



Hello and welcome to FREEPOD. I'm Paulette Williams-Thom-
as...

And I'm Tim Connors...

In this week's episode, Freeport City Council censures two
members and acts to protect public works employees...

It is fair season in northwest Illinois...

And the Krape Park Art Walk puts a call for artists.

This is Freepod for July 23rd, 2026 and here is the news that

CITY COUNCIL UPDATE

More discontent coming out of a recent Freeport City Council meeting. On Monday, July 20th, the council held their regularly scheduled meeting with a few touchy items on the agenda.

The first was a resolution put forward by 6th Ward Alderman Greg Shadle and 2nd Ward Alderwoman Linda Johnson. The resolution was for a censure of 3rd Ward Alderwoman Rachel Simmons and 7th Ward Alderman Larry Sanders, accusing the two of them of violating rules of decorum at the July 6th council meeting.



We spoke to Alderman Shadle before the meeting and he told us:

"Well, obviously it was because of the actions on July 6th meeting. But prior to that, these council members have been on, on the board on the council for three years. Plus, and this has been kind of a standard operation of these two particular and several others, actually two, where they do not follow the Robert's Rules of Order and there's a total lack of decorum and it creates a hostile environment at the meeting and it hinders us getting our work done on the council because of the fact that we're backpedaling and having to reestablish order that should just be followed."

During the meeting, the resolution was approved by a vote of 5-3.

Also at the July 20th meeting, Public Works Director Darin Stykel presented a memo notifying council that he was now directing public works employees to immediately terminate any contact with citizens once they become abusive, intimidating, or threatening, saying that this type of behavior will no longer be tolerated.

City Manager Rob Boyer told us that these changes are necessary both due to the frequency of abuse leveled against city employees, but because of the damage it does to morale and retention for city workers.

"They take a lot of punishment from residents who have some kind of an ax to grind. There are emotionally unregulated individuals who think that they can intimidate people into doing something other than what

they're there to do. So we're standing up for our folks as well, because it's the right thing to do. And I will say, this is certainly not the first time this has happened.

I mean, we've had circumstances where people run the, they run the barricades at street reconstructions. I've had an employee hit by a side view mirror as people run through the intersection because they're angry, or they're upset that they're being inconvenienced by, you know, what is basically necessary work. But that certainly isn't the only thing that's ever happened.

But, we have many occasions of this, and it's really time we put this into an ordinance and create some kind of a, a standard so that if this happens again, you know, there'll be some recourse."

Director Stykel also noted that public works will no longer follow up on any iWorks submission that doesn't have personally identifying information, such as a name or email address, attached to it.



CITY OF FREEPORT GETS NEW SALT SHED

The City of Freeport is investing in winter readiness with the installation of a new salt storage shed at the Public Works Yard.

City officials say the previous structure had become unsafe and was on the verge of collapse, prompting its replacement. The new facility will protect thousands of tons of road salt purchased each year for snow and ice control, helping preserve the city's investment while improving safety for Public Works employees.

Proper salt storage also helps prevent moisture damage and keeps material ready for use during winter storms.

City leaders say the project is part of an ongoing effort to modernize municipal facilities and improve the infrastructure that supports essential public services year-round.

TRAFFIC CONTROL ADDED ON GALENA AVENUE

Drivers in Freeport should plan for delays on Galena Avenue as a road improvement project gets underway. Eastbound traffic has been reduced from two lanes to one between Park Boulevard and Illinois Route 26, with additional traffic control now extending from Illinois 26 to Clark Street.



Contractor Kelsey Excavating is beginning storm sewer and sidewalk improvements, with work expected to continue through July, weather permitting. The city announced that the south side of Galena Avenue was finished July 21, so construction will shift to the north side while traffic remains open through changing lane patterns.

City officials are asking motorists to slow down, watch for workers and equipment, and allow extra travel time through the construction zone.



FIREFIGHTERS MAKE ADJUSTMENTS FOR WORKING IN EXTREME HEAT

As northwest Illinois endures another stretch of dangerous summer heat, the Freeport Fire Department is taking extra steps to protect firefighters responding to emergencies.

Lieutenant Ernest Stabenow III says crews begin monitoring for heat stress as soon as a call comes in by checking firefighters' temperatures, keeping them out of direct sun when possible, and stocking engines with cold water, ice packs, and cooling supplies.

Firefighter and EMT Hewitt Dameier says crews rotate in and out of active duty, remove heavy gear during breaks, and call for additional personnel when needed to prevent heat-related illness. The precautions come as the National Weather Service warns that heat index values near 100 degrees can quickly increase the risk of heat exhaustion for both first responders and the public.

GIVE YOUR INPUT ON A CITY LAND ACQUISITION PROPOSAL

The City of Freeport is asking residents to help shape the future of downtown.

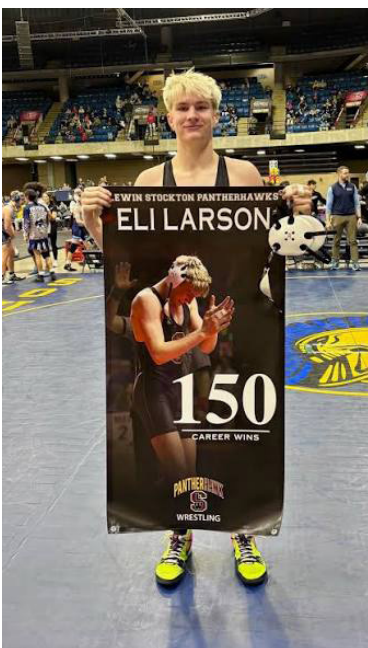
City officials have launched a public survey as they prepare an application for an Open Space Lands Acquisition and Development, or OSLAD,



grant through the Illinois Department of Natural Resources. The grant program helps communities fund parks, trails, public gathering spaces, and other outdoor recreation projects.

Residents are encouraged to share what they like about downtown, what they'd like to see improved, and ideas for future public spaces. City leaders say the feedback will help strengthen Freeport's grant application and guide ongoing downtown revitalization efforts.

The survey is available at <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/CoFSurvey26?utm>



STOCKTON ATHLETE NAMED MALE ATHLETE OF THE YEAR

A standout athlete from northwest Illinois is earning recognition from sports fans across the region.

Stockton High School's Eli Larson has been voted the 2025–2026 Rockford-area Male Athlete of the Year in the Rockford Register Star's fan poll, receiving more than 26 percent of the vote. Larson finished ahead of Harlem's Braxton Fausett in a field of standout athletes from across the Rockford area.

Larson capped an outstanding year by winning the IHSA Class 1A state wrestling championship at 175 pounds after finishing as the state runner-up the previous season. He's also excelled in football and has qualified for national wrestling competition, making him one of northwest Illinois' premier multi-sport athletes.

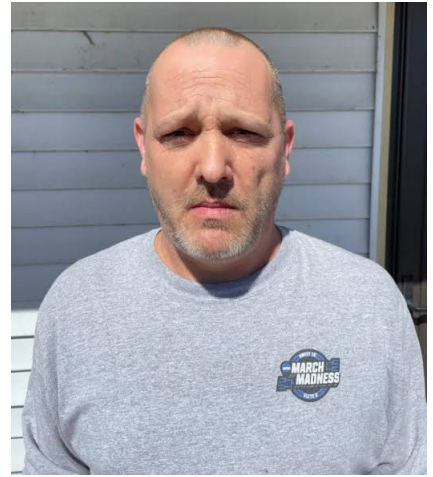
FORMER CARROLL COUNTY DEPUTY'S CRIMINAL CASE MOVES FORWARD

The criminal case against a former Carroll County Sheriff's deputy accused in the death of a Mount Carroll teenager continues to move forward.

An Ogle County judge has denied a defense request seeking more detailed information about the charges filed against Matthew Herpstreith, clearing the way for the case to proceed toward trial. Herpstreith has pleaded not guilty to charges including reckless homicide, reckless conduct, and obstructing justice in connection with the July 2024 death of 18-year-old Jackson Kradle.

Kradle was found along Illinois Route 78 north of Mount Carroll and was later determined to have died from injuries consistent with a vehicle-pedestrian crash. The Illinois State Police led the investigation, and prosecutors say the case remains on track, with trial proceedings expected to begin later this year.

As with all criminal cases, Herpstreith is presumed innocent unless proven guilty in court.



JO DAVIESS COUNTY SHERIFF'S OFFICE MOURNS LOSS OF K-9



The Jo Daviess County Sheriff's Office is remembering one of its most trusted partners. K-9 Sam died on July 10th at the age of nine after battling cancer.

Sam served alongside Sergeant Nathan Furlong since 2018, completing hundreds of deployments that included narcotics investigations, searches for missing and wanted people, and other high-risk law enforcement operations.

Beyond the job, Sam became a familiar face at school career days, community demonstrations, and public events throughout northwest Illinois. Sheriff Klaus Kretschmer called Sam "a loyal partner, a dedicated protector, and a valued member of our law enforcement family," adding, "Your watch is over. We will take it from here."

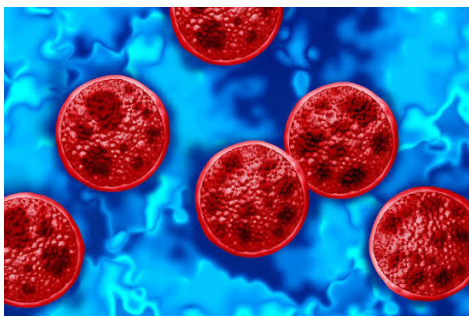
OGLE COUNTY FAIR NEEDS VOLUNTEERS

The countdown is on to the Ogle County Fair, and organizers are looking for volunteers to help make this year's event a success.

The fair runs July 29th through August 2nd at the Ogle County Fairgrounds in Oregon, and volunteers are needed to assist with admissions, exhibits, events, and other fair operations throughout the week. Fair officials say volunteers play a vital role in welcoming thousands of visitors each year and helping keep one of Ogle County's longest-running traditions running smoothly.

Anyone interested in volunteering can contact the Ogle County Fair Association through its website or Facebook page.





CYCLOSPORIASIS INFORMATION

Illinois health officials are reporting a sharp increase in cases of cyclosporiasis, a foodborne illness caused by a microscopic parasite often linked to contaminated fresh produce.

The Illinois Department of Public Health has confirmed 240 cases this year, with 21 people hospitalized. Nationwide, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention says more than 1,600 cases have been reported across 34 states as investigators work to identify the source.

Symptoms include watery diarrhea, stomach cramps, nausea, and fatigue, and most people recover within one to two weeks.

Health officials recommend thoroughly washing fresh fruits and vegetables, refrigerating produce promptly, and contacting a healthcare provider if symptoms develop. They also encourage anyone diagnosed with the illness to cooperate with public health investigators to help identify the source of the outbreak.

FUNDING FOR PROJECTS THAT IMPROVE FISH HABITAT AND FARMS

Conservation groups across northern Illinois are encouraging farmers, land-owners, and local organizations to apply for funding that can improve both farmland and fish habitat.

The Fishers & Farmers Partnership is now accepting grant proposals through September 10, with awards ranging from \$15,000 to \$100,000. The partnership supports projects throughout the Upper Mississippi River watershed, including northwest Illinois, that improve soil health, water quality, and stream habitat.



Coordinator Heidi Keuler says healthy fish habitat starts upstream with healthy soil, adding that planting deep-rooted prairie species and improving soil health benefits rivers while strengthening farms for future generations. Organizers say they're especially interested in grassroots projects and are available to help applicants develop proposals.



DISABILITY PRIDE MONTH STORY TIME

Disability Pride Month will be celebrated in Freeport with a special family event at the Freeport Public Library.

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RAMP Disability Resources and Services will host a free pop-up story time on Friday, July 24th, at 10 a.m., featuring two children's books that highlight disability, inclusion, and acceptance, followed by a coloring activity for young participants. The event is open to families with preschool and elementary-age children.

RAMP, which serves people with disabilities across northern Illinois, says Disability Pride Month recognizes the history, achievements, and contributions of people with disabilities while promoting accessibility and inclusion in every community.

Registration is not required, and the program will be held in the library's meeting room.

FAMILY FUN NIGHT AT THE FREEPORT ART MUSEUM

The Freeport Art Museum is inviting families to help create a lasting piece of community history.

A free Family Fun Night will be held on Wednesday, August 5th, from 4 to 6 p.m., where participants of all ages can create artwork that may become part of a new public mural celebrating America's 250th anniversary. Lead artist Ben Swords will be on hand to talk about the project and its vision, and all art supplies will be provided.



Organizers ask families to RSVP by July 31st to help ensure enough materials are available. The mural project is supported through grants from the Illinois Arts Council and The Foundation for Northwest Illinois.



NIBNA SUMMER BLOOMS FIELD TRIP

Nature lovers have an opportunity to explore one of northwest Illinois' rarest natural treasures later this month.

The Northwest Illinois Bird and Nature Alliance is hosting "Summer Blooms on the Freeport Prairie" on Friday, July 31st, from 9 to 10 a.m. Participants will discover native wildflowers in bloom at the Freeport Prairie Illinois Nature Preserve, considered the last remaining remnant of the original Shannon Prairie.

The preserve has been protected by the Jane Addamsland Park Foundation for nearly 50 years and was dedicated as an Illinois Nature Preserve in 1977. The guided walk begins at the preserve's new parking area off Meadows Drive.

Organizers recommend bringing water, insect repellent, and sturdy footwear for the steep, uneven terrain.

ART WALK CALL FOR ARTISTS

Artists, crafters, and art lovers are invited to be part of a new community tradition in Freeport.

The Freeport Park District is accepting vendor applications for the Krape Park Art Walk, scheduled for Saturday, August 15th, from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. The free, family-friendly event will feature regional artists, live music, food vendors, and handcrafted works in one of Illinois' most scenic parks.

Organizers expect thousands of visitors and are encouraging artists working in painting, photography, jewelry, pottery, fiber arts, glass, woodworking, and other handmade media to apply by July 31st.



Visitors can also enjoy Krape Park's paddleboats, miniature golf, historic carousel, and walking trails during the event.



OGLE COUNTY FAIR

The countdown is on for one of northwest Illinois' biggest summer traditions.

The 173rd Ogle County Fair returns to the fairgrounds in Oregon Wednesday, July 29, through Sunday, August 2. Fairgoers can enjoy five days of carnival rides, livestock shows, 4-H exhibits, live music, delicious fair food and grandstand entertainment.

The fairgrounds are located at 1440 North Limekiln Road in Oregon. Grandstand events begin Wednesday evening at 6:30, with additional motorsports and entertainment scheduled throughout the week.

Admission is \$10 per day, while children 4 and under get in free, and five-day passes are also available. Organizers encourage visitors to purchase tickets in advance online. Whether you're cheering on local 4-H members, enjoying the midway or taking in the nightly grandstand events, the Ogle County Fair offers something for every member of the family.

For a complete schedule and tickets, visit <https://oglecountyfair.com/>

JO DAVIESS COUNTY FAIR

One of Illinois' longest-running traditions returns later this month as the Jo Daviess County Fair comes to Warren Thursday, July 30, through Sunday, August 2.

Known as the longest continuously running county fair in Illinois, this year's event will feature four days of livestock shows, 4-H exhibits, carnival rides, family entertainment, and grandstand events. Highlights include the Fair Queen Pageant at 6:30 Thursday evening, the Demolition Derby at 7 p.m. Friday, and the Badger State Tractor Pull at 7 p.m. Saturday. The midway will also feature unlimited ride wristbands on Thursday night from 5:30 until 9:30.



Daily admission begins at just five dollars on Thursday, with discounted season passes also available.

For a complete schedule of events and ticket information, visit jodaviesscountyfair.org

IN CLOSING...

Before signing off this week, a programming note for our listeners. Did you know that you can read any of our scripts any time on our website? Along with "broadcasting" our podcast each week, we also publish a print version of each weekly news episode on our website, www.freepod.org. The print version allows you to move at your own pace to absorb the news you've been missing.

And because of the nature of a podcast, you can also get the news when you want it. While we release these newscasts every Thursday at noon, they are available anytime. So, while we appreciate it if you think of Freepod as "appointment listening," the reality is that you can download our episodes and play them whenever you have time.

And it's not just our newscasts either. Our interviews are available to listen to anytime as well, including this past week's interview. Freepod host Alan Wenzel spoke to the owner-operators of Deerland Dairy about their "cow to kitchen" operation here in Freeport.

This coming Tuesday, I will be speaking with Craig Deininger about the new life that has been breathed in to Deininger Floral. That interview will be available starting at noon on Tuesday, July 28th, but you can listen anytime after that, as well. You can find it, and all of our other interviews, on our website, www.freepod.org, or wherever you get your podcasts from.

We'd like to thank our community liaisons and reporters for providing pivotal content for our program, our partners at WNIJ in DeKalb for helping to share Freepod to a larger community, and the Media Studies department at Highland Community College for producing this podcast.

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This has been Freepod. Thank you for listening.



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