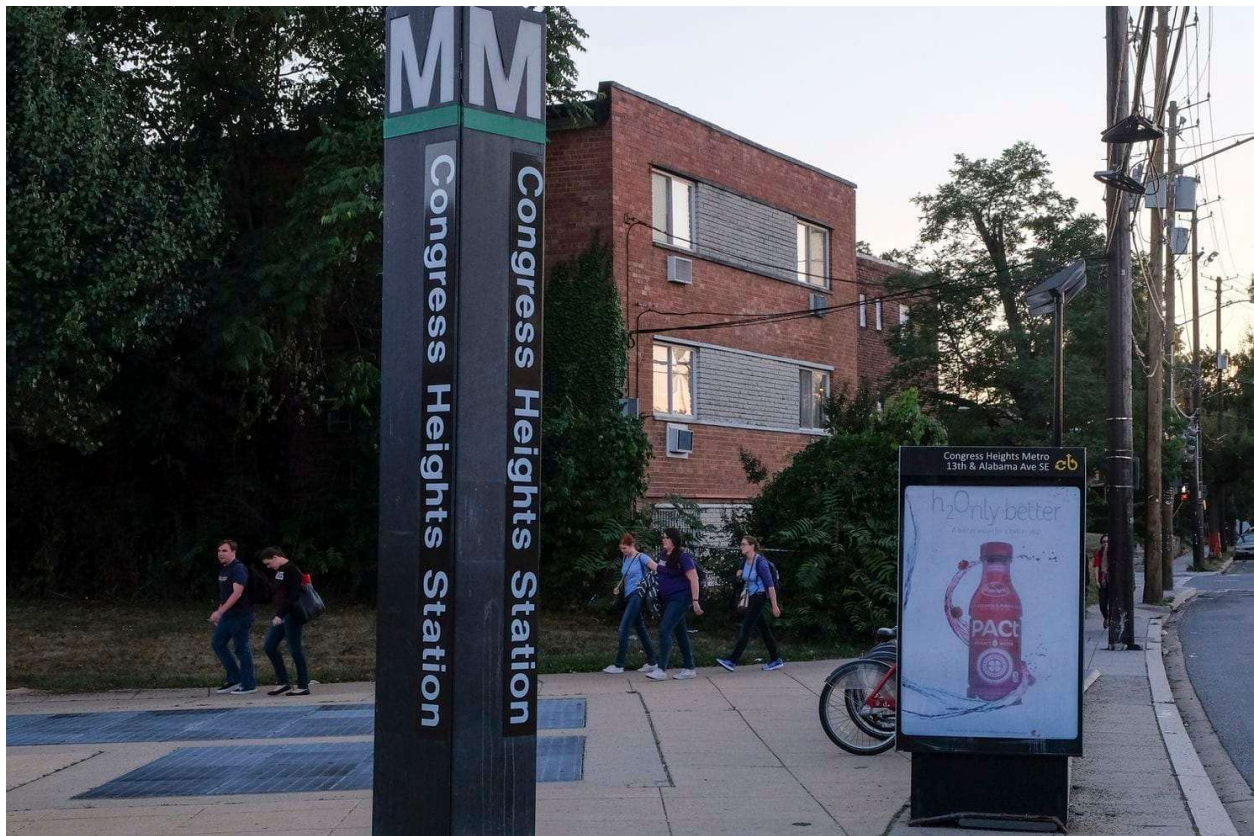


The Congress Heights Metro redevelopment would be a win for all of the District



Vacant and mostly vacant apartment buildings at 13th Street SE and Alabama Avenue SE above the Congress Heights Metro Station. (Jahi Chikwendiu/The Washington Post)

By **Arrington Dixon**

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Arrington Dixon, a Ward 8 resident, is a former chairman of the D.C. Council and former chairman of the Anacostia Coordinating Council, a nonprofit dedicated to the promotion and development of the Anacostia section of Ward 8.

In her proposed 2020 budget, D.C. Mayor Muriel E. Bowser (D) addresses what she says is the city's No. 1 issue: [affordable housing](#). I agree. Lawmakers should be working overtime to create and preserve affordable housing so that our seniors, working families and longtime residents are not displaced — something that can and should be done while creating jobs and economic opportunities for our neighbors.

Now it is time to get behind a project that will greatly benefit Ward 8. The [redevelopment of the Congress Heights Metro site](#) could bring affordable apartments, market-rate apartments, maybe a day-care facility, retail shops, restaurants and offices — all on top of the Metro station. This project would increase the number of existing affordable units and dramatically increase safety in the neighborhood. The developer has zoning approvals already in hand and could break ground in a matter of weeks. This development would be a win for Congress Heights, for Ward 8, for affordable housing, for transit-oriented development and for all of the District.

But will it be a win for the [10 tenants who make up the tenant association](#) at the now-abandoned buildings above the Congress Heights Metro, and who will determine the fate of this development?

The tenants suffered for years in [miserable living conditions](#). They were victimized by the former property owner, a landlord that warehoused low-income residents in grossly substandard housing. Fortunately, D.C. Attorney General Karl A. Racine ran the landlord out of town, and it [won't do business here again](#).

Also fortunate is the fact that the new owner of the Congress Heights Metro buildings, [CityPartners](#), is a respected local developer with a solid track record in our community. One example is Hyatt Place Washington DC/National Mall, a hotel complex in Southwest that CityPartners and its partners built and opened in 2015. Along with the typical amenities one might find in a hotel, CityPartners built a new headquarters for [Kid Power](#), a nonprofit organization providing innovative programs for children in the District's underserved communities. Kid Power didn't pay a dime to build the space, and its rent is just \$50 a year. Building the Kid Power facility was not something CityPartners was required to do but something it chose to do.

Also, by choice, CityPartners started [CityPartners Pathways](#), the first and only hospitality apprenticeship program for young D.C. adults. In less than four years, the management staff at Hyatt Place has trained 45 D.C. youths, mostly from Wards 7 and 8, and hired 36 for permanent jobs.

Unfortunately and understandably, the tenants are angry and can't seem to separate CityPartners from the previous landlord. About 10 months ago, CityPartners gave the tenants an offer to purchase the Congress Heights apartment buildings, which triggered TOPA, the [Tenant Opportunity to Purchase Act](#). Since then, the tenants have refused to meet with CityPartners to negotiate a sale price or buyout terms. Not one meeting; a total stalemate.

As a native Washingtonian from Ward 8 and a [former chairman of the Anacostia Coordinating Council](#), I have been frustrated to watch this important project languish. The offer that CityPartners put on the table is as generous as I have ever seen, with each tenant association

member getting \$100,000 and the option to move into new apartments at current rental rates. Additionally, CityPartners is offering to pay the taxes on the \$100,000, provide the tenants with an independent financial consultant free of charge and give tenants the option to invest in the new property with a preferred interest rate.

This project is at a critical juncture. CityPartners could renovate the existing 60-year-old buildings and move the tenants back in, but doing so would eliminate any possibility of other development and remove all benefits to the larger community. Or CityPartners could reach an agreement with the tenants and advance everyone's interests.

A cash settlement to tenants who lived through the horrible years with the previous landlord won't take away the pain and humiliation of living in those neglected buildings. But it's a start. I'm hopeful that the tenants will accept this deal and allow a project to move forward that will provide jobs and affordable housing and a renewed sense of community and optimism to Congress Heights. I'm equally hopeful that city leaders will be able to bring the tenants and the developer together to make this happen in Congress Heights.