

# Williamson County Commissioner Terry Cook

## N E W S L E T T E R

May 2021 Volume 5 Issue 5



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**Our  
Largest  
Edition  
Ever!**



# The Message



With the state legislature in session, trying to keep up with the bills that impact county government, and ultimately you as taxpayers, is never ending, especially now at the end of the session. There's tracking the bills, making phone calls, and sending letters to representatives and senators encouraging them to either pass a bill, defeat a bill, or amend a bill. Speaking of letters, Garry and I have sent out over 110 letters (by email) covering just 10 different bills. More on those bills below:

HB 1/SB 1à These are the general appropriations bills, AKA the state budget. I sent letters on two important issues included in these bills - mental health and indigent defense. I encouraged House members to provide more mental health funding to organizations across the state that provide a clubhouse model for those struggling with their mental health and substance abuse. Funding was approved, but we don't know how much yet. In the other letter, I asked for Senators to keep a House amendment in their final version that would provide \$5M more for counties for indigent defense.

HB 749 (SB 10)à 749 would have banned all political subdivisions of the state from engaging in lobbying activities or belong to organizations that help alert Texas counties about good and bad bills their potential affects. That is dead. However, the senate had its own bill that moved forward-SB 10. Texas counties are dependent upon various organizations, such as the Conference of Urban Counties (CUC) and the Texas Association of Counties, to let them know what is happening in Austin and how certain pieces of legislation will affect them. Most counties cannot afford to send someone to Austin on a weekly basis to testify on a bill, and these bills can be full of legalese, loopholes, and gotchas so these associations are important to help decipher the language & potential impacts. Besides, SB 10 exempts the state from this bill. It's been reported that the state spends \$30M/year to lobby at the U.S. Capitol. What's good for the goose, should be good for the gander, right? It's been postponed, but we're waiting word on whether language of this bill will show up on another bill or it be resurrected.

HB 1869à This bill attempts to define what public debt is, but it has so many carve-outs that it is really hard to understand what the impacts are.

HB 2144à Yet another bad bill. This would effectively bar government entities and private citizens from using the courts for relief from a public nuisance. Public nuisance laws have been used to protect property rights and fight effluent releases into our rivers, streams, and lakes. However, this bill would strip the ability of communities to seek monies to reverse the effects of nuisances. The House did not take up this bill. Dead.

HB 2947, HB 4447, SB 1557à All very problematic development bills. 2947 would prohibit counties from regulating RV parks as subdivisions. RV parks are designed for temporary human habitation. If someone is living at an RV park for an extended period of time, then that ceases to be a temporary situation and becomes permanent. In Wilco, many of these RV parks are located within flood plains. Major rain events require First Responders to rescue people. It passed the House, but I encouraged the Senate County Affairs Committee to vote no on the bill or at least let counties regulate them like mobile home communities.

Currently, for a new subdivision to be ok'd by our Road & Bridge folks, there is a process of review with some back and forth with the developer to make sure that the few regulations that counties have are being followed. 4447 would require counties to accept plat applications without any planning documents. How does one decide on such an important document as a plat without all of the information at hand? The legislature has already placed 30-day time limits on plat decisions. This would run contrary to the goal of timely approval of plats.

1557 would prohibit counties from regulating the internal development of subdivisions designated as condominium regimes. Williamson County has seen this type of product. A condominium scheme can be 100s of acres of unregulated dense urban dwelling with "driveways" that are essentially roads, which means that there's no standard for safety and more often than not, poorly constructed. If this bill passes, there's no guarantee that there would be fire hydrants with enough pressure to put out a fire, no traffic plan would have to be submitted, and no assurance that nothing is built in a flood plain.

I am happy to say that all 3 bills are dead.

SB 476- Anytime the state legislature tries to make outcomes of sexual assault responses better for the victim, that is a good thing. SB 476, the bill that would mandate the creation and operation of a sexual assault response team in every county, would seem to be one of those bills that would make for better outcomes for victims of sexual assault. That would mean 254 response teams. From a recommendation sent to member counties by the CUC, I sent a letter to the House Committee on County Affairs asking them to provide money for such a venture, because this would be an unfunded mandate, and I asked if the bill could be amended to allow smaller, contiguous counties under 250,000 population to pool resources and cooperatively develop an effective response to sexual assault in their communities. Not sure about the former, but I'm happy to say that the latter suggestion was amended onto the bill. It has passed the House and is on its way to the Governor.

SB 1827a The widespread opioid crisis has touched every state and every locality in this country. The cost of the crisis is overwhelming, especially to local budgets that are already stretched thin. This bill would create an opioid abatement account, trust fund, and statewide settlement agreement. Sounds good, right? As passed by the Texas Senate, it would bar political subdivisions, such as Williamson County, from continuing its case against the opioid defendants, would take away the direct funds to the county, and changes the uses for the abatement money. Williamson County has entered a resolution that ratifies the allocation agreement between the State and the counties on how settlement monies should be spent in response to this crisis, and it has an agreement by outside counsel to cap fees and expenses to better serve the goals of mitigating the epidemic. The amended bill out of the House is acceptable, but the Texas Attorney General's office is trying to change it back into a bad bill. Negotiations continue into the weekend.

We tracked 100 bills, and frankly, we couldn't have done it without our partners at the CUC & TAC. The session still has 3 days left and anything can happen, even resurrecting dead bills. Zombie bills!

I'll be happy when this legislative session is over on Monday, so I can breathe again and not worry about anymore bad legislation being generated...until a special session might be called or wait for the next regular session in 2 years.

### ***And that's not all we got done***

I got out to all Wilco City Councils, Chambers, ISD Supers and IT personnel, economic development persons and city managers my proposal to fund a comprehensive evaluation of broadband availability and speeds across Wilco using CARES 2020 funds. This would provide the foundation information for these entities AND vendors to go after broadband grants to expand service. Need 2 more votes on the court! This is the culmination of months of exploration and work.

# ***Goodbye Kelly Reeves Mass Vaccination Site***

At 6PM on May 12<sup>th</sup>, it was close of business for FER/FHS's mass inoculation site at the Kelly Reeves Athletic Complex! I arrived about 5:50PM and the lines of cars were still being processed through the vaccination lines. Food trucks awaited those finishing the work as well as those coming for the celebration.



It was a jamboree of music, food, relief, and gratitude to the over 600 volunteers and workers that facilitated the almost 4 months of hard work. Much THANKS to all those who took care of us once we cleared the hurdles of signup and registration!!!

## **By the numbers:**

Total number of days for the mass vaccination site = 59

Total number of volunteers = 5,012; 338 volunteered twice, 165 more than twice, 13 more than 10 times

Largest number of inoculations in one day = 5,200

Number of 2nd shots on last day, May 12 = 1,260

Total shots administered = 151,580



***So for now, so long!***



# TRAFFIC LIGHTS!!!

## ***O'Connor***

## ***Sam Bass Rd.***

**Signal controller bases have been constructed at Morgan Hill and Great Oaks intersections.**

**Installation of the mast arms have begun at all 3 intersections! Cables at all three have been put in place, too.**

**Liberty Walk has an electrical feed that needs completion.**

**Cost is ~\$1,000,000. Projected completion is anticipated by the end of June.**

**At Walsh Ranch Blvd.- The signal controller and all cables and conductors have been installed.**

**At Great Oaks Dr.- The last timber pole was installed and the foundation for the steel strain pole was drilled and poured. 3 of the 4 signal poles were installed. The wheelchair ramp and ground box apron at the NE corner were formed and poured. Cost is ~\$350,000. Lights remained in flashing red mode longer than desired, but both intersections should have functioning signals by the time you read this.**

## **Terrific Employment News from Workforce Solutions Rural Capital Area**

The unadjusted unemployment rate of the Rural Capital Area of Central Texas (Bastrop, Blanco, Burnet, Caldwell, Fayette, Hays, Lee, Llano, and Williamson counties) is continuing its downward trend to pre-pandemic levels after dropping to 4.5 percent in April 2021, a drop from the 5.3 percent rate reported in March and 11 percent recorded a year ago, according to figures released today by the Texas Workforce Commission (TWC). The 4.5 percent unemployment rate in the nine-county **Workforce Solutions Rural Capital Area** (WSRCA) represented 25,675 residents seeking employment. The region's unemployment rate remained below Texas' (6.3 percent) and the national (5.7 percent) rates.

The WSRCA team is eager to help you find workforce solutions and offers curbside and in-center assistance by appointment. Services continue to be available virtually. Utilize their **Skill-Based Career Progression Lattices** and work with their teams to develop a customized training plan to help you enhance your skills and create sustainable career outcomes.

Are you looking for work? The **Workforce Wednesdays Virtual Career Expo** connects employers and job seekers at weekly online hiring events. Workforce Wednesdays represent a collective effort among Rural Capital Area communities and industries to empower their workforce through virtual interactive events and continue to help the region compete globally.

There's no better time to ramp up your skills and marketability for local careers in high-demand industries. Through their partnerships, WSRCA offers more than 20,000 online courses in various occupations as well as access to job descriptions. If you're looking, don't pass WSRCA by. Access is convenient with location off Round Rock West Bld. or on-line.

For more information, please visit WSRCA at **[www.workforcesolutionsrca.com](http://www.workforcesolutionsrca.com)**, call toll-free, at 1-844-344-2780, and begin your job search on **[www.workintexas.com](http://www.workintexas.com)**.

# OZONE SEASON HAS BEGUN

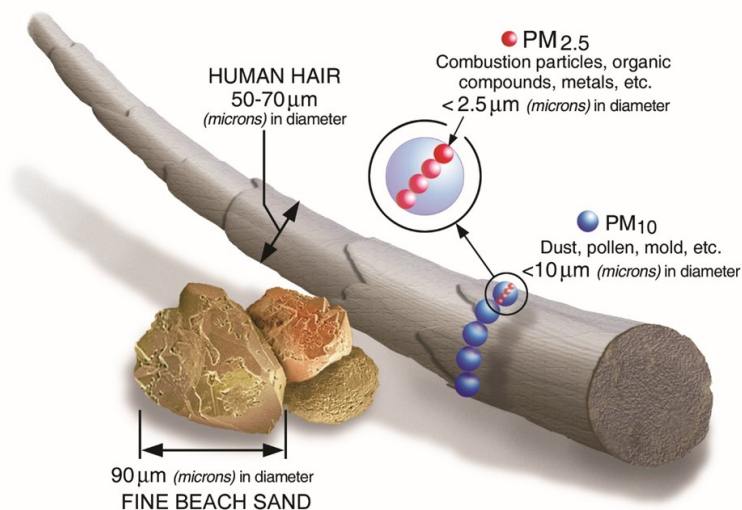
PS- What do you know about Particulate Matter?

Ozone season has begun. There have been numerous mentions of ozone over the life of this office's newsletter- what it is, what to do when an Ozone Action Day is declared, suggestions of what you can do to lessen the effects of ozone- but what do you know about particulate matter?

Commissioners Court declared the week of May 3-7, 2021 as Air Quality Awareness Week in Williamson County, as we do every year around this time. However, instead of only focusing on ozone, we added particulate matter, specifically PM<sub>2.5</sub>, as an added issue of which we should be concerned.

**Particulate matter** is the sum of all solid and liquid particles suspended in air. This complex mixture includes both organic and inorganic particles, such as dust, pollen, soot, smoke, and liquid droplets. Unfortunately, many of these particles are hazardous. PM<sub>2.5</sub> is particulate matter that is 2.5 micrometers big, or small, depending upon your point of view. Just how big is 2.5 micrometers? The graphic below might help explain that.

As you can see, these particles are small enough to penetrate and harm numerous body systems.



The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has reviewed particulate matter health studies looking at causal or likely causal relationships between short- and/or long-term exposure to PM<sub>2.5</sub> and found the following health effects:

- Premature death
- Lung cancer
- Cardiovascular effects
- Nervous system effects
- Respiratory effects

Similar to ozone, PM<sub>2.5</sub> affects people with heart and lung diseases, children, and older adults with greater impact. These sensitive groups comprise of at least 40% of the population in the Austin-Round Rock-Georgetown Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA).

So, what are the different types of PM<sub>2.5</sub> pollution? Sources include:

- ♦ Crustal PM<sub>2.5</sub> – particles from dust & soil
- ♦ Elemental carbon (EC) PM<sub>2.5</sub> – particles that contain the elemental form of carbon (i.e., graphite)
- ♦ Organic carbon (OC) PM<sub>2.5</sub> – particles that contain organic molecules (hydrocarbons)
- ♦ Sulfate PM<sub>2.5</sub> – particles that contain SO<sub>4</sub> molecules
- ♦ Nitrate PM<sub>2.5</sub> – particles that contain NO<sub>3</sub> molecules
- ♦ Ammonium PM<sub>2.5</sub> – particles that contain NH<sub>4</sub> molecules

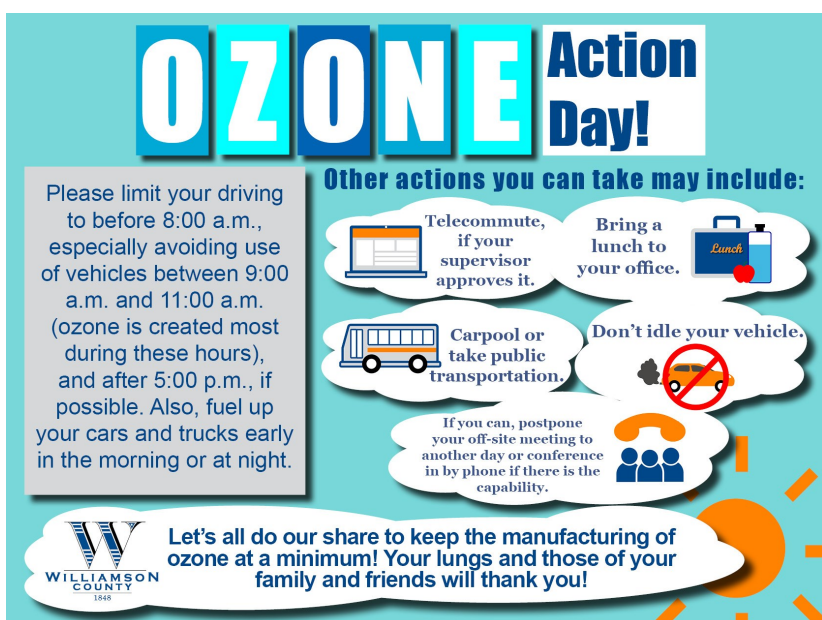
The largest source of PM<sub>2.5</sub> and organic carbon PM<sub>2.5</sub> within the Austin-Round Rock-Georgetown MSA come from the following:

Source Category	Tons per year PM <sub>2.5</sub>	% of Total PM <sub>2.5</sub> Emissions	Tons per year OC PM <sub>2.5</sub>	% of Total OC PM <sub>2.5</sub> Emissions
Road Dust	2,325	22%	153	6%
Construction Dust	1,693	16%	78	3%
Open Burning	1,574	15%	611	26%
Prescribed Fires	861	8%	403	17%
Agricultural Dust	793	8%	24	1%
Commercial Cooking	417	4%	279	12%
Mining and Quarrying	326	3%	0	0%
<b>Subtotal</b>	<b>7,989</b>	<b>76%</b>	<b>1,548</b>	<b>65%</b>

EPA's review also indicated that there is no evidence of a threshold below which further reductions to PM<sub>2.5</sub> exposure would not continue to decrease risks. This means that there are public health benefits of reducing both long-term and short-term exposure to PM<sub>2.5</sub> even if an area is attaining the PM<sub>2.5</sub> National Ambient Air Quality Standards (NAAQS).

The current EPA standard NAAQS for PM<sub>2.5</sub> is 12 micrograms. Our MSA is at 9.7 or 81% of the maximum allowed. However, you should know that EPA staff have proposed consideration of a NAAQS as low as 8.0, which would put us in non-attainment.

Non-attainment is any area, in our case- MSA, that does not meet the national primary or secondary ambient air quality standard for a NAAQS. *We do not want to be designated as being in non-attainment!* After an area is designated as nonattainment, the area must meet the federally mandated deadlines established by the 1990 Amendment to the Clean Air Act for compliance with the national ambient air quality standards, which could take years, decades, or even result in never coming off this list. In the interim, it must be demonstrated to the EPA that reasonable further progress toward improving the air quality is being made in the nonattainment area



Economic development would not be impacted directly by a nonattainment designation, but there could be indirect, costly consequences due to the designation. Industrial facilities could be required to install pollution control equipment, take limits on their production, or otherwise find reductions in emissions by "offsetting" for expansion. New facilities wanting to locate in a nonattainment area will most likely be required to install pollution controls or take stringent operational limits.

Note to you who live near quarry and concrete batch plants: yep, you see the dust at your house, but it is greater in diameter

than PM<sub>2.5</sub>.

As a reminder of what to do when an Ozone Action Day is announced, the picture above gives you some easy tips that you can do on those particular days.



## EXEMPTIONS- NEW AND EXPANDED!

You may have heard about this important property tax decision by Commissioners Court:

The Williamson County Commissioners Court voted to increase property tax exemptions, providing further tax relief to all residential homesteads in the county. Property tax exemptions for persons 65 and older increased from \$30,000 to \$90,000. Property tax exemption for disabled persons increased from \$20,000 to \$75,000.

In addition, the Commissioners Court added an additional homestead property tax exemption for all homeowners with a reduction of 1.5% of their homestead's assessed value or \$5,000, whichever is greater. In order to qualify for the Homestead Exemption, the property owner must have owned and occupied the property as of January 1 of the tax year.

Homeowners can apply for property tax exemptions through the Williamson Central Appraisal District's website [www.wcad.org](http://www.wcad.org). Applying for exemptions is free.

First thing you should know about the 65 and older and disabled person exemptions is that you can only claim one or the other. You cannot claim both even though you may have a disability and be over 65 years old. Further, to claim the disability exemption, you must provide proof that you receive Social Security disability payments.

Now, for the first time in Williamson County, everyone will receive a 1.5% homestead exemption. The homestead exemption is for the home that you own and where you live. A homestead exemption cannot be claimed on a home that you own but rent out to others.

How does this fit in with the over 65 and disabled exemptions? First, some definitions. There are 3 different values for a property:

1. **Market Value** - The market value would be the highest value you would see on your property.
2. **Assessed Value** - This is the market value minus any increased valuation above 10% with no improvements year-to-year. The assessed value is the 10% increase from last year's assessed value, not the 19% increase most Wilco homes rose in value of your home may have rose 11%, 15%, or even 20% or more from the year before, your assessed value can only rise to a maximum of 10% additional value per year.
3. **Taxable Value**- this is the assessed value minus exemptions. This is the value that taxes are calculated on.



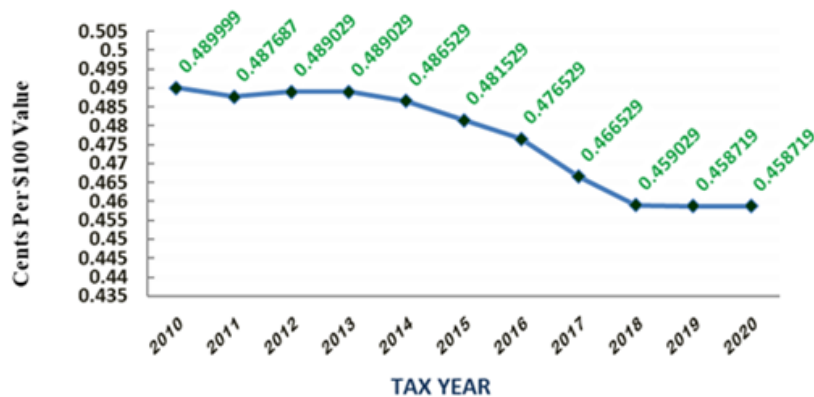
For property taxes that the county will levy, your 1.5% homestead exemption is calculated (or \$5,000) and then your over 65 or disabled exemption is added to that amount. Then that total is subtracted from the assessed value to give you your taxable value (after all protests).

For example, take a home with a \$400,000 assessed value:

1. If you are 64 or younger on January 1 of any tax year, you will qualify for the homestead exemption of 1.5% or \$5,000 which ever is greater. In this case, you would take the 1.5% because your exemption would be \$6,000, rather than \$5,000. Your taxable value would be \$395,000.
2. If you are 65 or older on January 1 of any tax year, you will qualify for the homestead exemption of 1.5% AND the over 65 exemption. Your exemption would increase to \$96,000, and your taxable value would be \$304,000.
3. If you collect Social Security disability payments, and you are 64 years old or younger on January 1 of any tax year, you can claim the 1.5% homestead exemption and the disabled exemption. Your taxable value would be \$319,000.
4. If you are disabled and 65 or older, you would have a decision to make. You will receive the 1.5% exemption, but you'll need to decide whether to take the over 65 exemption OR the disabled exemption. The over 65 exemption is larger to help make your decision that much easier- a taxable value of \$304,000 or \$319,000.

Please remember: You must apply for the over 65 and disabled exemptions with the Williamson Central Appraisal District, and you don't need to apply for these exemptions annually. You can see more information [HERE](#).

### WILLIAMSON COUNTY TAX RATE HISTORY



*\* This chart reflects the actual adopted combined tax rates for the General Fund, Road & Bridge Fund and Debt Service Fund based on that calendar year.*

The county tax rates are set at the end of budget deliberations by the Commissioners Court, usually at the end of August. At that point, you'll be able to approximate what your county taxes could be the following year.



# IN COMMISSIONERS COURT

## National Prevention Week 2021

National Prevention Week, created by SAMHSA (Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration), is an annual time to raise awareness of the importance of substance use prevention and implementing positive mental health changes. May 9-15, 2021 was proclaimed as National Prevention Week in Williamson County by Commissioners Court.

According to the 2020 Texas School Survey, 42.8% of high school students (grades 9-12) and 21.3% of middle school students (7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grades) report drinking alcohol in the previous 30 days. This is very troubling, especially with increased feelings of stress, fear, anxiety, and isolation in people of all ages, as youth have been especially impacted. Sadly, drugs and alcohol have a disproportionate effect on young developing brains, which is why it is so important to educate our young people on substance use prevention and strengthen their stress coping skills.

In the face of this distressing data, this year's theme is "Youth Leading Prevention," recognizing youth prevention leaders across the country and the power that each young person has in influencing positive community change.

Since 1978, LifeSteps Council on Alcohol and Drugs is a safe, supportive, drug-free community with healthy, nurturing families; where all who experience alcohol or drug-related problems have affordable, easy access to the services that they need to help them become productive, empowered and substance free, [www.lifestepsCouncil.org](http://www.lifestepsCouncil.org) has a plethora of information and programs for youth and adults.

Commissioners Court urges everyone to fight the stigma and discrimination faced by those loved ones facing the long journey of recovery and seek organizations, like LifeSteps, to assist with not just the first step, but the many steps that come afterward.



**L-R: Martha Paddie-Coalition Coordinator, Rosana Sieloff-Coalition Director, Barbara and George Brightwell-Founders of LifeSteps, Kelly McCaffrey- Executive Director**



# IN COMMISSIONERS COURT

## Elder Abuse Prevention Month

On May 11, the Commissioners Court declared the Month of May to be Elder Abuse Prevention Month in the county. Chante Thompson of Texas Adult Protective Services, Williamson County Unit came and spoke about activity in our county. In 2020, 1,284 allegations were investigated and resulted in 388 cases confirmed of abuse, neglect, and/or exploitation in just our county. In this newsletter, I want to speak about financial exploitation of elders.

In this day, we know we must be vigilant to avoid being caught in a scam. What about our aging parents, relatives, and friends? Who's watching out for them? Then our anxiety might ratchet up when they need to move into assisted living. Are their best interests actually being protected? What if you don't live near them and can't drop in (or this past year happens again?) – how do you know they are OK?

The investment and banking industries, like the medical industry, are big on protecting privacy. They block and box out family members and caring friends unless that loved-one has listed you in some fashion to be privy to their information. A curse and a blessing. Many times, greed or incompetence destroy the investments and savings that the loved one created throughout their lifetime. It is tough for the rest of the family or friends to be able to tell what's going on until it is too late.

Fraud also occurs through the telephone, email, websites and at someone's door. Scammers today are sophisticated and organized. What safeguards are available today to prevent theft, especially by family members?

What are the signs of exploitation? Adult Protective Services list the following:

- ◆ Sudden changes in bank accounts or banking practices.
- ◆ Unexplained or unexpected withdrawal of large sums of money.
- ◆ Adding names to someone's bank signature card.
- ◆ Unfamiliar people accompanying bank customers to withdraw large sums.
- ◆ Unauthorized withdrawal of funds using ATM cards or sudden transfers of assets.
- ◆ Sudden changes in financial documents.
- ◆ Unpaid bills despite having enough money.
- ◆ Previously uninvolved relatives who suddenly claim rights to a person's affairs and possessions.
- ◆ Abuse of power of attorney.

One approach, family friendly, is to have a family meet and greet once or twice a year to review the books for "mom's" care and estate. All banking, investment and charge card statements should be available for review by the other immediate members of the family. Documents should also be available for any special occurrences during the current review period. Plan for any special times where responsiveness of family members may be necessary to address an issue. Treat care for mom like a business; with this attentiveness, any improper use of mom's funds to pay off another's charge card bill could be avoided. Trust but verify.

A more sophisticated approach may be through technology. There is a product through a company, EverSafe.com, that uses artificial intelligence to identify their members' financial activity patterns. And if you take care of a senior's affairs, you know the cash-flow tends to be highly predictable month-to-month. If this software notes abnormal events, alerts are sent to a list of "trusted advocates" such as family members according to an article in AARP The Magazine. I feel a sense of calm coming over me.

I take care of an elderly friend. I am her attorney-in-fact. I pay the bills, track down problematic bills, create a monthly spreadsheet on spending, work with her financial adviser, monitor her bank and investment accounts, arrange appointments, do her taxes, and do anything else where there's a need. I see how easy it could be to skim. However, if Adult Protective Services showed up at my house, the records are organized, maintained and verifiable. Now, if her cash from her 2020 taxes would just land in her bank account as the IRS goes looking for the \$1,200 cash card that never reached her last May – sigh.

If you see signs of financial exploitation, call the Texas Abuse Hotline (800-252-5400) or report online at [TxAbuseHotline.org](https://www.txabusehotline.org).

Find out more about this issue at [EveryonesBusiness.org](https://www.everyonesbusiness.org), including tips on how Texans can protect themselves from financial exploitation.

## IN THE NEWS

### Commissioner Cook: Courts transition from virtual to in-person

[Williamson County Commissioner Terry Cook: Donating to save lives and heal others \(statesman.com\)](https://www.statesman.com/story/news/2020/06/01/williamson-county-commissioner-terry-cook-donating-to-save-lives-and-heal-others/3211117002/)

When the state of emergency for COVID-19 was declared in March 2020, the Williamson County Justice Center, assisted by county departments such as IT and others, was able to conduct business throughout the shutdown. “We knew that the ‘wheels of justice’ had to keep turning, so we did what you do in a desperate situation, we came together and figured it out,” said Judge Donna King of the 26th district court.

They didn’t just figure it out, they excelled at conducting daily business and holding court hearings virtually. King also credits the support from the Commissioners Court.

This March, the emergency order permitted courts to begin holding in-person proceedings following COVID-19 prevention standards but encouraged them to continue remote proceedings through June 1. King held her first in-person jury trial on April 13, describing it as “almost a feeling of relief to be back in a jury trial.”

Although the logistics of the proceedings looked very different from the prepandemic jury trial, they had turned a corner and their hard work of planning paid off. She described feeling a sense of pride that those summoned to appear for jury duty honored their responsibility to the community. They showed up, participated and seemed to share in this “corporate” sense of relief that the proceedings were well-organized and COVID-protocol compliant.

While virtual jury trials were conducted during the shutdown in other counties, Wilco courts didn’t, citing a lack of control over procedure and adherence to the rules of trial, exposure to information outside the proceeding and constraints on litigants’ rights to confront their accusers fully and appropriately. Before the shutdown, jury trials involved large cattle calls of prospective jurors and a flurry of activity to see which case would be selected, all in-person. The court now has implemented limitations on the number of cases heard per day and plans that reduce the number of people convened at the courthouse.

They now have a carefully constructed plan that is built around pandemic precautions such as social distancing, masks, barriers and sanitation. Courts were compelled to formulate a new ways of impaneling a prospective jury, selecting members of the jury for a particular trial, careful docket management and a reconfigured courtroom full of plexiglass.

Using a variety of virtual platforms, King has held many types of civil and criminal court hearings, allowing dockets to continue moving, reducing the jail population and allowing litigants in civil, family and criminal cases their day in court, while providing justice and resolution for crime victims. Some of the limitations of the virtual realm include a lack of person-to-person interaction, hesitancy of some to speak up in larger groups (many can join virtually), people talking over one another and of course, the infamous, “You’re on mute!” A virtual platform, however, allows courts to convene at a moment’s notice, so decisions can be made quickly. It also allows for participants to appear from any location with an internet connection. This has reduced costs (in travel and time) for litigants, witnesses and lawyers.

Lawyers and judges are just like everyone else — creatures of habit — so it is sometimes hard to break with tradition, but judges like King have realized that continuing to use online platforms does make sense for some court business.

While the transition to virtual proceedings was difficult, now that they’ve been doing it for over a year everyone is pretty settled in, so transitioning back does have its challenges. First, not everyone feels comfortable being back in large group settings. This is problematic as the courthouse has hundreds of visitors in addition to the hundreds of employees in the building daily. Second, the convenience and efficiency of the virtual platform has proven to be a time-saver in certain aspects, therefore King and other judges are formulating a plan that maximizes the benefits of both in-person and virtual proceedings. However, they must take into consideration those who lack internet access or reliable devices. For this reason, King has kept an in-person option even during the shutdown that allows people to participate virtually at the courtroom, still socially distanced and abiding by COVID protocols.

It is unlikely that court proceedings will be entirely the same as they were before the coronavirus. They will be more in-person than virtual; however, King is pleased to have that virtual option.

As for now, Judge King is so very pleased to take her seat at the dais and declare “Court is now in session.”





## Where is Commissioner Cook?

### Old Settlers Park – Newest Addition: Yonders Point



Friday night, May 21, the newest section of Old Settlers opened in Round Rock as a relaxing oasis of more passive use than all the ballfields, tennis courts and waterpark. East of the lake where we're all familiar with at the Lakeside Pavilion is now Yonders Point. GREAT 4-person swing sets, sloping hill with platforms for sitting with a picnic served as a back-

drop to a 9PM family movie (I'd watch for more of those happening). Sipping wine from Craft and Crated, snacking on the charcuterie in individual boxes and munching on shortbread cookies with the monogram "YP", we relaxed to light jazz music being performed live. Oh my gosh, ~~masks~~??? It was divine.



In the future when you go, take cushions to perch upon should you snag one of the platforms on the hill.

Numerous sidewalks to get your steps in around the lake or just swing and read. Kind of like après skiing – as we get older we appreciate it more!

# ROAD UPDATES

620 at Railroad/Chisholm Trail (Contractor: Bridges and Roads LLC)– There is a new traffic pattern along RM 620. Drivers traveling between Deep Wood Dr. and Lake Creek Dr. has been diverted onto a temporary roadway adjacent to RM 620 while crews construct the new eastbound frontage road. The temporary roadway is anticipated to be in place for the next year and will not result in a reduction of lanes. Go [HERE](#) to learn more. Estimated completion date is late 2022.

Great Oaks Bridge at Brushy Creek Rd.– STILL waiting for Charter and Grande to move their lines. The Contract is just going out to bid; Construction still anticipated to start this summer!!! Estimated cost is \$11.2M. Learn more [HERE](#).

Hairy Man Rd./Brushy Creek Rd. Safety Improvements (Contractor: DeNucci Constructors LLC)– Learn more about this project at this [website](#). Lots of work done around the retaining wall sections on the westside of Brushy Creek Rd. Pavement repairs have continued on the westbound lanes of Brushy Creek Rd. near Olson Meadows Park. This is a 100% county job with estimated cost of \$4M. June should bring work east to Hairy Man Rd. Substantial completion is anticipated in early 2022.

Pond Springs Road Area Drainage Improvements– 60% design of the project will be submitted to the City of Austin in June 2021. Construction start is still slated to begin Fall 2021. County project with estimated cost of \$4.17M.

Forest North Drainage Improvements Phase III (Contractor: DeNucci Constructors LLC) – Hydro-mulch and soil retention blankets were placed and concrete work and sod was installed as well in the Norchester Zone , and not a moment too soon with all our recent rain! Work on a storm sewer line continues on Newberry Dr. in the Woodvale Zone. This is a county job with an estimated cost of \$4.8M. Substantial completion is anticipated early 2022.

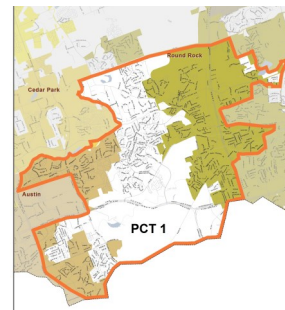
University Blvd. widening from IH-35 to just east of Sunrise Rd. (Contractor: DeNucci Constructors LLC)– *Stay off University if you possibly can!!!* Asphalt and curb and gutter are being removed on existing University Blvd. from Sunrise Rd. to the east. Asphalt was placed on the eastbound University Blvd. widening from University Oaks Blvd. to Oakmont Dr. Water line work continues along eastbound University. Utility relocations are occurring near Cypress Boulevard and work on new signals at the intersection are happening also. So many things happening at the same time! Is it any wonder how difficult this project is? This is a City of Round Rock project for which the county has contributed \$5M. Project is slated to finish in early 2022.

Wyoming Springs @ Smyers Lane—A left turning lane will be created in the median. Plans have been finalized and an Inter-local Agreement (ILA) with the City of Round Rock was approved. Environmental due diligence has been completed. It is anticipated that the project will be advertised and go out for bid in June 2021 with soon afterward in Summer 2021. This project should have a very short time span for completion.

I-35 Changes (outside of Precinct 1) - I-35 bridge at Ronald Reagan has been destroyed and traffic re-routed as new bridges are built, hopefully sometime in June . I-35 at 183 northbound is now closed (what a mess) so northbound traffic exiting for 183 must continue along I-35 and do U-turn and comeback south to catch overpass to N 183.



# The Mission, Vision, and Value Statements of the Williamson County Commissioner Precinct 1 Office



## **MISSION**

To lead pro-actively on the Williamson County Commissioners Court while advocating for the constituents of Precinct 1 and the county at-large from a foundation of collaboration and respect.

## **VISION**

To transform Williamson County government into a more accessible, responsive, transparent, and well-managed organization for our residents, so that we become the community recognized as the best in Central Texas to live and enjoy.

## **VALUES**

Accountability, commitment, integrity, and respect form the values that guide the Williamson County Commissioner Precinct 1 office.

### **CONTACT US!**

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### **SEE US ONLINE!!!**

Williamson County's Website! - [www.wilco.org](http://www.wilco.org)

Our office's web site– [Terry Cook, Commissioner Pct 1](#)

### **Non-Emergency Phone Numbers**

Austin Fire Department  
512-974-0130

County Judge Bill Gravell  
512-943-1550

Jollyville Fire Department (ESD 1)  
512-258-1038

Round Rock Fire Department (ESD 9)  
512-218-5590

Sam Bass Fire Department (ESD 2)  
512-255-0100

Williamson Central Appraisal District  
512-930-3787

Williamson County Landfill  
512-759-8881

Williamson County Regional Animal Shelter  
512-943-3322

Williamson County Sheriff's Office  
512-864-8282

Want to know even more  
about what's happening in  
Williamson County?

Sign up for the WILCOunty  
Line E-newsletter! Click  
[here](#) to sign up!

Commissioner Cook  
keeps meeting with many  
MUD Boards and HOAs.  
To invite her to your  
meeting, contact Doris at  
doris.sanchez@wilco.org

**In case of  
Emergency  
DIAL 911**