



Hello and welcome to FREEPOD. I'm Lynn Feaver...

And I'm Becky Connors...

In this week's episode, a townhall is called to discuss a proposed tower structure on Stephenson Street...

Freeport High School's student garden is now taking orders...

And Polkafest is gearing up for a triumphant return.

This is Freepod for March 26th, 2026 and here is the news that you've been missing...

### JCWIFI TO HOST TOWNHALL ABOUT PROPOSED TOWER

There has been a lot of buzz on social media recently about a proposed tower being erected near the Firebaugh Observatory on Stephenson Street in Freeport. And, unfortunately, a lot of the information circulating has either been speculative or half-truths.

According to city officials, the proposal is for a zoning ordinance variation for the construction of a 150 foot WiFi tower; NOT a cell tower, as some posts have reported. The variation is being applied for by JCWIFI, a local provider of wireless internet services.

The variance application was originally supposed to be discussed and voted on at the Zoning Board of Appeals meeting on March 5th. But at the last minute, the petitioner requested a continuum on the hearing. Now, the proposal will be voted on at the April 2nd meeting.

In the meantime, JCWIFI has announced a Townhall Public Meeting for residents to both hear about the facts of the proposal, as well as voice their opinions and concerns. That townhall is scheduled for Monday, March 30th at 6 p.m. in City Hall.

Freepod will continue to monitor this story and report back as new developments unfold.



### CITY PREPARES TO DEMOLISH VACANT DOWNTOWN BUILDING



Demolition is underway on a long-vacant building in downtown Freeport, and city officials are warning nearby businesses about short-term impacts.

Crews are tearing down the former One Hour Sanitary Cleaners building, which had been deemed unsafe due to a collapsing roof and safety concerns. Officials say the demolition is complex, requiring the structure to be taken down in layers because of tight spacing between buildings.

Road closures and limited access are expected, raising concerns from neighboring businesses about customer safety and traffic disruptions.

City leaders say those concerns are valid, but believe removing the dangerous structure will ultimately open the door for future development and bring more activity to the downtown area.

The project is expected to be finished by the end of May.

### **DILLAN VANCIL WINS GOP HOUSE PRIMARY**

Republican voters in Illinois' 17th Congressional District have chosen their nominee for November.

Business owner Dillan Vancil defeated Carroll County Board Chair Julie Bickelhaupt in Tuesday's primary, winning by a margin of 58 to 42 percent. Vancil held a lead of roughly 4,800 votes when he was declared the winner late Tuesday night.

The Monmouth-based coffee shop owner campaigned on support for small businesses, economic growth, and reducing the federal deficit. In a social media post, Vancil criticized incumbent Democrat Eric Sorensen, saying Illinois families are facing higher costs and growing division.



Sorensen, who ran unopposed in the primary, is seeking a third term.

The 17th District stretches across 14 counties, including a significant amount of Freepod's coverage area.



### **HCC SIGNS TRANSFER AGREEMENT WITH ISU**

Highland Community College has recently signed multiple transfer agreements with Illinois State University for students interested in pursuing a degree in early childhood or special education.

The agreements allow students who begin their college careers at Highland to then move on to ISU while allowing for more of their credits to transfer and minimize duplication of instruction.

Transfer agreements are a standard practice for community colleges and universities in Illinois, and Highland already has multiple agreements with institutions across the state.

### **FREEPORT STUDENT GARDEN IS NOW TAKING ORDERS**

The student garden at Freeport High School is gearing up for growing season. Along with a bountiful array of fruits and vegetables for sale grown by Freeport High School students and staff, the garden also sells garden ready plants for you to grow yourself.

These starters are cultivated by students at FHS and make kick starting your home garden even easier. This year, the student garden is offering pick-up or delivery for residents within 5 miles of Freeport who order \$50 or more.

Plant varieties available include broccoli, brussels sprouts, cucumbers, leafy greens, melons, peppers, tomatoes, and herbs. The garden also sells harder to find varieties like kohlrabi and okra.



Pick up will be on Wednesday, May 13th from 3:30 to 6 p.m. And deliveries will go out on Thursday, May 14th.

To order, visit <https://my.cheddarup.com/c/2026fsgplantsale/items>.



#### POLLINATOR SEEDS FOR SALE BY STEPHENSON COUNTY FARM BUREAU

A discounted pollinator seed sale is now underway in Stephenson and Carroll counties.

With support from the Illinois Farm Bureau, along with Growmark and FS, local farm bureaus are offering two seed mix options this year.

The Butterfly Mix is designed to support monarchs, butterflies, and bees, while a separate CRP mix includes grasses to help reduce weeds and is available for approved conservation plots.

Officials say the program helps boost pollinator habitats across the region.

Orders must be submitted by March 30th. You can find a link here ([on.ilfb.org/stephensonseedsale](http://on.ilfb.org/stephensonseedsale)) or place an order by contacting the Stephenson County Farm Bureau directly.

#### PAINT THE PORT T-SHIRT CONTEST FOR KIDS

Young artists in Freeport are being invited to showcase their creativity in a new contest.

Organizers of Paint the Port are asking kids 13 and under to help design the official 2026 event t-shirt.

Children can submit original artwork through April 3rd, with top designs moving on to a public vote on social media. One winning design will be selected and featured on shirts worn throughout downtown Freeport during the popular event.

Organizers say it's a fun way for kids to get creative—whether they love drawing, painting, or doodling.

Families are encouraged to grab their art supplies and take part before the deadline.

To enter, please visit [painttheport.com](http://painttheport.com).



#### REMINDER ABOUT DROPPING OFF WOODY DEBRIS

In the wake of the windstorms that swept through our area recently, the city of Freeport is reminding residents about their rules for disposing of woody debris.

Any resident of Freeport who has woody debris that is under 4 inches in diameter is welcome to drop off that material to the city's collection area located at 1001 North Island Avenue between 7 a.m. and 2:30 p.m. Monday through Friday.

Before dropping off, however, residents must check in at the office. All debris must be placed inside the gate, and no contractors are allowed to dump at this site.

### **CARROLL AND OGLE COUNTY AMONG STATE LEADERS IN WHEAT PRODUCTION**

Farmers in northwest Illinois are posting strong wheat yields, with both Carroll County and Ogle County among the top performers in the state.

According to new data from the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Carroll County averaged more than 111 bushels per acre in 2025—ranking second statewide—and produced over 327,000 bushels.



Ogle County also topped the 100-bushel mark, averaging nearly 107 bushels per acre and producing more than 524,000 bushels across nearly 5,000 acres.

Statewide, a dozen counties reached triple-digit yields, highlighting a strong year for Illinois wheat production.

Officials say the numbers reflect favorable growing conditions and continued efficiency from local farmers.

### **IHDA ASKS FOR FEEDBACK ON HOUSING NEEDS**



Illinois residents are being asked to weigh in on housing needs across the state.

## **ILLINOIS HOUSING DEVELOPMENT AUTHORITY**

The Illinois Housing Development Authority is launching a public survey as part of its statewide housing plan. Officials say the goal is to better understand local housing challenges and development needs.

All residents are encouraged to participate by sharing their experiences and opinions. The survey is expected to take less than 15 minutes to complete.

Input gathered will help guide future housing policies and investment decisions across Illinois.

You can find the survey here: [https://survey123.arcgis.com/share/ed937f5477db49dcb85c8575953cd404?f-bclid=IwZXh0bgNhZW0CMTAAYnJpZBExQ0IBb3U3WDVhVVQzRG1sRHNYdGMGYXBwX2lkEDlyMjAzO-TE3ODgyMDA4OTIAAR4\\_IFPtwdA7WkBzSG8Xm5SqEXRcstu\\_JxqladRuveJcgUbdSv4ncclsiKvszQ\\_aem\\_vN99EoYe0N811tbt7LKMOQ](https://survey123.arcgis.com/share/ed937f5477db49dcb85c8575953cd404?f-bclid=IwZXh0bgNhZW0CMTAAYnJpZBExQ0IBb3U3WDVhVVQzRG1sRHNYdGMGYXBwX2lkEDlyMjAzO-TE3ODgyMDA4OTIAAR4_IFPtwdA7WkBzSG8Xm5SqEXRcstu_JxqladRuveJcgUbdSv4ncclsiKvszQ_aem_vN99EoYe0N811tbt7LKMOQ).

### **PROPOSED BILL WOULD REQUIRE HIGH SCHOOLS TO OFFER VOTER REGISTRATION**

A proposal in Illinois would require high schools to offer graduating seniors the chance to register to vote.

The measure, known as the Rev. Jesse Jackson Senior Young Voter Empowerment Act, recently passed a House committee with unanimous support from Democrats. Supporters say the bill aims to boost youth voter participation and make registration more accessible.

But some Republicans have raised concerns about adding unfunded man-



dates for schools and questioned whether it would increase turnout.

Advocates say the effort honors civil rights leader Jesse Jackson and could help engage more young people in the democratic process.



### **PRITZKER CALLS FOR HIGHER NUMBERS OF POSTSECONDARY DEGREES**

Illinois Governor JB Pritzker is directing state agencies to boost the number of adults with college degrees or job training credentials.

In a new executive order, Pritzker is creating a working group to review workforce programs and recommend updated education goals. The move comes as Illinois falls short of its target of having 60 percent of adults credentialed by 2025.

Recent data shows about 57 percent have reached that level, though that's up significantly over the past decade.

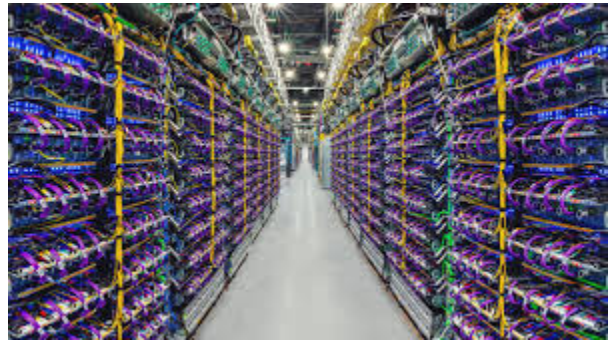
The governor says the push is critical, with projections showing more than 70 percent of jobs will soon require education beyond high school.

The group is expected to deliver recommendations by December of 2026.

### **STATE AND LOCAL LAWMAKERS EXAMINE RULES FOR DATA CENTERS**

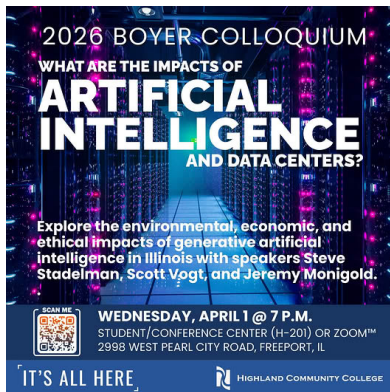
Local governments across Central Illinois are moving ahead with their own data center regulations as state lawmakers have yet to act.

Data centers, seen as critical for the growing artificial intelligence industry, have raised concerns about heavy water and energy use. Proposed state legislation, known as the Power Act, would require companies to report usage and cover energy costs, but no statewide rules are in place yet.



In the meantime, counties like Logan are considering zoning and environmental regulations, while Pekin has already rejected a proposed project following community pushback. While there are no public plans for a data center to come to northwest Illinois just yet, many in the community have been watching this issue closely, as the likelihood of such a proposal coming forward is far from minimal.

State lawmakers remain divided, with some calling for local control and others urging statewide guidelines to balance economic growth with environmental protections.



### **BOYER COLLOQUIUM ANNOUNCED**

Highland Community College is set to host its 31st Annual Boyer Colloquium, focusing on the impacts of generative artificial intelligence.

The free event will take place April 1st at 7 p.m. at the college's Student and Conference Center, with a virtual option available.

A panel of experts—including State Senator Steve Stadelman—will discuss the environmental, economic, and ethical challenges tied to AI, especially its grow-

ing energy demands.

Organizers say the goal is to help the public better understand how emerging technology affects communities and the environment.

The Boyer Colloquium, named for local veterinarian Dr. M.E. Boyer, has been a longtime tradition, bringing discussions of ethics, economics, and ecology to the Freeport community.

### **POLKAFEST TICKETS ON SALE NOW**

Tickets are now on sale for a unique celebration in Freeport.

The Lincoln-Douglas Society is hosting Polkafest on April 25th from 4 to 6 p.m. at the Masonic Temple, celebrating National Pretzel Weekend.

The event will feature live music from the Zwiefel Brothers, along with food, drinks, and plenty of polka. Local favorites including The Traveling Chefs, Lena Brewing Company, and Freeport Pretzel Company will be on hand.

There will also be a silent auction with a variety of items.

Tickets are just 10 dollars and can be purchased at 9 East Coffee, the Greater Freeport Partnership, at the door, or online, by following this link: <https://www.eventbrite.com/e/pretzel-city-polka-fest-tickets-1983087034704>

Organizers say it's shaping up to be a fun, family-friendly event that you don't want to miss!

### **IN CLOSING...**

As we wrap up this week's show, we'd like to remind you all to listen to this past week's interview. My usual Freepod co-host Tim Connors spoke with Denny Garkey, the man behind the local legend: Little Cubs Field. Tim and Denny discussed the origins of the project, as well as some incredibly interesting opportunities for the field moving forward.

This coming Tuesday, the featured interview is with Rob Boyer and Randi Kohlbauer from the city of Freeport. My usual Freepod co-host Alan Wenzel spoke to Rob and Randi about ongoing and upcoming infrastructure projects that are helping to grow and maintain the Pretzel City. That interview will be available starting at noon on Tuesday, March 31st. You can find it, and all of our other interviews, on our website, [www.freepod.org](http://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 Mass Communication 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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