



Hello and welcome to FREEPOD. I'm Matt Mullen...

And I'm Amy Fisher...

In this week's episode, a Freeport City Council meeting devolves in to chaos...

We present a special interview with Congressman Eric Sorensen...

And Tutty Baker Weekend is here!

This is Freepod for July 9th, 2026 and here is the news that you've been missing...

FREEPORT CITY COUNCIL MEETING DEVOLVES INTO CHAOS

A routine meeting of the Freeport City Council Monday night ended abruptly after a heated dispute over parliamentary procedure escalated into shouting, removals from the council chambers, and an early adjournment.

The meeting opened with proclamations recognizing Parkview Home's Centennial, Freeport firefighters for years of service, and local law enforcement officers for their work during a recent hostage situation.

Tensions rose during public comment, where five speakers opposed a proposal to provide retirement benefits to Police Chief Jacquelyn Frausto, citing her short tenure in Freeport and questioning her performance and transparency.

The meeting unraveled during a vote on the consent agenda when an attempt by an alderman to raise a procedural concern led to a disagreement between Mayor Jodi Miller, members of the council, and City Attorney Aaron Szeto over parliamentary rules.

The confrontation intensified, with Mayor Miller calling an alderwoman out of order and ordering her removal. Several audience members were also removed after disrupting the meeting. The council ultimately voted unanimously to adjourn before any remaining business could be considered.

After the meeting, Mayor Miller defended her actions, saying maintaining order is her responsibility.

MILLER: "It always comes back to roles. My role is chairing the meeting, maintaining Robert's Rules. Part of the rules of Council is maintaining order and decorum. I know there's a lot of talk out there on Facebook saying that I'm trying to silence people's voices, and that's simply not true. Let your voice be heard, but do it in a way that's respectful and follows the rules and keeps order. It's Robert's Rules. I didn't write them, but it's my responsibility as chair to uphold them."



Asked how the council moves forward, Miller said:

MILLER: “I think we all have the same goal, and the goal is the betterment of Freeport. I know that my role in this is to maintain the order. And, really, aldermen’s role is to prepare themselves; come in to a meeting prepared. My door is always open to any of the aldermen. My phone is always on to them. Let’s have those discussions beforehand. But, you know, get your homework done. Let’s be efficient.”

The agenda items left unfinished Monday night are expected to be considered at the next City Council meeting on July 20th. Freepod also requested comment from Alderwoman Rachel Simmons but had not received a response before deadline.



STEPHENSON COUNTY GETS DISASTER PROCLAMATION FROM STATE

Governor JB Pritzker has issued a state disaster proclamation that includes Stephenson County following the severe storms that struck northern Illinois this spring.

The proclamation covers storm damage from April 14th and April 17th, making additional state resources available to support recovery efforts. It also allows eligible local governments to apply for up to \$250,000 through Illinois’ Community Development Block Grant Disaster Response program to help cover costs such as debris removal, cleanup, and repairs to public infrastructure.

Illinois has already recorded 173 confirmed tornadoes this year—the highest total ever documented in the state by this point in the year. Governor Pritzker says the proclamation is intended to help communities rebuild while state officials continue working with local governments to pursue additional recovery assistance where available.

TREE REMOVAL UNDERWAY WITH MIXED RESPONSE FROM COMMUNITY

The City of Freeport is responding to questions from residents after the recent removal of several trees along city streets.

Officials say the city is responsible for maintaining trees located in the public right-of-way—the area between the sidewalk and the street—and that trees posing safety hazards, including storm risks or conflicts with power lines, may be removed in coordination with ComEd.



The city says it understands many residents have emotional attachments to mature trees but says public safety must come first. Residents looking to replace trees on their own property can request free trees through the city’s YIELD Program while supplies last by contacting the city’s communications office.

On social media, reaction has been mixed. Some residents thanked the city for removing trees they considered dangerous, while others expressed disappointment over the loss of mature neighborhood trees and urged officials to increase replanting efforts and provide more notice before future removals. City officials say they appreciate the public feedback and remain committed to balancing neighborhood safety with preserving Freeport’s urban tree canopy.



KRAPE PARK SOUTH ENTRANCE IMPROVEMENT UNDERWAY

If you're planning a trip to Krape Park this week, be prepared for a detour.

The Freeport Park District says the park's south entrance remains closed as construction gets underway on a major improvement project that began Monday. The work is designed to improve traffic flow, expand access for emergency responders and school buses, and create a safer entrance for one of the district's busiest parks. Visitors should use alternate routes while construction is underway. Park officials say updates will be shared as the project progresses and are thanking the public for its patience.

Despite the closure, most park amenities remain open, including preparations for Saturday's Unplug Illinois event from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m., featuring outdoor games, fishing, crafts, and family activities.

NEW STUDY HIGHLIGHTS HCC'S ECONOMIC IMPACT ON REGION

Highland Community College continues to be a major economic engine for northwest Illinois.

A new independent study by Lightcast finds the Freeport-based college generated an estimated \$89.9 million in economic impact during the 2023–24 fiscal year, supporting more than 1,350 jobs across the region. The report says one out of every 49 jobs in Highland's district is connected to the college and its students.



Researchers also found taxpayers receive about \$1.10 in benefits for every public dollar invested, while students earn an average annual return of more than 14% on their education. Highland officials say the study underscores the college's role in preparing a skilled workforce and strengthening the economy throughout northwest Illinois.



Illinois.

SRC EXPANDING SERVICES TO JO DAVIESS COUNTY **THANKS TO FNWIL**

Older adults in Jo Daviess County will soon have more opportunities to stay active and connected thanks to a new \$14,000 Community Impact Grant from The Foundation for Northwest

The funding will help the Senior Resource Center expand programs and transportation services, making it easier for seniors to attend book clubs, wellness workshops, art classes, educational programs, and other community activities. Executive Director Amanda Faivre says the project is designed to reduce social isolation while helping older adults remain independent, regardless of where they live.

The Senior Resource Center also announced that staff member Anna Bell has received the Foundation's Rising Leader Award for her work supporting older adults throughout northwest Illinois.

The Senior Resource Center has served the region since 1973 and offers a wide range of programs for older adults and their caregivers.

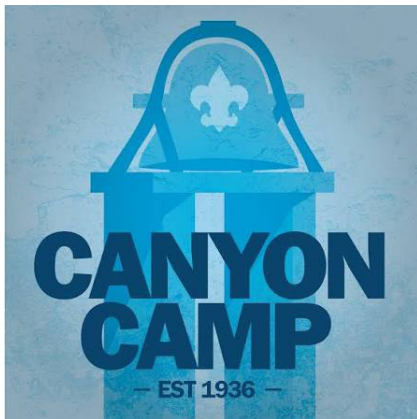
**UNITED WAY ANNOUNCES MORE THAN
\$250,000 IN LOCAL GRANTS**



More than a quarter of a million dollars is heading to non-profit organizations serving northwest Illinois.

United Way of Northwest Illinois has announced \$257,800 in community impact grants for the 2026–2027 funding year, supporting programs in Stephenson, Jo Daviess, and Carroll counties. The grants will help agencies serving ALICE households—families who are working but still struggle to afford essentials like housing, food, child care, transportation, and health care.

United Way says this year's awards represent a 17% increase over last year, thanks to strong support from local donors, businesses, and workplace campaigns. Executive Director Connie Kraft says every donation helps strengthen the region's safety net and create opportunities for families across northwest Illinois.



CANYON CAMP CELEBRATES 90 YEARS

One of northwest Illinois' longest-running outdoor traditions is marking a major milestone this summer.

Canyon Camp, near Stockton, is celebrating its 90th anniversary as nearly one thousand Scouts and adult leaders from across Illinois, Wisconsin, and beyond take part in summer camp programs.

This year's theme, "Witness History," also recognizes America's 250th anniversary. Operated by the Blackhawk Area Council of Scouting America, Canyon Camp has welcomed generations of young people since 1936, offering hiking, canoeing, swimming, camping, and leadership development.

Recent improvements, supported by nearly half a million dollars in donations from the Friends of Canyon Camp, are helping preserve the camp for future generations. The camp will also host a 90th Anniversary Friends and Alumni Reunion later this month.

SPECIAL INTERVIEW WITH CONGRESSMAN ERIC SORENSEN

Eric Sorensen has been serving as the Congressman for Illinois's 17th District since 2023. This past Saturday, on July 4th, he visited the Freeport office of the Stephenson County Democrats. Freepod host Alan Wenzel met up with Congressman Sorensen and spoke to him about issues directly challenging residents of the district. Here is some of that interview.

Wenzel:

Hello everyone. I'm Freepod host Alan Wenzel and I'd like to welcome you to this week's interview with Representative Eric Sorensen, a member of the U.S. House of Representatives who represents Illinois's 17th Congressional District. Eric, welcome. It's nice to have you with us.

Sorensen:

Thank you for having me, Alan. You can hear the crowd behind us. We had such a great event here to start off the 4th of July.

Wenzel:

And what a day to do this July 4th, 2026. Who would have thought that we'd



be here today talking about all the important things to the constituents of the 17th district? And let me start with this question, Eric, you've been, before your election to Congress, involved for many years working in local newsrooms. And as you know, many communities in the district are facing what we're calling a news desert. It's harder and harder to find reliable, accurate sources for local news. So what is your take on the connection between local news and civic engagement?

Sorensen:

Well, look, I mean, when I grew up in, in Rockford, all I wanted to be was the Eric Nefstead on Channel 13. You know, you know, we shared the same first name. And as I was afraid of storms, I just wanted that was all I aspired to do as a, as a kid. And then I got to be the Eric on Channel 13.

But now to see that channel 13 is being absorbed into WIFR means that the lights of that studio go out, which means that I will be the last Eric to do the weather at WREX. Why that's so concerning? It means that differing views are going away, right? We need to make sure that we have diverse communication of the news.

We need to make sure that we have people that are holding elected leaders to account. Because if that goes away, then now we're going to have people misuse funds. We're going to have, you know, more of the Rita Cronwells of this world, right? If we don't have journalists. So it really concerns me going forward, which is another reason why we need more broadcasts like this.

You know, where you're able to ask any question to any, you know, elected leader and demand the answers, and then and then people have to show up to do it.

Wenzel:

It seems like the key is we have to have someone to hold public officials accountable for their actions and their decisions. And when you're not covering local news, school boards, city councils, county board meetings, citizens miss opportunities and know what's going on.

Sorensen:

Right. And let's understand that people are working as hard as they can these days. You know, they're doing everything right, trying to grasp the good life. I answer the question when people say, why can't I grasp the good life? You should be able to. You shouldn't have to work three jobs in a in a day just to be able to afford your child care, but also when that happens, it means that these are people that aren't connected to the news because they don't have time.

They're trying to keep their head above water. Right. And so if they're not connected, we need to make sure that the that the voices are being heard of, the people that are holding those leaders to account.

Wenzel:

I want to ask you about a specific need that was addressed by Congress just recently, the bipartisan housing bill, which was overwhelmingly passed by the Senate. And the House is now sitting on the president's desk and he's refusing to sign that bill. What do you see as steps that might be taken that would allow that bill to become law?

Sorensen:

So if that sits on the president's desk for ten days, it automatically becomes a law. And so I'm hopeful that he does not veto it. This is actually where I agree with Mike Johnson, the Speaker of the House. Because, you know, we passed it on a bipartisan level in the House. It passed, you know, with more than 60 votes in the Senate. It's sitting on Donald Trump's desk.

Wenzel:

Are you optimistic the housing bill will become law?

Sorensen:

I am, yeah, because this is what the overwhelming majority of the people want. And also, here's the thing. I had an affordable housing roundtable in the Quad Cities just a couple of weeks ago. Rents are out of control. People can't buy their first home. And then look, here in Stephenson County, people are forced to rent. We need to build up these communities in our neighborhoods so that people are able to have that first home and raise their kids and be proud to say, I raise my kids in Freeport.

Wenzel:

Let's talk about another aspect of life in small communities throughout the district. Since you've been elected

representative, you brought literally tens of millions of dollars in federal funding back to the 17th Congressional District, particularly Northern Illinois and the many communities that are on this northern edge of Illinois. What do you see on the horizon for the next infrastructure projects that you would like to support and see happen for your district?

Sorensen:

So one of the issues that we have in Illinois 17 is there are more lead service lines than any other congressional district in the country. After what we saw happen in Flint, Michigan, that should never happen again. We have to understand and we have to say that's never going to happen again on our watch. And so, so far in the four years I've been in Congress, it's bringing back the funding to upgrade water infrastructure. And we've seen that here in Freeport with the PFAs is the forever chemicals are showing up in the water supply. We need to drill new wells, but that can't just be placed onto the burden of the homeowner and their taxes. If I can get federal funding, that's federal taxes coming back home to fix the problem. It's doing more of that. It's also making sure that the state of Illinois gets more funding to mitigate lead pipes, so that it should not go under the homeowner. If you're a homeowner, in, you know, any community, right? And you have lead pipes coming from the street to your house that should be replaced free of charge. And so we're working as diligently as we can, fighting to make sure that that funding comes home.

Wenzel:

America is now 250 years old as of today. And while we've come a very long way in terms of fulfilling the American dream as defined in the Declaration of Independence, we have a long ways to go. Could you talk a little bit about, by reflecting on this historic milestone for our country? Talk a little bit about what you see us being very good at as Americans, and where do we need to make some improvements and do a little better as Americans?

Sorensen:

Look, in America, we I go back to the time where, a couple of years, maybe ten years ago now, I for for work, as was before, I was a member of Congress. I was in Huntsville, Alabama, at NASA. And I looked and I stood underneath that Saturn V rocket. Okay. But I was cognizant that in the next room over was an airplane with cloth wings. We figured out as Americans how to take flight. And within 70 years we were on the moon.

Wenzel:

But my parents, for example, went from no airplanes to jet travel just in a lifetime.

Sorensen:

So when you think about what it took. How did we get there? What discoveries needed to be made? I am in awe. I'm in awe going forward to say, what are we going to be able to tackle? Are we going to be able to cure cancer? Are we going to be able to solve the climate crisis? What are the things that we're going to be able to do to make sure that our kids and our grandkids are going to have a good life. And a lot of that boils down to American ingenuity, right? It's making sure that wherever a kid is growing up today, they will be connected to as much education as they want, right?

It doesn't matter what zip code you grew up in or what, what household or how much money your parents make. No, you should be able to learn because you know, the first person that's going to set foot on the surface of Mars is already living today. But if that child today is not allowed to learn, is not connected to STEM education, then then it just might mean that a Russian child or a Chinese child.

And I'm not saying that that they're not going, you know, that the rest of the world shouldn't innovate too. But I want America to be first, right? And this is the thing that transcends politics, right? One side says America first. We all believe in America first because this this nation is wonderful. It is great. We don't need to make it great again because it is great today.

But it's great today because of our neighbors, because we believe in a hard day's work. And then when we come home, we can celebrate.

Wenzel:

It sounds like you're saying, Eric, we've done a really good job. Let's just keep at it. Let's just keep going.

Sorensen:

Well, and also...It's life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness that we need to think about, right? We need to

make sure that you have a good life in this country. That that liberty provides you with the opportunities of a nation. And then the pursuit of happiness means that no matter what your neighbor looks like, no matter how your neighbor prays, no matter who your neighbor loves, that we take care of one another. We believe in the collective of all of us, of Americans. It's not just the wealthy that get ahead. No, it should be. All of America gets ahead.

Wenzel:

Eric, thanks so much for your time with us today, and thank you for taking some time on the nation's 250th birthday to give a message to us here in the 17th Congressional District. Best to you, and thanks again for your time with us.

Sorensen:

Thank you, Alan, and Happy Fourth.



UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS
EXTENSION

U OF I EXTENSION PROGRAMS IN CARROLL COUNTY

Young people and adults in Carroll County have several opportunities to learn something new this July through the University of Illinois Extension.

On Monday, July 13th youth ages 10 to 14 can build a working Hydraulic Hand during a hands-on STEM workshop beginning at 1 p.m. at the Mount Carroll Public Library. Then, on Tuesday, July 14th, the library will host Adult Mental Health First Aid training, helping participants recognize and respond to signs of mental health challenges.

Families can also register children ages 8 to 14 for the Junior Master Naturalist Camp, taking place July 13th and 15th from 9 a.m. until noon at the Andresen Nature Center in Fulton.

Registration is required for all programs through the University of Illinois Extension and can be done here:

<https://extension.illinois.edu/clw/events>

STEPHENSON COUNTY FAIR IS COMING SOON

The Stephenson County Fair returns to Freeport Tuesday, July 21st, through Saturday, July 25th, with five days of family entertainment, agriculture, and community fun.

Gates will be open daily from 9 a.m. until 10 p.m., while vendors will welcome visitors from 11 a.m. to 9 p.m. and the carnival midway will operate Tuesday through Friday from 5 to 9 p.m. and Saturday from 1 to 9 p.m.



This year's fair marks the return of the rodeo on Wednesday night, followed by live music from Wildwood Country. Other grandstand attractions include the Carquest Auto Parts Tough Truck Challenge on Thursday, Friday Fair Music Fest, and the always-popular Demolition Derby on Saturday. Visitors can also enjoy 4-H and livestock exhibits, carnival rides, delicious fair food, and activities for the whole family.

Daily admission is \$10, Thursday admission is just \$5, and children 7 and under are admitted free.

For tickets, the complete entertainment schedule, and fair information, visit stephensoncountyfair.org

You can also hear more about this year's fair by listening to this past week's Freepod interview, as Freepod host Alan Wenzel spoke with Executive Manager of the Fair, Kate Boyer, about returning favorites and new innovations for 2026. You can hear that interview on our website, www.freepod.org, or wherever you get your podcasts.



TUTTY BAKER WEEKEND FESTIVITIES

Downtown Freeport is getting ready for one of the biggest weekends of the summer as Tutty Baker Fest returns Friday through Sunday, July 10th through the 12th.

Organizers have released a packed schedule featuring live music on multiple stages, food trucks, family activities, shopping, and entertainment throughout downtown. Festival organizers are also encouraging people to tag the friend they'll be bringing along on the event's Facebook page for a chance to win a free wristband.

Saturday's lineup includes the Tutty Baker Fest 5K beginning at 8 a.m., with proceeds benefiting Friends Forever Humane Society. Throughout the weekend, visitors can also enjoy a large maker and vendor market featuring local artisans and small businesses, along with plenty of food, drinks, and activities for all ages.

Admission to Tutty Baker Fest is free, with some attractions requiring wristbands. The complete entertainment schedule, event map, and festival information are available on the Tutty Baker Fest Facebook page and Linktree.

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. As we mentioned already, Freepod host Alan Wenzel spoke to Kate Boyer, Executive Manager of the Stephenson County Fair, about new changes and old favorites people can expect from this year's event.

This coming Tuesday, Tim Connors will be speaking with Alex Lavolette and Dylan Shipley, the owners of Freeport Pretzel Company. Tim, Alex, and Dylan will talk about the founding of the new bakery and plans for their, inevitably, bright future. That interview will be available starting at noon on Tuesday, July 14th, 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.

As always, please like us on Facebook, subscribe on the podcast platform of your choice, and share with your friends. If you'd like to make a tax-deductible contribution to support local news content, please visit our website at www.freepod.org.

This has been Freepod. Thank you for listening.