



Hello and welcome to FREEPOD. I'm Amy Fisher...

And I'm Matt Mullen...

In this week's episode, the Northwest Illinois Enterprise Zone raises debate amongst city leaders...

Paityn London makes her choice for her college hoops career...

And free back to school physicals are offered by the Stephenson County Health Department.

This is Freepod for August 6th, 2026 and here is the news that you've been missing...

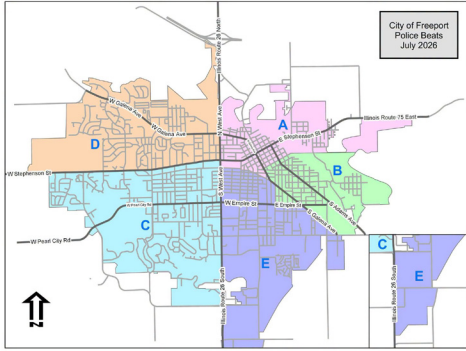
DEBATE OVER NORTHWEST ILLINOIS ENTERPRISE ZONE

Local leaders are highlighting the Northwest Illinois Enterprise Zone as a tool to encourage new housing construction across the region. The state-authorized program offers developers a sales tax exemption on building materials, helping reduce construction costs, while qualifying homebuyers may receive property tax abatements for the first three years of ownership. Local officials say those incentives can make it more affordable to build homes in areas like Stephenson County, where communities continue to face a shortage of available housing. The enterprise zone is governed by local taxing bodies and applies only to properties within designated boundaries.



Supporters say the incentives help attract investment, create jobs, and encourage development that might not otherwise happen. But enterprise zones also have their critics. Opponents argue the tax breaks can reduce revenue for local governments and schools, shift the tax burden onto other taxpayers, and sometimes subsidize projects that developers would have built without incentives. Researchers have also questioned whether enterprise zones consistently deliver the long-term economic growth they promise. At some recent city council meetings, some alderpeople have also raised questions about where these proposed buildings are being built, and, more so, where they are not.

More information, including maps of qualifying properties, is available through the Northwest Illinois Enterprise Zone website, which you can find here: https://www.stephensoncountyil.gov/departments/county_assessment_office/maps_gis.php



FREEPORT ANNOUNCES SCHEDULE FOR NEIGHBORHOOD WATCH REPLACEMENT

The Freeport Police Department is replacing its traditional Neighborhood Watch meetings with a new series of Beat Meetings designed to strengthen communication between officers and the communities they serve.

All meetings will be held at 6:30 p.m. at the Freeport Public Library. Residents are encouraged to find their assigned police beat on maps posted by the department and attend the meeting for their area. Beat A met Wednesday, August 5; Beat B on Thursday, August 6; Beat E on Tuesday, August 11; Beat C on Wednesday, August 12; and Beat D on Thursday, August 13.

Police say the meetings are an opportunity for residents to discuss neighborhood concerns, ask questions, and build stronger partnerships with the officers who patrol their communities.

TWO STEPHENSON COUNTY MURDER TRIALS CONCLUDE IN CONVICTIONS

It was a busy week in the Stephenson County courthouse as two separate murder trials ended with guilty verdicts. A Stephenson County jury found Saul Lara, 30, of Rockford, guilty of three counts of first-degree murder, armed robbery, and unlawful possession of a weapon by a felon in the 2024 killing of 23-year-old Jace Glasgow in Freeport.



In a separate case, another jury found 23-year-old Deon Hart guilty of first-degree murder and aggravated discharge of a firearm in the fatal shooting of Lester Flowers.

The convictions bring two high-profile homicide prosecutions to a close after lengthy investigations and jury trials. Sentencing hearings for both defendants will be scheduled by the Stephenson County Circuit Court, where each faces the possibility of decades in prison, with first-degree murder carrying a maximum sentence of natural life under Illinois law.



ORANGEVILLE MAN ARRESTED ON MAJOR NARCOTICS CHARGES

An Orangeville man is facing multiple felony narcotics charges following a search warrant executed by the Stephenson County Sheriff's Office. Investigators say the Sheriff's Office Crime Suppression Unit and Emergency Response Team searched a home in the 200 block of West High Street early on July 29th as part of an ongoing narcotics investigation.

Authorities say they recovered approximately 14 grams of suspected methamphetamine, along with suspected heroin and fentanyl. Forty-one-year-old Tyson L. Blum has been charged with possession with intent to deliver methamphetamine, methamphetamine possession, and possession of heroin and fentanyl.

Following a detention hearing, Blum was released with pretrial conditions. The charges are allegations, and he is presumed innocent unless proven guilty in court.

JO DAVIESS MAN ARRESTED FOR MULTIPLE BREAKS INS

Jo Daviess County

A 24-year-old Elizabeth man is facing multiple felony charges after investigators say he broke into two homes in Jo Daviess County early last Thursday morning.

Sheriff's deputies responded to the first burglary just after 2:30 a.m. on West Longhollow Road, where a homeowner reported a man had entered the residence after breaking a window before fleeing. About 20 minutes later, deputies were called to a second break-in on North Scales Mound Road. Following an investigation, deputies arrested Keenan Ortmeier of Elizabeth. He has been charged with two counts of residential burglary, criminal damage to property, criminal trespass to a residence, and possession of burglary tools.

The case remains under investigation, and Ortmeier is presumed innocent unless proven guilty in court.



SCHOOL REGISTRATION CONTINUES

Freeport School District 145 is reminding families that there's still time to register students for the 2026–2027 school year.

The district has scheduled several registration events at the Enrollment and Transportation Center, located at 2037 West Galena Avenue, Building B. Bilingual registration will be offered from 4 to 8 p.m. on August 17, while an open registration for all families is set for August 11, also from 4 to 8 p.m. District officials say registering now will help ensure students have a smooth start to the new school year.

Bilingual staff will be available to assist families, and all parents are encouraged to complete registration as soon as possible.

PAITYN LONDON COMMITS TO DEPAUL BASKETBALL

One of the top high school basketball players in northern Illinois is staying in-state for college. Freeport High School standout Paityn London announced last week that she has committed to play for DePaul University in Chicago. London has been named the NIC-10 Conference Most Valuable Player in each of the past two seasons and has established herself as one of Illinois' premier recruits in the Class of 2027.



London began her high school career at Aquin Catholic before transferring to Freeport High when Aquin closed. She averaged nearly 25 points, 9 rebounds, 5 assists, and 6 steals per game as a sophomore, and was averaging more than 22 points per game last season before suffering a torn ACL that ended her junior year early.

Now fully back on the court, London chose DePaul over offers from several major Division I programs and will enter her senior season looking to lead the Pretzels back into postseason contention while preparing for her collegiate career with the Blue Demons.



FREEPORT FREEDOM FINISHES INCREDIBLE SEASON

The Freeport Freedom Special Olympics softball team is celebrating an outstanding season after finishing undefeated in the regular season and earning fourth place at the Special Olympics Illinois Regional Tournament in Elgin.

Coaches praised the athletes for their dedication, teamwork, and steady improvement throughout the season. Now, attention turns to volleyball.

The Freeport Freedom Special Olympics volleyball team is preparing for its upcoming season and still has three roster spots available. Organizers encourage anyone interested in building friendships, developing athletic skills, and competing in Special Olympics to sign up soon.

More information is available through the Freeport Freedom Special Olympics Facebook page and online registration link found at https://webtrac.freeportparkdistrict.org/webtrac/web/iteminfo.html?Module=AR&FMID=72788224&_gl=1*1gu0y6a*_ga*MTkxODI5ODY3MS4xNzc0NTU0MzQy*_ga_04L6YDVBBC*cze3ODU0MTU4MTIkbzM5JGcxJHQxNzg1NDE1ODE1JGo1NyRsMCRoMA..*_ga_8290QPNFB-D*cze3ODU0MTU4MTIkbzE4MCRnMSR0MTc4NTQxNTgxNSRqNTckbDAkaDA

FREEPORT ART MUSEUM OPENS TWO NEW EXHIBITS

The Freeport Art Museum is inviting the public to experience two new exhibitions on display through September 12th.

In the Ferguson Gallery, “Transcending Reality” features about 25 surrealist and abstract works created by 21 artists from the Momentum Art Guild, exploring themes that go beyond the visible world. Meanwhile, the Newell Gallery showcases “Away I Must,” a collection by Iowa artist Matt Pulford, inspired by his artist residency in rural Nebraska and reflecting on nature, solitude, beauty, and loss.



Admission is free, and the museum is open Tuesday through Saturday. Museum officials encourage visitors to explore both exhibits and support regional artists while they’re on display.



CUB TESTIMONY ACCUSES COMED OF MORE THAN \$1B IN QUESTIONABLE SPENDING

Illinois consumer advocates say they’ve found more than one billion dollars in what they call questionable spending in Commonwealth Edison’s proposed four-year power grid upgrade plan.

The Citizens Utility Board says ComEd’s \$15.3 billion proposal includes costs for projects that are inflated, premature, or improperly shifted onto customers. Among the biggest concerns are \$405 million in data center-related upgrades that CUB argues should be paid for by the data centers themselves—not by ratepayers—as well as more than \$200 million to replace smart meters that are still in service and haven’t been fully paid off.

ComEd says the investments are needed to modernize the grid and support future electric demand. The proposal is now before the Illinois Commerce Commission, where administrative law judges are expected to issue a proposed order in October, with a final decision due by December. If approved, customer rates would be addressed in a separate rate case next year.

BIODIESEL SET TO BECOME BIGGER PLAYER IN ILLINOIS ECONOMY

Biodiesel is expected to play an even larger role in Illinois' economy as demand for soybean-based fuels continues to grow.

Illinois, the nation's leading soybean-producing state, is seeing increased investment in biodiesel production and soybean processing, driven by stronger demand for cleaner-burning fuels and incentives that make B20 biodiesel less expensive than conventional diesel in many parts of the state.

Industry leaders say the expansion will create new markets for Illinois farmers, support rural jobs, and strengthen the state's agricultural economy. Analysts also say growing domestic production could reduce reliance on imported biofuels as new federal renewable fuel requirements take effect.



PRITZKER SIGNS LANDMARK BILL AIMED AT CURBING YOUTH SOCIAL MEDIA USAGE

Illinois is taking new steps to protect children online. Governor JB Pritzker has signed the Children's Social Media Safety Act, a sweeping new law aimed at limiting the use of what the governor calls "addictive algorithms" that keep kids scrolling.

The measure, which takes effect in 2028, requires social media platforms to use device-based age verification and restricts personalized algorithmic feeds for users under 18. Instead, minors will primarily see content from accounts they follow, searches they've made, and direct messages. The law also requires stronger default privacy settings and prohibits notifications to minors between 10 p.m. and 7 a.m.

Illinois Attorney General Kwame Raoul will enforce the law, with penalties of up to \$7,500 per child for intentional violations. The measure passed both chambers of the General Assembly unanimously but is opposed by several technology industry groups that argue it could face constitutional challenges.

LINCOLN-DOUGLAS 5K THIS WEEKEND

There's still time to register for one of Freeport's longest-running community traditions. The 23rd Annual Lincoln-Douglas 5K, hosted by United Way of Northwest Illinois, takes place Saturday, August 8th, at Taylor Park. Same-day registration will be available from 6:45 to 7:45 a.m., with the event beginning at 8 o'clock and the timed 5K starting at 8:15.

The morning also includes a one-mile fun run and kids' races to crown the "Fastest Kid in Town." Organizers say training for a 5K can improve heart health, boost your mood, and build confidence.

Proceeds support United Way programs serving Stephenson, Jo Daviess, and Carroll counties. Registration details are available at <https://www.uwni.org/lincoln-douglas-5k>





HOPE WINS BACKPACK BASH

Hope WINS is getting ready to help local students head back to school with its Second Annual Backpack Bash on Sunday, August 9th, at the Jane Addams Community Center in Cedarville.

The event will provide 300 children with backpacks filled with school supplies, thanks in part to a major donation from FIRST ONSITE Property Restoration. The company contributed 2,400 folders, hundreds of markers and notebooks, along with financial support for games and family activities. The event is reserved for

MAC Camp participants from 10 to 11 a.m., then opens to the public from 11 a.m. to 1 p.m.

Organizers say the goal is to ensure every child starts the school year prepared, confident, and ready to learn.

If you'd like to learn more about Hope WINS, then head to our website, or wherever you get your podcasts from, and listen to last week's in-depth interview. Freepod host Alan Wenzel sat down with the founder and leader of Hope WINS, Linsey McDanel, to learn more about the great work Hope WINS does for our community.

COVER CROP PROGRAM COMING TO LENA

Northwest Illinois corn and soybean producers are invited to learn more about cover crops during a free University of Illinois Extension program on Tuesday, August 11th, at the Lena Community Center.

"Taking the Next Steps in Cover Crop Management" runs from 8 a.m. to 11:15 a.m. and is geared toward farmers looking to expand their use of cover crops and improve management decisions. Topics include building effective cover crop mixes, drone seeding applications, termination strategies, herbicide considerations, crop nutrition, and the economics of cover cropping. The program also features a farmer panel sharing real-world experiences.



Organizers say the event is designed to help producers improve soil health, manage input costs, and strengthen long-term farm sustainability.



THIS WEEK'S PROGRAMS AT SENIOR RESOURCE CENTER

The Senior Resource Center in Freeport is offering several activities for adults 60 and older during the second week of August.

On Monday, August 10th, participants can create a personalized journal during the Create & Connect program from 1 to 2:30 p.m. for \$5. Golden Gamers returns on Tuesday, August 11th, from 10 a.m. to noon, with free euchre and other card games open to players of all skill levels. Then on Thursday, August 13th, the center hosts a free Lunch and Learn featuring Hoo Haven Wildlife Rehabilitation and Education Center, where attendees can meet live animal ambassadors and learn about wildlife rescue.

Advance registration is required for the journal workshop and Lunch and Learn by calling 815-235-9777.

SCHD OFFERING FREE SCHOOL PHYSICALS

As families prepare for the new school year, the Stephenson County Health Department is helping students check an important item off their back-to-school list by offering free school physicals for eligible children.

The clinics are available by appointment for students who meet income guidelines or who are uninsured or underinsured. School physicals are required in Illinois for students entering kindergarten, sixth grade, and ninth grade, as well as for students enrolling in an Illinois school for the first time.



Health department staff say appointments are limited and encourage families to schedule as soon as possible to avoid the late-summer rush. In addition to physical exams, the department can also help families review required immunizations and other school health requirements.

To make an appointment or learn about eligibility, contact the Stephenson County Health Department before the start of the school year. https://stephensoncountyil.gov/departments/health_department/index.php or 815-235-8271

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. As we mentioned earlier, Freepod host Alan Wenzel spent some time with Linsey McDanel, the founder and operator of Hope WINS, to learn more about how that organization is serving children and families throughout our community.

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.

