hopes the new name will shed light on the neighborhood’s history, bring attention to important community figures and pay homage to the location’s uniqueness.

Douglass Crossing venerates former D.C. resident Frederick Douglass’s contributions as a social reformer and abolitionist, while Three Stars Plaza marks the stars in the D.C. flag and the intersection’s three new public spaces. Mamie “Peanut” Johnson was a Northeast D.C. resident and the first woman to pitch in the Negro Leagues; People’s Plaza has a double meaning, marking the name of a nearby warehouse and the new public spaces; and Tiber Gateway refers to the long-diverted Tiber Creek that was important in the city’s early development.



Mayor Muriel E. Bowser knocks down a brick wall that was part of the former Wendy's restaurant. (Minh Connors/The Washington Post)

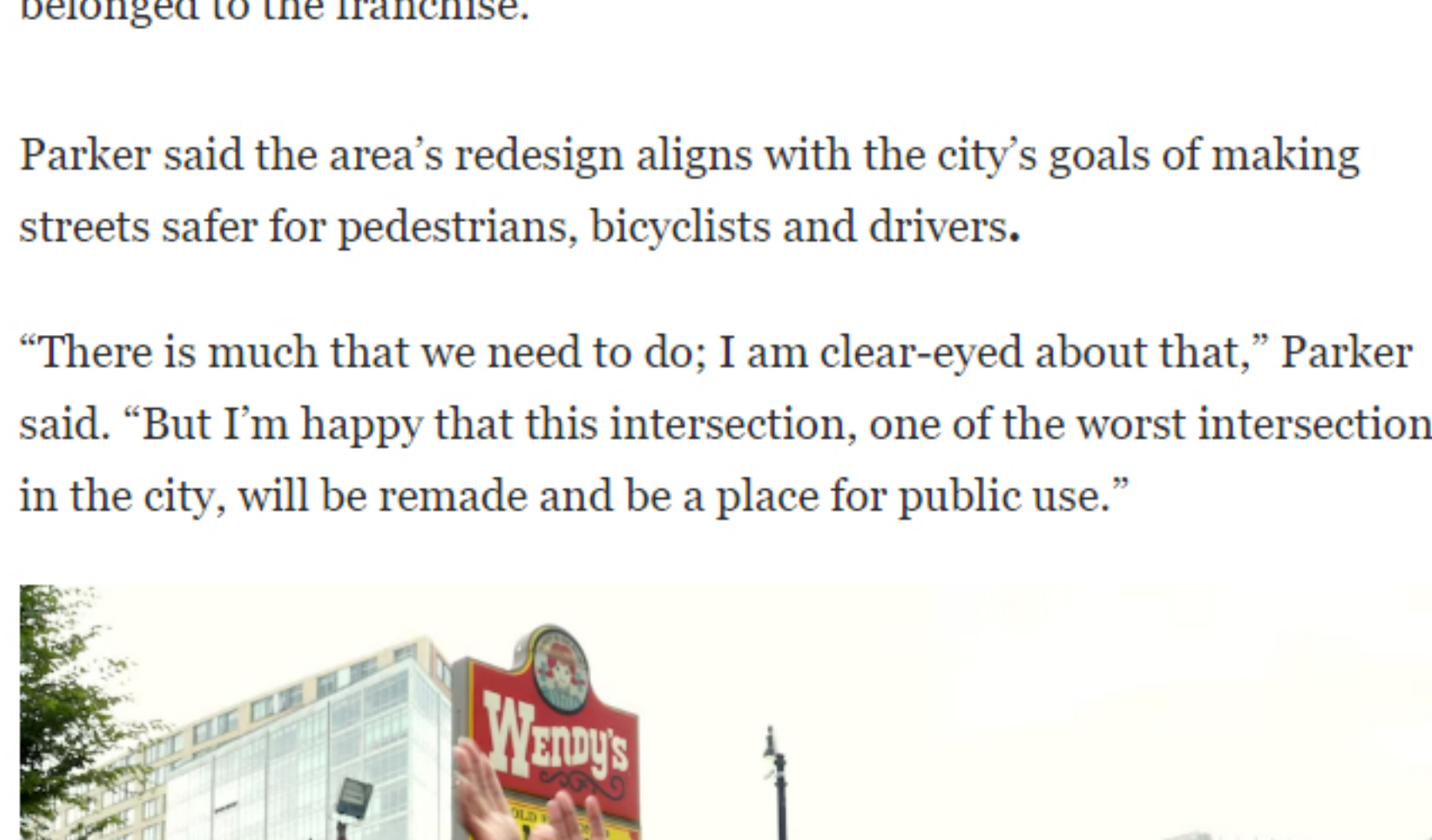
Votes will be accepted on the NoMa BID website through Aug. 25.

“We have been inspired by the thoughtfulness, creativity and level of participation,” Brophy said.

Before a towering crane gnawed through the former Wendy’s location, D.C. Council member Zachary Parker (D-Ward 5) and Bowser took ceremonial sledgehammer swings at the bricks and mortar that once belonged to the franchise.

Parker said the area’s redesign aligns with the city’s goals of making streets safer for pedestrians, bicyclists and drivers.

“There is much that we need to do; I am clear-eyed about that,” Parker said. “But I’m happy that this intersection, one of the worst intersections in the city, will be remade and be a place for public use.”



The Wendy's in D.C.'s most confusing intersection is shutting its doors. The Post's Hannah Jewell spoke to locals about their memories and mixed feelings. (Video: The Washington Post)