

American University
Community Liaison Committee Meeting Notes
Tuesday, March 11, 2026
6:00 - 7:00 p.m.
SIS Abramson Family Founders Room

Introductions & Opening Remarks

The quarterly meeting of the American University Community Liaison Committee (CLC) was opened by Sherry Rutherford at 6:00 PM. Matt Bennett, Vice President and Chief Communications Officer, welcomed attendees. Sherry Rutherford reviewed the ground rules and agenda. Attendees introduced themselves to the group.

Matt Bennett provided opening remarks and shared updates on AU's new strategic plan. As the university reaches the halfway point of the spring semester, planning for commencement is well underway. On January 26, AU successfully launched its new strategic plan, which focuses on ensuring that students are well prepared for the careers they hope to pursue. A centerpiece of the plan is the AU Ready pledge, which guarantees that beginning in their sophomore year, students who meet certain prerequisites will have access to \$4,500 to support an unfunded research or internship opportunity. The initiative also serves as an enrollment strategy to attract prospective students. In addition, the university is expanding mentorship opportunities, strengthening its research portfolio, and further integrating Washington, D.C., into the academic experience.

Q. Is the \$4,500 funding for unpaid research/internships a one-time opportunity?

A. Yes.

Q. Who places students in internship opportunities?

A. It is the responsibility of the students to secure their internship, but our career services office connects students to opportunities.

Q. Who should I reach out to if I work somewhere that I think could be of interest to students?

A. We are exploring pathways to create matchmaking opportunities.

Q. Does the \$4,500 funding also count for the summer?

A. Yes.

Standing Reports

Construction and Facilities Update

- Since we last met, we held our opening event for the Meltzer Center in January, and many government organizations have already visited to see the work and sustainability efforts underway.
- Construction on the Meltzer pathway and plaza is planned to make the space more vibrant, with new plantings and improvements designed to encourage people to walk around and spend more time outdoors. The project is expected to take about three months; permits are currently pending. Once approved, construction of the full concrete pathway will begin in April and is anticipated to be completed by June. The fence at Osbourne will also be replaced as part of efforts to improve the area.
- Updates to the Sports Center are currently pending permits as well. The goal is for the project to be completed by December 2027.
- April 7 has been scheduled as Campus Beautification Day.

Q. What sports take place in the Meltzer Center?

A. Volleyball and wrestling.

Q. Is a liquor license currently pending for Bender Arena?

A. Yes, only beer and wine will be available during games and special events.

Q. Where are the buffer zones?

A. Between AU campus and wooded/vegetative areas etc.

Off-Campus Student Conduct

- Justin Bernstine presented the Off-Campus Student Conduct Report for September 6, 2025, to March 9, 2026. Seven reports were received. During this period, three of the incidents were resolved through meetings, one was referred to Transportation, and three were anonymous and did not provide enough information to determine whether AU students were involved.

Community Relations Updates

AU Neighborhood Fan Club

- The AU Neighborhood Fan Club was created by the Community Relations office to build a program and culture within the surrounding community around attending AU sporting events. The initiative launched in time for the men's basketball season and is designed to provide an insider experience for neighborhood families. Based on the positive response, the office is looking to continue the program next school year.
- The Fan Club initiative has also received internal attention and was highlighted as a PR case study. As part of this, the team hosted a guest lecture discussing the work of this body and the broader role of the Community Relations office.

Upcoming and Past Events

- The university is currently in the midst of our 250+ at American programming, which includes events such as Sine Institute Fellow discussions and a presidential conversation with Lonnie Bunch, head of the Smithsonian Institution.
- Looking ahead, upcoming events include Campus Beautification Day and the Cherry Blossom Spring Market, in which AU will participate.
- In late April, AU will host an event with Renée Fleming, but registration is not yet live.

Student-Neighbor Dinners

- Applications are currently open for neighbors interested in hosting a student-neighbor dinner. Hosts simply welcome students into their homes, while the university covers the cost of catering and coordinates the food. Dinners can also be themed based on shared interests or career focus.

Walk for Peace

- Buddhist monks from Fort Worth recently came to AU as part of the culmination of their 2,300-mile, 108-day Walk for Peace. The university hosted a large gathering in Bender Arena, which drew more than 3,500 attendees and served as a strong example of the university's ability to bring the community together for meaningful events.

Good of the Order

Sherry Rutherford opened the floor for any questions and covered the dates for the remaining 2026 quarterly Community Liaison Committee meetings.

Q. How did enrollment go?

A. We are in the middle of the cycle with deposits due on May 1.

Q. Will tours of the arboretum be available again to neighbors this year?

A. We will discuss these offerings with the new arboretum director.

Attendees

Community:

Judith Kopperud, AUNP Student Life and Safety Working Group member

Shelly Repp, Neighbor

Larry Seftor, Neighbor

Mary Buckles, Neighbor

Chuck Elkins, AUNP Student Life and Safety Working Group Co-Chair

Timothy Talley, AUNP Facilities Working Group Member

Suzanne Smolik, Neighbor

Robert Smolik, Neighbor

Georgianna Paul, Neighbor

Dennis Paul, Neighbor

Stanley Harris, AUNP Engagement and Communications Working Group Co-Chair

Gary Carter, Neighbor

American University Staff:

Matt Bennett, Vice President and Chief Communications Officer

Justin Bernstine, Dean of Students

Jay Gruber, Chief of Police

David Bierwirth, Associate Athletic Director/External Relations

Skip Vaughn, AVP of Facilities Management

Edna Pate-Cloutier, Director of Planning and Project 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