



FREEPOD
The news you've been missing.

Hello and welcome to FREEPOD. I'm Tim Connors...

And I'm Becky Connors...

In this week's episode, Stephenson County considers a moratorium on data centers...

A local non-profit wants your input on life in northwest Illinois...

And a program on chimney swifts promises to sweep you away.

This is Freepod for August 27th, 2026 and here is the news that you've been missing...

STEPHENSON COUNTY CONSIDERS MORATORIUM ON DATA CENTERS

Stephenson County could become the latest Northwest Illinois community to put the brakes on data center development while officials determine how the massive facilities should be regulated.

The county's Planning and Development Committee has discussed a six-month moratorium on data centers, giving officials time to update zoning rules and specifically address concerns including electricity and water consumption.

Stephenson County isn't alone. In neighboring Ogle County, debate continues over potential data center development near Byron, where more than 500 acres near the Byron nuclear plant were previously rezoned for industrial use. Residents have organized against data centers, citing concerns about water, energy and land use.

And in Rochelle, city leaders unanimously rejected a development agreement in April for a proposed 300-thousand-square-foot data center that would have initially required 48 megawatts of electricity.

The local debates mirror a statewide reassessment, as Illinois has paused new state tax incentives for data centers while lawmakers consider additional regulations.



CITY OF FREEPORT APPROVES ORDINANCE AIMED AT PROTECTING CITY WORKERS



Freeport city employees now have the authority to end some interactions with residents if those conversations become abusive, intimidating or threatening.

The Freeport City Council unanimously approved an ordinance August 17th protecting the city's 51 Public Works employees. Under the policy, workers may hang up

the phone or leave a work site when harassment occurs, with police involvement possible when necessary. Public Works Director Darin Stykel says employees have reported abusive encounters regularly — sometimes several times a day — with incidents increasing over the past two years.

Supporters say city workers shouldn't be required to tolerate threats or abuse simply because they're public employees.

But opponents have raised concerns about where the city draws that line — arguing residents have a right to question, criticize and even become frustrated with their government, and that subjective terms could allow legitimate complaints to be cut short.

City officials say the policy is intended to address abusive or threatening conduct, not prevent residents from criticizing city government.

RENTAL RATES IN FREEPORT ON THE RISE

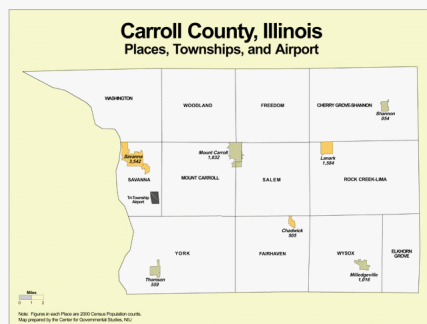
Renters in Freeport are seeing apartment prices climb much faster than renters across Illinois and the nation.

According to rental marketplace Zumper, the median apartment listing in Freeport reached \$995 a month in July, up 33 percent from \$750 in July of last year. That was also a nine-percent increase from June.

The increase is particularly notable compared with broader trends. Apartments.com reports Illinois rents were up about 3.3 percent year-over-year in July, while rents nationwide increased just eight-tenths of one percent.

That means Freeport's reported 33-percent increase was roughly ten times the statewide rate and more than 40 times the national increase.

Freeport remains comparatively affordable, however. Zumper's latest data shows local rents still well below the national median, although its figures can fluctuate significantly as the mix of available listings changes.



CARROLL COUNTY CONSIDERS PARATRANSIT GRANT

Carroll County could pursue new state funding to help provide transportation for seniors and people with disabilities.

The Illinois Department of Transportation has opened applications for its Consolidated Vehicle Procurement Program, which provides accessible paratransit vehicles to public transportation agencies, local governments

and eligible nonprofit organizations. Applications are due September 21st, with awards expected this fall.

Carroll County has benefited from the program before. In 2024, the county was awarded seven paratransit vehicles through an earlier round of state funding.

Carroll County Transit provides public transportation throughout the county and is supported by federal and state programs, fares, donations and required local matching funds.

Any new grant could help the county replace or expand its fleet while improving transportation access for residents who may have difficulty using conventional vehicles.

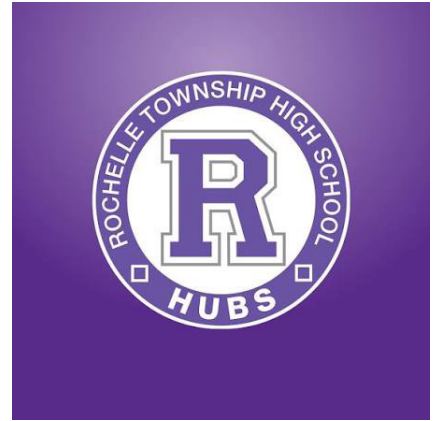
ROCHELLE HIGH SCHOOL GETS GREEN LIGHT FOR NEW FIELDHOUSE

A new indoor sports facility is moving forward in Rochelle after the local high school and park district approved a long-term partnership.

Rochelle Township High School and the Flagg-Rochelle Community Park District have approved a 50-year agreement to jointly develop and use a new indoor competition center on park district property near Jones Road and Eighth Street. The project carries an estimated nine-million-dollar price tag.

Under the agreement, the park district will own, operate and maintain the facility, while Rochelle schools will receive priority access during weekday after-school hours. The building will also host park district programs, community events and outside rentals.

Cord Construction has been selected for the first phase of design work. Construction could begin in 2027 and is expected to take about eight months.



TRIAL DATE SET IN JACKSON KRADLE CASE

A trial date has been set for the former Carroll County Sheriff's deputy charged in connection with the 2024 death of 18-year-old Jackson Kradle.

Matthew Herpstreith is scheduled to go before a jury beginning November 16. He faces charges including reckless homicide, reckless conduct and obstructing justice.

Kradle was found along Illinois Route 78 near Mount Carroll in July of 2024. A Carroll County coroner's jury later ruled his death a homicide.

Herpstreith's attorneys have sought dismissal of the reckless homicide and reckless conduct charges, arguing prosecutors haven't sufficiently alleged that he acted recklessly.

Herpstreith has pleaded not guilty. The charges are allegations, and he is presumed innocent unless proven guilty.

MAJOR ROAD WORK UNDERWAY NORTH OF GALENA

Drivers traveling north of Galena should prepare for delays as a major road construction project gets underway in Jo Daviess County.

The Illinois Department of Transportation says crews began work August 18 on Illinois Route 84 between U.S. 20 north of Galena and the Wisconsin state line. The nearly four-mile project will resurface the highway at a cost of about 3-point-7 million dollars.



Daily lane closures will be required throughout construction, and IDOT says motorists should expect delays along with periods of slow or stopped traffic.

Weather permitting, the Route 84 resurfacing project is expected to continue through the end of November. Drivers are being reminded to slow down, watch for workers and allow extra time when traveling through the construction zone.



GFP RECEIVES RENEWED STATUS

The Greater Freeport Partnership has again received national recognition for its work revitalizing downtown Freeport.

The organization has earned 2026 Main Street America Accredited status, the program's highest designation. Accreditation recognizes communities demonstrating strong performance in areas including economic development, historic preservation, sustainable opera-

tions and community involvement.

Freeport is among 838 programs nationwide receiving Accredited status this year. The Partnership says the recognition reflects the work of its staff, volunteers, businesses, property owners and local government partners.

The national Main Street program reports its participating communities generated 9-point-4 billion dollars in local reinvestment during 2025, while adding nearly 7-thousand businesses and more than 36-thousand jobs.

The Greater Freeport Partnership oversees Freeport's Main Street program as part of its broader economic development, business and tourism efforts throughout Stephenson County.

NEW MURAL SET FOR UNVEILING

A new piece of public art celebrating Freeport's past and future will be unveiled next month.

The Freeport Art Museum will reveal its new "United We Create" mural September 12th, during the museum's Freedom on the Rocks fundraiser. The mural is part of the nationwide celebration of America's 250th anniversary and was shaped through workshops involving local residents and young people.

The project's lead artist is Freeport native and local educator Ben Swords. The Illinois Arts Council awarded 15-thousand dollars toward the Freeport mural project.

Freedom on the Rocks begins at 5 p.m. at the museum's Arts Plaza, with the mural unveiling at 7. The evening also includes the Highland Community College Big Band, an All-American cookout and the museum's Cultural Leadership Awards.

Tickets are 50 dollars, with proceeds helping the museum continue offering free admission and community arts programming.





FNWIL SEEKING INPUT ON LIFE IN THE REGION

Residents of three Northwest Illinois counties are being asked what they value about living in the region — and what needs to improve.

The Foundation for Northwest Illinois has launched its annual Rural Vitality Survey, seeking responses from people living in Stephenson, Carroll and Jo Daviess counties.

The survey asks residents to identify both the strengths of their communities and challenges that should receive greater attention. The Foundation says that community input is part of its broader effort to strengthen civic health and ensure residents have a voice in shaping the region's future.

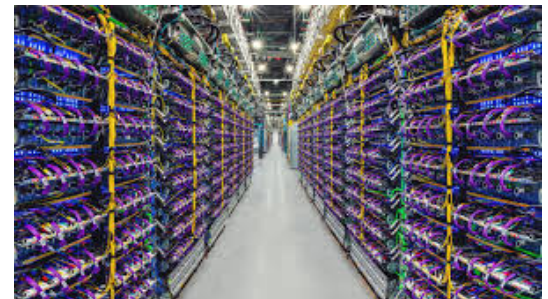
The Foundation serves all three counties through community development, charitable giving and partnerships with local organizations.

Residents can take the 2026 Rural Vitality Survey at <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/2026NWIL>

More information about the Foundation is available through The Foundation for Northwest Illinois.

DATA CENTERS BECOME KEY FOCUS IN GOVERNOR'S RACE

Data centers are emerging as a major political and economic issue in Illinois as concerns grow about their impact on electricity rates and water supplies.



Governor J.B. Pritzker signed bipartisan legislation in 2019 offering tax incentives to attract data centers, calling them an important source of investment and union jobs. But the rapid growth of artificial intelligence has brought much larger facilities requiring significantly more electricity, water and land.

Pritzker has now paused new state tax incentives, saying Illinois needs safeguards to prevent data centers from driving up utility costs. Republican gubernatorial candidate Darren Bailey says he would go further, temporarily halting even existing incentives while the state studies their impact.

Illinois had committed an estimated \$666 million in incentives to 34 data center projects through 2025.

Lawmakers could revisit regulations during the November veto session, including proposals requiring data centers to provide their own energy, report water use and enter agreements providing benefits to their host communities.



VOICES PREPARES FOR ANNUAL MUM SALE

A colorful fall fundraiser is returning to Freeport next month to support survivors of domestic and sexual violence.

VOICES of Stephenson County is bringing back its annual Mum Sale September 9th through the 11th, continuing a tradition started by the Freeport Garden Club. This year, there will be no pre-orders, with customers instead choosing their flowers during the sale.

Mums will cost 13 dollars each and will be available in red, orange, white, yellow and purple.

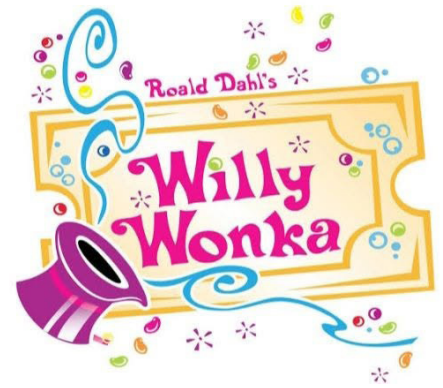
The sale runs from noon to five September 9th, nine to seven September 10th, and nine to five September 11th.

Money raised will support VOICES and the survivors it serves. The Freeport nonprofit provides free services including counseling, advocacy and emergency shelter for people affected by domestic and sexual violence.

WILLY WONKA AUDITIONS AT FHS

Freeport High School students will soon have the chance to step into a world of pure imagination.

The Freeport High School Theatre Department has announced auditions for its upcoming production of the musical Willy Wonka. Auditions will be held Wednesday, September 9th, and Thursday, September 10th, from 3 until 5:30 p.m.



Auditions are open to all Freeport High School students in grades nine through twelve. Audition packets and scripts will be available after the start of the school year.

The production continues a long-running tradition at Freeport High School, where the annual musical serves as a highlight and opening production of the school's Fine Arts season.

Additional information about Freeport High School performing arts and the Jeannette Lloyd Theatre can be found through the school's website.



FAM HOSTING HOMESCHOOL ART CLASSES

The Freeport Art Museum is giving homeschooled students another opportunity to add hands-on art education to their school year.

Registration is open for the museum's Fall 2026 Art Explorers program, which offers studio art classes designed specifically for homeschool students.

Students get experience with a variety of artistic materials and techniques while also exploring the museum's galleries. The program uses art to encourage personal expression while making connections with subjects including culture, math and science.

Class sizes are kept small, giving students more opportunities for hands-on instruction.

Families interested in enrolling can get registration information through the Freeport Art Museum at <https://www.freeportartmuseum.com/home-school?>

PANEL PRESENTATION ON FARMING THROUGH THE YEARS

A look at how farming has changed through the generations is coming to German Valley this weekend.

The German Valley historical society museum will host “Generations of the Land: Farming Then and Now” Sunday afternoon.

The program will feature a panel of local farmers and other members of the agricultural community, sharing stories and experiences about how farm life and agriculture have evolved over the years.

The discussion will be moderated by retired agricultural educator Robert Nelson, who was named Forrestville Valley’s Teacher of the Year in 2018.

The program will also incorporate historical artifacts to help tell the story of farming in the region.

It begins at 1:30 Sunday afternoon, August 30th, at the German Valley Museum complex on Church Street.

Admission is free, although donations are appreciated, and refreshments will follow the presentation.



NIBNA HOSTS PRESENTATION ON CHIMNEY SWIFTS

A unique bird that spends much of its life in the air will be the focus of an upcoming program in Freeport.

The Northwest Illinois Bird and Nature Alliance will present “Chimney Swifts: Well ‘Sooted’ for Their Job” Tuesday, September First, at St. John United Church of Christ.

Rich and Marion Miller will share what they’ve learned during 12 years as co-ordinators of the Kane County Audubon Chimney Swift Tower Project.

The presentation will explore the birds’ behavior, life cycle and habitat needs, along with concerns about declining chimney swift populations. The millers will also explain how artificial chimneys are being used to provide nesting and roosting habitat — and what people can do to help conserve the species.

The evening begins with a potluck at six, with the program starting at 7:15.

St. John United Church of Christ is located at 1010 Park Boulevard in Freeport.

IN CLOSING

Before we go, a quick programming note. If you’d rather read the news than listen to it, we’ve got you covered. Every week, we post a complete written version of this newscast on our website at freepod.org. It’s a great way to catch up on local news at your own pace or revisit a story you want to read in more detail.

And remember, podcasts are available whenever it’s convenient for you. While new episodes are released every Thursday at noon, you can listen anytime—whether you’re driving to work, mowing the lawn, or relaxing at home. Subscribe wherever you get your podcasts, or visit freepod.org to listen and read whenever it works

best for you.

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 sat down with Mark Mannino, coordinator of the Northwest Illinois Air Show. Mark told Alan about the special program lined up for this year's show at the Albertus Airport on September 19th.

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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