

American University
Community Liaison Committee Meeting Notes
Wednesday, September 17
6:30 - 7:30 p.m.

Mary Graydon Student Center, Room 307

Introductions & Opening Remarks

The quarterly meeting of the Community Liaison Committee (CLC) was opened by Jason Millison at 6:30 PM. Matt Bennett, Vice President and Chief Communications Officer, welcomed attendees. Jason Millison reviewed the ground rules and agenda.

Matt Bennett provided opening remarks and updates on the start of American University's fall semester, including orientation and convocation. He highlighted AU's progress on its new strategic plan, upcoming celebrations for the 250th anniversary of the United States, and the anticipated winter completion of the Meltzer Center for Athletic Performance and Sports Center Annex. Matt also discussed plans to enhance the Sports Center once relevant offices relocate to the Meltzer Center. In addition, he shared updates on the implementation and potential impact of the One Big Beautiful Bill Act on higher education, as well as the federal government's role in the District of Columbia.

Community Relations Updates

Construction Updates

Jason Millison and David Bierwirth discussed relevant updates to the Meltzer Center/SCAN as well as the Reeves and Greenberg Track. Jason Millison and David Bierwirth discussed the upcoming completion of the Meltzer Center, which is on track for early 2026. Jason reminded neighbors that pets are only allowed on Reeves Field and Greenberg Track when they are on a leash and athletes are not present at the facility.

Upcoming and Past Events

Jason Millison provided a report of recent news and upcoming events at American University including:

- AU Community Relations celebrated Clean Energy Week with a tour of the Meltzer Center/SCAN for Councilmember Matt Frumin, staff from the District Department of Energy and the Environment, and other guests.
- Isabella Hassett joined the team as our Assistant Director of Community and Government Relations bringing a wealth of expertise from the White House Office of Intergovernmental Affairs and the Harris for President campaign. She looks forward to helping strengthen AU's connection to the community and foster relationships with government partners.
- The Community Relations team, in collaboration with DC Jazz Fest, hosted a Jazz in the Park pop-up concert in our outdoor amphitheater with AU's Musician in Residence, Josh Bayer, and his quartet.
- Alongside the Office of Student Affairs, Community Relations hosted a Neighborhood Movie Night on the Quad to view and sign-along to Encanto.

Campus Plan Commitments

Jason Millison provided information on accessing the most recent Jacobs Field Quarterly Sound Monitoring Report that covers June 2025 – August 2025. He also announced that back-to-school postcards had been delivered and he plans to visit various apartment complexes in the area.

President Alger's Address

President Alger began by sharing that at a recent Constitution Day event held at the Washington College of Law, leaders in civic education gathered to reflect on the current state of democracy with a sense of optimism. He shared that this same spirit of hope was mirrored in the university's vibrant start to the academic year, welcoming 1,700 new undergraduates and 1,100 new graduate students. The incoming Class of 2029 is the most diverse in the university's history, representing 49 states and 42 countries, with 18% identifying as first-generation college students. This diversity, particularly among international students, is a testament to the inclusive and welcoming environment cultivated on campus. Mentorship continues to be central to the university's strategy for recruiting and retaining students and will play a key role in the new strategic plan. The President acknowledged that the challenges of the COVID era are largely behind, and this incoming class appears eager to engage deeply in both their academic and civic lives. The Presidential Speaker Series also returned with notable energy, featuring U.S. Representative Sarah McBride as the first guest and will continue October 4 with a fireside chat between former House Majority Leader Dick Gephardt and former Senator Rob Portman. These events align with the university's broader commitment to civic life and civil discourse, encouraging students to build the skills necessary for collaboration, creativity, and problem-solving across divides. In support of these goals, the Democracy Innovation Lab is launching at the Sine Institute and will aim to serve as a national hub for thought leadership in partnership with the Civic Learning and Democracy Engagement Coalition. The university also introduced the 250+ Initiative to celebrate America's 250th anniversary, where the "+" symbolizes a hopeful vision for democracy, civic engagement, and interdisciplinary collaboration. Cultural enrichment remains a key part of campus life, with Renée Fleming scheduled to present "Music and the Mind" on April 14, and the Katzen Arts Center celebrating its 20th anniversary through a year of special performances and other events. President Alger reiterated that all these efforts are grounded in the university's evolving strategic plan, focused on five core priorities, also known as the "5 Cs": career, curriculum, civic pluralism, curiosity, and community.

Good of the Order

Matt Bennett opened the floor for any questions.

Closing Questions and Comments

Are there opportunities for lifelong learning or classes for the community?

- Osher Lifelong Learning Institute offers courses and activities to provide additional intellectual stimulation. OLLI has more than 1,000 members and offers more than 90 study groups each semester. Tuition is \$300 for the fall semester and \$550 for the fall/spring.
- Neighbors 55+ residing in the 20016, 20015, 20008, and 20007 Zip codes may audit classes at AU. The Spring 2026 application opens December 5 and closes January 7, 2026. Classes begin January 12. Contact alumniaudit@american.edu with any questions.

What percentage of AU's budget comes from the federal funding and what impact would a loss of federal funds have on the university? How would that impact applications?

- The university prepared accordingly, and WAMU lost \$1.5 million, or 4.5% of their operating budget, due to the Recissions Act of 2025. The university had only a small number of grants canceled. We cannot be certain of the future, but the university had a record number of applicants this last year for reference.

President Alger mentioned mentorship opportunities for neighbors in his remarks. Who would you speak to if interested in participating?

- If interested, you should reach out to members of the Community Relations team as well as Dean Trogden.

Attendees

Community:

Mary Buckles, Neighbor
Margaret Chung, Neighbor
Jock Chung, Neighbor
Judith Kopperud, AUNP Student Life and Safety Working Group member
Dennis Paul, Neighbors for a Livable Community
Georgianna Paul, Spring Valley resident
Shelley Repp, Neighbor
Larry Seftor, Neighbor
Aischa Saavedra, Neighbor
Rita McWilliams, AUNP Engagement and Communications Working Group member
Pelia Spitzer, Neighbor
Glenn Spitzer, Neighbor
Peggy Asante-Spitzer, Neighbor
Maria Meier, Neighbor
Scott Meier, Neighbor
Blaine Carter, Neighbor
Diana Gregg, AUNP Student Life and Safety Working Group member
David Thompson, Neighbor
Carol Wells, AUNP Steering Committee member
Chuck Elkins, AUNP Student Life and Safety Working Group Co-Chair
Betsy White, AUNP Engagement and Communications Working Group member

American University Staff:

Matt Bennett, Vice President and Chief Communications Officer
Vicky Wilkins, Provost and Chief Academic Officer
Bridget Trogden, Dean of Undergraduate Education and Academic Student Services
Josh Finver, Assistant Director for Transportation Demand Management
David Bierwirth, Associate Athletic Director/External Relations
Justin Bernstine, Deputy Dean of Students
Evelyn Thimba, Vice President for Undergraduate Enrollment Management
Laura Marks, AVP of Community and Government Relations
Jason Millison, Director of Community Relations
Isabella Hassett, Assistant Director of Community and Government Relations
Sherry Rutherford, Principal, Rutherford Partners LLC