



**20 November  
2025**

Welcome to FREEPOD, a local news source for everyone in the Freeport area. This weekly podcast is brought to you by a large volunteer group dedicated to providing to objective, unbiased updates on what's happening in our community.

You can find us on Facebook as well as our website ([www.freepod.org](http://www.freepod.org)) and the website of our NPR partner WNJI Northern Public Radio ([www.northernpublicradio.org](http://www.northernpublicradio.org)), so please visit us there and continue to share about us on your own social media. Now let's see what's happening.

### **Capital Plan, EV chargers, and more from the City**

The City of Freeport has published its Capital Plan for 2026 through 2029, which is a long-term planning and budgeting tool designed to guide investments in major community assets such as road repairs, water and sewer upgrades, public buildings, and other infrastructure investments. It outlines what needs to be done, when it should be done, how much it will cost, and how it will be funded. It helps to ensure efficient use of resources, promotes financial stability and predictability and provides accountability to the community.

The Plan is a living document that is fluid and will change year over year as it reflects the City's changing needs, priorities, and financial realities. You can find a copy of the Plan at <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1JvRaYnFmqgKEaYH3Q5RXUmDhzWJzEb-f/view>



In other City news, Freeport is installing eight new Level 3 electric vehicle or EV chargers in two city-owned municipal lots in downtown Freeport. These are the municipal lot on North Chicago Avenue and the lot behind the Lindo Theater. Construction has already begun, with a portion of the downtown lot closed for the installation.

The new Level 3 chargers are also known as DC fast chargers and can provide a rapid charge to electric vehicles. Funding for the project comes primarily from an Illinois EPA grant of \$320,000 and \$240,000 from ComEd.

Finally, the City is also asking for community input on two projects. First up is a draft for the Freeport Safety Action Plan, a community-driven effort to improve safety for people walking, biking, driving, and using mobility devices throughout the city. Input is invited during a two-week public comment period from November 12–26, 2025, allowing community members to review the draft plan and share their feedback online. To find the draft plan, visit the City website at [www.cityoffreeport.org](http://www.cityoffreeport.org) and search on “Freeport Safety Action Plan.”

Secondly, the City is planning a major update of their website in 2026 and they are also requesting community input for that project. You can find a survey on the topic that will only take two or three minutes to complete at the City website, [www.cityoffreeport.org](http://www.cityoffreeport.org), by searching on “website survey.”

### 2026 Election season begins with candidate filings

The 2026 primary election in Stephenson County next March will feature only one contested race, but it has an interesting twist. As of now, in County Board District G it will be brother versus sister as Jackie DeMeester and Jerry Clay both have filed as Republicans. Only one can advance to the November General Election. All other races in March will be unopposed. Also filing as Republicans are Jazmin Wingert for County Clerk, Tom Konieczny for Coroner, Steve Stovall for Sheriff and Stephanie Helms for Treasurer. Democrat Suzanne Cook is seeking the County Clerk nomination.

For County Board, Republicans filing are Lou Hayes for District C, Troy Barr for District D, Joshua Libby for District E, Clayton Zimmerman for District F, Nicole Baker for District H, and Cynthia Lawfer for District I. Filing for the Democratic Party are Samuel Newton for District B, Roxanne Rice for District D, Adam Moderow for District E, and Edward Klein for District I.

### Mistletoe Walk this Saturday



Downtown Freeport will be filled with the sights and sounds of Christmas this Saturday, November 22<sup>nd</sup> with the annual Mistletoe Walk from noon to 6 :00 p.m. Dozens of businesses, shops and boutiques open their doors with holiday music, treats and shopping specials. Live music appearances are scheduled throughout downtown as well as strolling community carolers. Horse-drawn carriage rides are free to all attendees from noon to 4:00 p.m. and there will be active Living Windows in select downtown storefronts from 4:00 to 5:00 p.m.

You can also enjoy hot cocoa at several stores and visit with Santa from 2:00 to 4:00 p.m. at the pocket park on Stephenson Street. The event ends with a tree lighting ceremony at 5:00 p.m. at the Stephenson County Courthouse. What a great way to kick off the holiday season!

### **FHN receives highest care grade**

The latest Leapfrog Hospital Safety Grades are out and FHN Memorial Hospital received the highest grade in the area for high-quality, safe and compassionate care for our communities.

The Leapfrog Group, which has been in operation for over 20 years, is a non-profit organization that advocates for health care transparency and patient safety. It collects, analyzes, and publishes hospital data to inform consumers and help employers reward high-performing hospitals. Leapfrog's work provides an independent assessment of hospital safety, quality, and performance to help people make informed healthcare decisions. See the results at <https://bit.ly/4hYyaRv>

### **FSD 145 launches Rising Pretzels Academy**

Freeport School District #145 has announced the launch of the Rising Pretzels Academy, recently approved by Illinois as an Alternative Learning Opportunity Program. This new program is designed to support students who may be challenged in a traditional school setting. Key features of the Rising Pretzels Academy include personalized learning tailored to each student's unique needs, individualized plans with clear goals and regular progress monitoring, and use of Dialectical Behavior Therapy in group and individual sessions to build emotional regulation, mindfulness, and interpersonal skills.

Rising Pretzels Academy replaces the former Students in Transition Education or S.I.T.E. program and will be located at the Banks-Bergagna Education Center downtown. Sarah Lewis, who previously served as Associate Principal at S.I.T.E., has been named Principal of Rising Pretzels Academy.

### **Library receives State funding**

The Freeport Public Library District is set to receive nearly \$70,000 in state funding as part of an expansion of the Illinois Secretary of State's Equalization Aid Grant program. The library has not been eligible for the grant in the past.

The Equalization Aid Grant program has been in place since the 1960s to support libraries with limited tax bases. The change aims to reduce funding disparities in communities with lower tax bases. The new formula increases the eligibility from 17 libraries serving 77,000 residents to 108 public libraries serving more than 700,000 residents across the state.

Recent legislative changes approved by the Illinois General Assembly raised the base minimum funding from \$7.50 per person in a library's service population to \$17.50 per person. The adjustment increases funding for libraries in underserved communities. The funding is intended to help libraries address infrastructure needs, update technology and expand programming.

### **Protein to the People!**

Next Tuesday, November 25<sup>th</sup>, the League of Women Voters hosts a program titled “Understanding and Avoiding Fraud Targeted at Seniors” presented by Larry Feiner from GreenState Credit Union. The program begins at 6:30 p.m. at the Freeport Public Library and refreshments will be provided.

In connection with the program and in the spirit of Thanksgiving, the League is urging attendees to support “Protein to the People” by bringing high-protein canned food items such as black beans, kidney beans, lentils, chick peas, whole wheat pastas, high-protein soups, peanut butter, and canned tuna, chicken, and ham. These donations will be distributed to local food pantries before the holidays.

### **Stephenson County Historical Society craft fair**

The Stephenson County Historical Society will once again host its annual holiday craft and gift sale starting tomorrow, Friday, November 21<sup>st</sup> at 9:00 a.m. at the Taylor House Museum at 1440 S Carroll Avenue in Freeport. The event features many handmade gifts from local artists and craftspeople, as well as books on local history and Rawleigh products. The event continues on Saturday from 9:00 to 4:00 p.m. and Sunday from 11:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. Admission is free and it is a great chance to see inside the historical Taylor House while browsing unique items for holiday giving.

The Museum also mentioned that they are grateful to the Freeport Park District for their recent help with several important updates around the Stephenson County Historical Society grounds, including work on the gazebo and several other maintenance projects. The Museum staff appreciates the work the Park District puts into keeping their spaces safe and beautiful for all who visit.

### **Greater Freeport Partnership receives accolades**

The Greater Freeport Partnership recently received accolades from Illinois Main Street during its annual Awards Dinner. Award recipients included Larry Feiner as board member of the year, Lance Ferguson as volunteer of the year, and the Downtown Unlocked event for economic impact.

Larry Feiner has served on the board of the Greater Freeport Partnership since 2021 and Lance Ferguson, volunteer of the year, has been a constant supporter for Partnership efforts and businesses since 2020. The award for economic development, Downtown Unlocked, recently invited business owners, entrepreneurs, developers, and community members to tour unoccupied spaces in downtown Freeport to help increase interest in first floor and upper-story spaces for lease or sale.

### **New way to get local produce and other goods...delivered!**

Northern Illinois Local Food Collective is an online farmers market based out of Forreston that offers a wide variety of fresh, locally grown fruits and vegetables as well as a variety of other locally produced items. Categories of available goods include fruits, dairy, eggs, meats, grains and beans, honey and bee products, snacks, baked goods, freeze-dried goods, tallow items, and other specialty items.

You can shop online from a wide selection of local goods and then have them delivered directly to your home or pick up at a nearby location. Orders are delivered every Sunday, year-round. There is no minimum order and no requirement to purchase weekly; just order when it's convenient for you.

When you shop with NILFC you're doing more than just buying groceries—you're strengthening our local food economy, helping preserve farmland for future generations, and reducing your environmental footprint. Plus, you'll enjoy the unbeatable taste and freshness of food grown close to home.

Go to [www.NILFC.org](http://www.NILFC.org) to sign up to check out their diverse range of local products learn more about how become a customer every week!



### **New exhibition at Freeport Art Museum**

The Freeport Art Museum has opened a new exhibition entitled "High Strangeness" that features works by five Northern Illinois Alumni, each exploring themes that blur the lines between reality and imagination.

Marisol Cervantes, one of the featured artists, uses vibrant mixed-media paintings to revive memories and emotional shifts. Janelle Rae, an interdisciplinary sculptor, disrupts the boundary between humor and unease. Amy Fleming, a photographer, translates lived experiences of mental illness and perception into shifting visual worlds. Veronica Storc creates sculptural hybrid forms that challenge what it means to feel connected to our own bodies, and Emma Vitallo, a photographic artist, uses miniature spaces and playful storytelling to navigate identity.

The exhibition runs through December 27<sup>th</sup> at the Museum at 121 N Harlem Avenue in Freeport.

### **Art Museum matching gift opportunity**

In other news from the Freeport Art Museum, they have announced a \$180,000 matching gift opportunity to boost fundraising for their Block 62 project which will relocate and expand the museum into downtown Freeport. Donations made until December 31<sup>st</sup> this year will be matched dollar-for-dollar, doubling the impact of each contribution up to an \$180,000 limit.

The overall campaign goal is \$4 million, with the museum having already raised \$1.9 million through gifts, grants, and in-kind donations to renovate an historic building at the corner of Exchange and State Streets that will create over 14,000 square feet of exhibition, classroom, administrative and event space.

The Block 62 project is part of a broader effort to form a cultural campus in downtown Freeport. Together with the Arts Plaza, the museum's new location occupies three-quarters of Freeport's city block 62 alongside Freeport's public library, the Lincoln-Douglas Debate Square and Union Dairy.

### **Fallen leaves are healthy for soil and wildlife**

Put down your rake! Now you have a scientific reason for not raking leaves in the Fall: scientists say leaving autumn leaves on the ground can add important nutrients to the soil and create needed habitat for insects.

To "leave the leaves" is simply allowing leaves to break down naturally over the winter. Scientists and advocates say this can help improve soil health and support wildlife populations. For example, significantly more moths, butterflies, and beetles emerged in the spring from lawns that retained fallen leaves over the winter. Many ecologists are now treating leaves more like essential habitat for local species rather than a waste product.

Leaving fallen leaves on the ground also allows nutrients, like carbon, to return to the soil and the surrounding plants, said Ryan Pankau, a horticulture educator with the University of Illinois Extension, who sees fallen leaves as an almost perfect recycling system that also helps with water management and providing nutrients for plants in your landscape.

So no matter what you've heard, leaves won't kill your lawn or harm plants in your garden, so put down that rake and look forward to a more ecologically savvy Spring!

### **Pearl City resident places third in Illinois Farm Bureau event**

Benjamin Bremmer of Pearl City, a Stephenson County Farm Bureau and University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign member, recently took third place in Illinois Farm Bureau's Collegiate Discussion Meet. The competition tests participants' ability to lead and engage in small-group discussions while exchanging ideas and information to solve agricultural challenges. Congratulations, Benjamin, and thanks for representing Stephenson County!

### **Make your food pantry or drive easy to find!**

The Foundation for Northwest Illinois has provided a hashtag to help those in need find the food pantries they need and allow the pantries to connect easily with volunteers to help them over the holiday season. Make your assistance easy to find with the hashtag #FeedingFamiliesNWIL



## The week ahead...

As we look at the week ahead, don't forget the next session in Tech Time, a series of technology classes designed specifically for older adults and hosted by the Senior Resource Center in Freeport. "Android Phone Tips" will be presented tomorrow, Friday, November 21<sup>st</sup>, from 1:30 to 2:30 p.m. It's free, but please give the Center a call to register at 815-235-9777. Participants are asked to bring their own devices and the class will be held at Senior Resource Center at 206 East Stephenson Street. Again, that's 815-235-9777 for tomorrow's class.

We also wanted to mention that children ages zero to five in the Freeport area now can enjoy a new Sensory Play Day program at the Freeport Public Library with several play stations including blocks, Play-Doh, sand, corn, and rocks. We were happy to learn too that Freeport School District #145 was one of only 10 schools selected for a grant for Learning in Spanish and Language Arts. The district will serve as a model in providing proficiency development, coaching, and resources that will support academically approved standards.

Don't forget that tickets are on sale now for two traditional holiday events. *The Messiah* at Highland Community College will be performed at 3:00 p.m. on Sunday, December 14<sup>th</sup> and tickets can be purchased at the Highland box office in the Center or online at [www.highland.edu/boxoffice](http://www.highland.edu/boxoffice). *The Nutcracker*, performed by students and members of Studio 121 Dance in Freeport, will be presented on December 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> at 7:30 p.m. at Freeport's Masonic Temple. Tickets are available now at 815-275-0643 or online at <https://www.etix.com/ticket/o/17565/studio121dance>.

The coming week is also Soup Week, the last week in the Freeport Public Library holiday food drive. Contributions to the Library's collection can be dropped off at the Library's circulation desk and will go to the Freeport Area Church Cooperative, and of course all non-perishable donations, not just soup, are welcome. The Freeport Public Library is just one of many local organizations hosting food collection drives during the holiday season that we hope you will consider supporting.

VOLUNTEERS ARE NEEDED!  
GO TO  
REGISTER2RING.COM  
OR CALL SUE  
815-541-1949

WHO CAN VOLUNTEER?  
FAMILIES, FRIENDS,  
COMPANIES,  
SERVICE CLUBS,!



And finally, don't forget that the Salvation Army needs more Red Kettle Ringers! Please call Sue at 815-541-1949 if you or your company or service club can help this holiday season.

If you are looking for something to do this week or any week, visit the Greater Freeport Partnership website at [www.greaterfreeport.com](http://www.greaterfreeport.com) and click on "weekly events" for a comprehensive listing of many more entertainment and dining events and activities throughout Stephenson County. You can also subscribe to the City of Freeport's monthly newsletter at their website, [www.cityoffreeport.org](http://www.cityoffreeport.org). We have links to both in the print version of FREEPOD episodes.

We also wanted to remind everyone that we're really enjoying the great in-depth interviews you can hear every week on FREEPOD, and are sure you will too if you're not already! This week's interview



featured FREEPOD and TimBeck2 host Tim Connors visiting with Freeport's Noah Eisenhower about professional car racing and the NDE Racing team owned by his dad Gary Eisenhower Jr. The interview, which first aired the day before yesterday on Tuesday, is available online and can be listened to anytime.

Next Tuesday, FREEPOD and TimBeck2 host Becky Connors will visit with Captain Lisa of the Salvation Army about their programs, which are especially relevant this time of year. Their conversation will post at noon on Tuesday, November 25th and be available to listen to then or at any time after that – just head to our website or your favorite podcast platform to select the programs of your choice.

### **In closing...**

In closing, as we've mentioned before, we need your help! When you're listening on your favorite podcast platform, please "like" or "follow" us – this helps us to move up in the rankings of podcasts and enables us to better promote ourselves throughout the region. On Facebook, also please click on "like" as the algorithms there also depend on user input to help us increase our presence.

And speaking of increasing our presence remember that FREEPOD is now on YouTube! The program is currently audio only but having it on YouTube gives you another super-easy way to listen. You can find both English and Spanish versions – just head to YouTube.com and search for FREEPOD or click the link in the print version at <https://www.youtube.com/@FREEPOD61032/podcasts>. Please tell all your friends and family members about our YouTube channel too – everything you do can help get local news out to our community!

FREEPOD couldn't come to you without the Mass Communication Department at Highland Community College and our community liaisons and reporters. Thank you, Team FREEPOD! You can always find us on our Facebook page or the website of our National Public Radio partner, WNIJ in DeKalb, at [www.northernpublicradio.org](http://www.northernpublicradio.org). For more info, including how to make a tax-deductible contribution to support our work, visit our website at [www.freepod.org](http://www.freepod.org).

With that, time's up for this week. Tune in again next Thursday at noon – or any time after that on our website or your favorite podcast platform – and thank you for listening!

***Listen next week for more about what's happening in the Freeport area!***

**LINKS TO OTHER COMMUNITY EVENTS NEWSLETTERS BELOW**



## What's Going on in Stephenson County?

**Subscribe to  
our weekly  
event guide!**



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