



# **GREATER FREEPORT PARTNERSHIP**

Chamber + Economic Development + Main Street + Tourism

# **2020 ANNUAL REPORT**



# YEAR IN REVIEW

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2020 has been one for the history books. Through the pandemic, political and social unrest, economic turmoil and all the stress created therein, our community and region have learned they possess a strength they had never known. While there have been struggles and heartache, there is also teamwork, perseverance, compassion, ingenuity, and grace.

The Greater Freeport Partnership halted nearly all regular in office-operations in March 2020 (as most organizations did) and shifted its focus to providing current information on relief efforts and recovery assistance, serving the needs of our businesses and community. These efforts took shape through communicating grant programs and relief packages, hosting webinars for further clarification, publishing new web and informational tools, and listening intently to the needs of our members. We executed our mission in novel, relevant ways to fit the needs of those who were strained by disruption. In the face of adversity, we adapted for the success of Freeport and Stephenson County, its business and our members. The Partnership's new Executive Director was hired and started on May 11, 2020.

There are several thoughts of how and where new business and self-employment opportunities will rise from our pandemic induced economic crisis. Regardless of where the "place" of the worker or business is located, it will be paramount that we establish an Entrepreneurship Ecosystem that underpins and supports not only sustainable but agile business development.

For this reason, staff began mapping out the existing entrepreneurship resource network and identifying the service gaps. The intent is to organically grow the services locally, connect to and leverage regional services and connect to services virtually outside the region.

Several value-added agriculture/food producers in Stephenson County started expansion of their production operations. While most other essential manufacturers remained steady with minor disruptions. our members.

Overall, we executed our mission in novel, relevant ways to fit the needs of those who were strained by change. In the face of adversity, we adapted for the success of Freeport and Stephenson County, its businesses and our members.



*C. Mark Williams,  
Executive Director*



The Greater Freeport Partnership is:

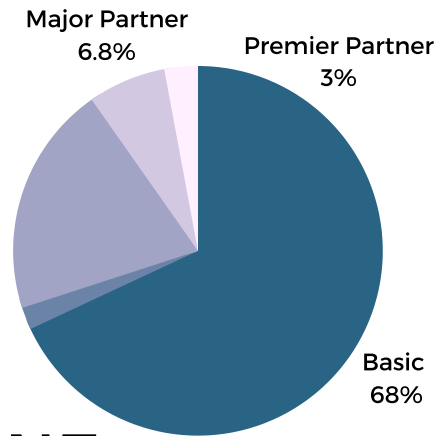
- Chief advocate of Freeport and Stephenson County as a great and safe place to live, work and play.
- Repository for business information and resources for creative solutions to grow business.
- Driver of revitalization and economic development.
- Workforce development leader.

# MEMBERSHIP BASE



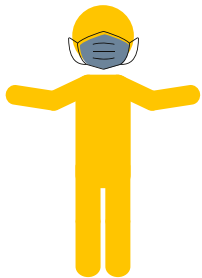
Not for profit/Government  
20.2%

Subsidiary  
2%



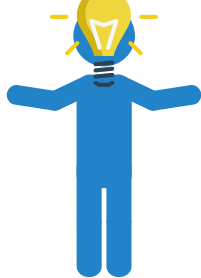
# BUSINESS ENGAGEMENT

Business  
Events



10 Live Events  
5 Virtual Events

Entrepreneur  
Engagement



15 Entrepreneurs  
25+ Contacts

Ribbon  
Cuttings



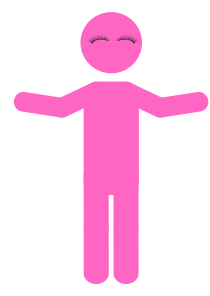
16 Businesses

Webinars



7 Hosted

WEN\*\*



49 Members  
17 Events

- Business events includes Business After Hours, Rise n' Shines and Young Professionals Network.
- \*\*Women's Enrichment Network (WEN) was established in July 2019, the professional women's group meets monthly to discuss business and leadership topics. The group has also established a quarterly book club.

# MARKETING & PROMOTIONS

## Social Media Engagement



8.3k followers  
24,800 average  
monthly reach



956 connections  
3,500 average  
monthly impressions



1.1k followers  
1,100 average  
monthly reach



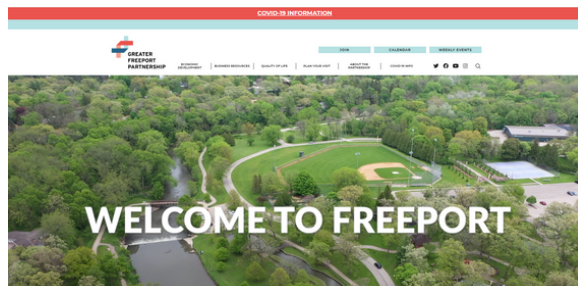
2.8k followers  
3.6k average  
monthly impressions

Visitor Center 2020 Attendance - 16,336  
Gross Visitor Center Sales - \$35,800  
Average hotel occupancy rate - 39%

Redesigned greaterfreeport.com web site with new features including:

- Directory options
- LOIS site selector database
- Stephenson County data portal
- Professional video highlighting economic development, tourism and resident life

Redesign and COVID-19 content increased web traffic by 300%



# COVID-19 RESPONSE



- Awarded in 2019, from the Freeport Community Foundation, the #FreeportReflections program is an art activation program for vacant storefront spaces in downtown Freeport. The goal of the program is to attract new attention to these underutilized spaces, with the ultimate goal of them being leased. The grant award funded 5 installations. Since the program launched in the 3rd quarter, 2 of the 5 spaces have been leased and the art installation has been relocated to a new vacant storefront. We look forward to this project continuing into 2021.
- Community Foundation of Northern Illinois awarded \$20,774 in late 2019 to pay for 6 new streetscape benches and 15 litter receptacles. In partnership with the City of Freeport Public Works Department, these furniture pieces were installed in the 1st Quarter of 2020.

- Awarded \$9,590 in grant funds from the Illinois Department of Human Services for Census Outreach and promotion to ensure every resident of Stephenson County was counted once and in the right location. Final report was completed June 1, 2020.

- # COVID-19 RESPONSE

**Partnership Cash**

Holiday Partnership Cash will go on sale on November 20 just in time for the Mistletoe Walk!

As an extra incentive to spend your dollars locally, the Partnership is offering an additional 25 percent to all of your Partnership Cash purchases. For every \$20 you purchase, we give you an extra \$5. For example:

	=		\$25	To spend at local participating retailers
	=		\$125	To spend at local participating retailers

In-person sales only November 20-22  
Online sales begin November 23  
GreaterTransport.com/partnershipcash

 GreaterTransport.com  
Partnership Cash

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# ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

- Distributed 100 grant opportunities to over 30 partner agencies and public sector partners.
- Continued to connect area employers to Probation Job Readiness class graduates. This class was designed to target soft skills training and give individuals tools needed to deal with conflict on the job, with the goal of sustaining employment. Two class cohorts were able to complete the program before COVID forced the program into hiatus. Five area employers continue to engage with the program. Met with Probation Department and Highland Community College in 4Q to see how the program could transition to an online format. The program has restarted in all virtual format; the first class will graduate in February 2021.
- The first Downtown Revitalization Loan Fund applicant had their project approved in March. We have presented the opportunity to three other interested parties.
- Referred 13 interested parties to building owners and/or realtors representing building owners about leasing/buying downtown properties.
- Other economic development milestones for 2020:
  - \$10 million in building permits for the City of Freeport
  - Waiting on data from the County.

## Redevelopment Proposals



2 Active Projects

## Developer Visits



2 Visits

## Corporate Outreach



35 Visits

## Ground Breakings



1 Event

## Business Retention/Expansion Project



8 Active Projects

## Business Attraction



2 Active Projects

# ECONOMIC IMPACT OF TRAILS

The Partnership created a trail study examining Stephenson County trail use and economic impact as local agencies discuss future improvements and infrastructure. The study targeted non-motorized traffic (hiking, biking), however some Stephenson County trails are used by motorized equipment as well. The trail study was presented live to the Jane Addams Trail Commission and the Freeport City Council and Stephenson County Board via recorded file. The presentation was also distributed to partner members.

The trail study included use data as provided by trail counters from Blackhawk Hills Regional Council comparing different access points on the trail year-over-year. Usage was up by 20 percent in the first five months of 2020 over previous years. Testimonials and survey results were included from trail users demonstrating strong support for the trails. Most notably, 100 percent of Jane Addams Trail users will come back to the trail again.

Trail systems are a positive asset to our community as:

- Tourism destination
- Sales tax generator (from out-of-town guests),
- Promote healthy lifestyles
- Job creation
- Improved quality of life
- Bike transportation system
- Lessened environmental impact

The study highlighted many examples of economic growth in other Midwestern regions where trails were maintained and promoted.

Enterprise Zone  
development  
in 2020:  
**\$20,063,000  
investment**



Enterprise Zone  
estimated job  
creation:  
**328 full-time  
jobs**

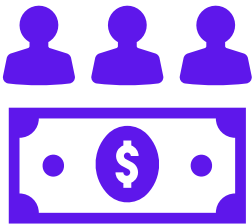


The enterprise zone is a state-authorized, locally designated geographical area that provides special incentives to encourage economic development, strengthen the business climate, and help create jobs. The Northwest Illinois Enterprise Zone was certified by the State of Illinois on March 1, 1990. The Northwest Illinois Enterprise Zone termination date has been renewed and extended to December 31, 2034.

The Northwest Illinois Enterprise Zone includes areas in:

- City of Freeport
- Rural Stephenson County
- Village of Lena
- Rural Jo Daviess County
- Village of Hanover
- City of East Dubuque

Business  
Interruption  
Grants



59 Businesses  
Received \$1.6M

City of Freeport  
Res. & Comm.  
Investment



767 Permits Issued  
\$10 Million

Stephenson Co.  
Res. & Comm.  
Investment



111 Permits Issued  
\$30 Million

## MISSION

The Greater Freeport Partnership is the place where organizations and people unite to advocate for the region, drive economic growth and champion a talented, workforce-ready community.

## VALUES

Freeport & Stephenson County Value:

- Art, Design & Culture
- Diversity in All Forms
- Hard Work and the Entrepreneurial Spirit
- Outdoor Experience
- Giving Back
- Commitment to Learning

## 2020 BOARD OF DIRECTORS

**Gary Quinn**  
Chair

**Mark Gridley**  
Vice-Chair

**Chris Schneiderman**  
Treasurer

**Josh Elliott**  
Secretary

**Jack Carey**

**Mike Marten**

**Mike Meade**

**Ross Vehmeier**

**Brooke Deininger Wagner**

**Mark Wright**

**Dr. Anna Alvarado**

Freeport School District

**Randy Bukas**

Freeport City Manager

**Chris Kuberski**

Highland Community College

**Scott Helms**

Stephenson County Board

## STAFF

**C. Mark Williams**  
Executive Director

**Tess Dahm**  
Director of Administrative Services

**Bill Clow**

Business Engagement Director

**Nicole Haas**

Brand Director

**Andrea Schultz Winter**

Development Director

**Katie Gentz**

Event Coordinator

**Billy George**

Administrative Coordinator

**Karen Brillhart**

Visitor Center Hostess

**Beth McWhirter**

Visitor Center Hostess

**Vicki Schadle**

Visitor Center Hostess

**Erin Stewart**

Visitor Center Hostess