Williamson County Commissioner Terry Cook

NEWSLETTER

May 2023 Volume 7 Issue 5

In This Issue

The Message

The Evolution of the Child Advocacy Center **Road Updates**

The Last Page and sign up for the WIL-COunty Line E-newsletter

Art!

The Texas Broadband Office Wants to Hear From You!

Put this on your calendar

In Commissioners Court

Justice of the Peace Community Forum

Where is Commissioner Cook?

STEAR

In the News







Open Houses for Road Bond Proposed Projects

The end of May also brought closure to the precinct open houses for the public to learn about proposed projects. Next step is for the Citizen Bond Committee to caucus and discuss value of each proposed projects – and there are many. With inflation continuing to climb, most critical is the cost of land to purchase the right-of-way for roads and road improvements, time is critical to afford the projects.

Understand, we will not do anything to increase your tax rate. Well then, how does elevated taxes happen. Our debt is managed incredibly well. There are some very smart people behind the curtain managing when we sell bonds (our high ratings give us very strong appeal to big investors in public offerings). That results in low interest rates and our goal is to pay off debts rapidly. How does that happen – simply, growth in our county results in a larger tax base. Your taxes continue to go up? Well, that's because the appraised values of properties continue to rise. So long as Williamson County has a strong appeal as a destination for families, our homes will hold on to increasing values because there's just not enough for the demand. Growth is also why our roads seem to be so backed up this year.

As to this year's proposed road bond projects, cities were asked to submit projects that they would like to have county participation to improve regional mobility. Small towns like Bartlett and Coupland presented proposed projects in the Precinct 4 open house; In Precinct 1, Round Rock laid out plans for several worthy candidates, and we had two citizen-proposed projects that are very favorable for funding. On this last day of the month, Precinct 2 conducted an open house where Cedar Park and Leander will had candidates for discussion.



Bob Daigh, our own road czar, always is studying connectivity and tweaking the long-range transportation plan looking for potential corridors and arterials to move vehicles and reduce congestion and, yes, improve safety. Of course, you build it, they will come. Houston-Katy route on I-10 is certainly evidence of that aphorism.

There are also proposed Park projects for funding consideration.

At last, the Brushy Creek Regional Trail is poised to close the gap in Round Rock AND Round Rock's Heritage Trail is back on track to connect to it!! Now it won't be fast, the second development on the Sauls land has to progress, again, this development is donating trail space as their park requirement for the City of Round Rock. Proposed projects include a lot of bathrooms – go figure – at Berry Springs, the Expo Center, River Ranch (not yet open) and – whoa hoa – along the Brushy Creek Regional Trail!! There's also an intriguing project; as-

suming responsibility for some (or all) of the dilapidated sites around Granger Lake and creating updated spaces and campgrounds (Army Corps of Engineers territory). *I'll see your two mosquitoes and raise you five*.

As this bond process proceeds, the Citizen Bond Committee will make recommendations to the Commissioners Court as to whether they feel a new bond program is needed and which projects they feel need to be done which could be anywhere from just purchasing (and preserving) the right-of-way land to design work to construction. Then, the court must decide how much to fund – both a political will issue as well as a fiscal responsibility. If this moves forward, it will be on the 2023 November ballot.

The Evolution of the Williamson County Child Advocacy Center





Has become



But Wait – there's more...





And that's just the outside! On Tuesday, May 16, the staff and board of directors for our Child Advocacy Center held an open house for a peek at the additions – pretty massive – for accommodating the growth in need for this agency which treats kids and youth of abuse, many times sexual abuse. With their staff and partners, this organization conducts forensic interviews, forensic medical exams, support the non-offending family members, holds trauma therapy sessions, coordinates cases with law enforcement partners and help to bring kids and youth to recovery.

For the past 2 years, they have had to conduct all of the above in cramped and less than positive office space in Round Rock and they just can't wait to move back to the corner of the Georgetown Loop and Wilco Way. With our population growth, their case load has grown mightily. For now, the former house structure is being renovated to provide sufficient office space for the staff and volunteers.

They are still short on the needed funds to complete the construction and procure the furniture needed. Should you desire to assist in meeting their financial goals for the center, You may make an on-line donation at <u>www.wilcocac.org/donate</u>

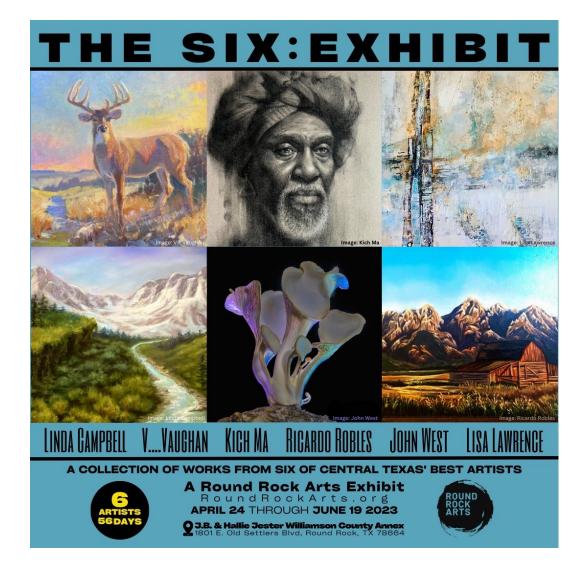


Brittany Cheathen, Interim President of the CAC board, gave an impassioned overview of the teams resiliency and successes and challenges. Join in – so worth it. #ProtectWilcoKids

In April our team hit a milestone...

In April of 2023 we conducted 104 forensic interviews - the most our Center has ever done in 1 month. While it is heartbreaking to think about the 100+ experiences these kids shared with our forensic interviewers, we are glad reports are being made.

We are grateful kids are being believed.



The Texas Broadband Office wants to Hear from YOU!

Millions of Texas households lack broadband access. Many Texans cannot attend online classes, use telemedicine, fill out a job application online, or access online marketplaces. These barriers negatively affect the quality of life and limit economic opportunities for Texans and the State overall. The Texas Broadband Development Office (BDO) is in the process of developing the Texas Digital Opportunity Plan for achieving reliable and affordable broadband, device access, digital skills training, and cybersecurity awareness to expand digital opportunities for all Texans. BDO wants to hear from you.

Tell the BDO what your experience is with broadband internet accessibility, affordability and adoption by completing the Digital Opportunity Public Survey. The survey includes an optional speed test and is available in English, Spanish, Chinese and Vietnamese, and is audioenabled to ensure folks with limited literacy, limited English proficiency and visual impairments can hear the survey questions and answers. Your opinions matter. Take 10 minutes to complete the Digital Opportunity Public Survey. Thank you for your participation.

<u>TexasDigitalOpportunity: Texas Digital Opportunity: Texas Digital Opportunity Plan: Public</u> <u>Survey (10-15 minutes) (civilspace.io)</u>









1:00pm -6:00pm

For details on how to donate, volunteer or become a vendor visit: www.blackfamiliesofhutto.com



2310 BRUSHY CREEK R CEDAR PARK, TX 7861





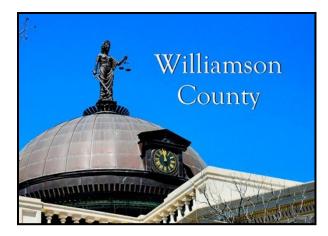












In Commissioners Court

May 21—26 was EMS Week in Williamson County. These 24/7/365 miracle-workers see so many people on their worst days and sometimes on their best days, and they all do it with utmost professionalism.

Thank you Williamson County EMS!



Justice of the Peace Community Forum on June 5, 2023

Williamson County residents are invited to join the four Justice of the Peace judges in Williamson County for a community forum on Monday, June 5, from 6 p.m. to 8 p.m. at the Georgetown Annex, 100 Wilco Way, Georgetown. Williamson County Pct. 1 Justice of the Peace KT Musselman, Pct. 2 Justice of the Peace Angela Williams, Pct. 3 Justice of the Peace Evelyn McLean and Pct. 4 Justice of the Peace Rhonda Redden will all be in attendance.

Residents can learn what the judges do on a daily basis, including information on small claims, debt claims, Class C traffic violations, death inquests, weddings and more. The forum is an open platform with time for questions and answers. Residents with questions are asked to email their questions to wilcojp2023@gmail.com.

Where is Commissioner Cook?

Memorial Day Program – Round Rock

Memorial Day doesn't represent remembrance of any war or battle; it is to remember those who gave their lives for their fellow soldiers, for a

cause, for our county or in the despair of depression and PTSD from the brutality of war.

From its roots in "Decoration Day" so proclaimed by General John A. Logan in 1868 when he called for the citizens of America to lay flowers on the graves of the dead from the Civil War as those bodies were buried in almost every city, village and hamlet churchyard in the county, it was finally declared a national holiday in 1971 as the last Monday in May to honor fallen armed service members from all of America's wars.



Did you know:

- American flags are flown at half-staff until noon on Memorial Day and then raised to full-staff for the rest of the day as a symbol of the nation's resilience and determination.
- **The National Moment of Remembrance** was established by Congress in 2000 as a way to encourage Americans to pause for one minute at 3 p.m. on Memorial Day to remember and honor the sacrifices of those who died in service to the country.
- **The red poppy** has become a symbol of Memorial Day. This tradition dates back to World War I when a poem called "In Flanders Fields" described red poppies growing on the graves of fallen soldiers. (from "Carry The Flag")



I attended the event at Yonder Point in Round Rock's Old Settler Park. That entire area of the park continues to evolve to now include a Veterans' garden with 8 flag poles. It was a warm, cloudy day and fortunately, the city had erected two large canopies for us to sit beneath. The ceremony began with a 10AM (right on time) flight formation of the "Lost Soldier".

Stoney Point High School's ROTC Honor Guard presented the flags including those of all the armed forces and MIA. The cadets also gave a 21-gun salute followed by Cadet Ensign Dalton Richards and Ryan Dufrene from Bugles Across America played "Taps." Finally, "Amazing Grace" on bagpipe brought the ceremony to an end. Many families who lost at least one

member in their commitment to our county were in attendance. This was a remembrance that none are forgotten; our country remains strong and resilient despite the rancor.





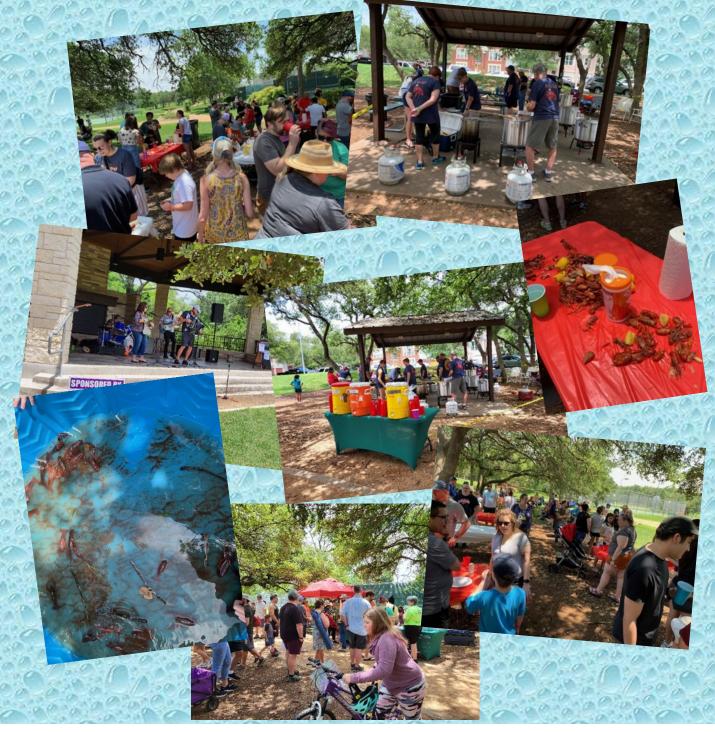


Left- The symbolic "Missing Man Table"

It's that Cajun Time in Rattan Creek

There's two family-centric MUDs in Wilco that really can put on a good time! That's Brushy Creek MUD and Rattan Creek's Neighborhood Association. On Saturday, May 20, it was a rocking, boiling, finger-licking good time swaying to a live band playing those Cajun tunes.

On the shoulders of many volunteers, the association pulled off an amazing boil of crawfish, corn, sausage, potatoes and spices with a continuous cleanup crew to prepare the partiers with rounds two, three and four! Much to the appreciation of anyone 16-yrs old and older, they even had hand wipes at every table. We had perfect weather!!





Early May brought the annual graduation program for this next group of new nurses (pending passing state exam). This is the second year the Commissioner for Pct 1's office has attended. Mayor Craig Morgan of Round Rock opened the ceremony followed by administrators and professors. The students were front and center in this program with their group projects on display. This country is still short on nurses despite the annual turnout of new ones from all the nursing schools and programs. It is both a challenging and rewarding career choice. Our hats are off to these new women and some men who've endeavored to reach this moment.

Congratulations Class of 2023



Sam Bass Road – Phase I Ribbon Cutting and So It Begins

A roundtrip tale in pictures (to June 2)



















We're moving into hurricane, fire, flood and high heat conditions, are you ready? Should you have medical needs such as dialysis, supplemental oxygen or other urgent medical needs, **STEAR** may be for you.

What is STEAR?

- Executive Order RP57 requires the establishment and implementation of a data base to assist in the evacuation of special needs populations.
- Originally known as Transportation Assistance Registry (TAR), which was instituted following Hurricanes Katrina and Rita. TAR focused on helping to determine what kinds of transportation the individual would require.
- In 2013 TAR was replaced by the State of Texas Emergency Assistance Registry (STEAR) focusing on gathering more information about additional needs an individual may have for allhazards.
- The STEAR program is a free registry for Texans of any age that needs additional assistance during an emergency event due to a disability, functional and/or access need, or lack of transportation for evacuation.
- STEAR registry information provides local emergency planners and responders with information about the needs of individuals in their community.
- Texas communities use the information in different ways and available services will vary by community.
- The registry is completely voluntary and free to local governments and to Texas citizens with the exception of the 3 statue requirements.
- Registrants are required to re-register every January to ensure accurate and up-to-date information is available to emergency planners and responders.
- All the information provided will be kept completely confidential.
- Registering in STEAR DOES NOT guarantee specific service during an emergency.
- Registering at last minute prior to a weather event or 12 hours prior to the landfall of tropical system is strongly discouraged. Last minute registrations may not make it to local emergency managers.

In the closing days of the 2021 legislature, Representative John Bucy, District 136, authored a bill which passed which mandated that the county must attempt contact with each registrant in STEAR within that county. A phone call might be sufficient assuming it resulted in a contact with the actual registrant. Else, someone would need to go to the residence listed in STEAR. Not ideal for those in the midst of responding to the havoc of a storm environment, such as an ice storm or flood situation. In Winter Storm Uri, Williamson County had volunteers with four-wheel drive vehicles checking on registrants that were not available (or responding) to phone calls. Annual updates to registrant's information is critical for this system to work and protect lives. <u>Failure to update annually results in the registrant being eliminated from the database.</u>

The Health and Safety Codes requires nursing homes and assisted living facilities to register with the Texas Information and Referral Network to assist the state in identifying persons needing assistance if the area is evacuated because of a disaster or other emergency. The facilities are not required to identify individual residents who may require assistance, but are required to notify each resident and the resident's next of kin or guardian regarding how to register with the Texas Information and Referral System (2-1-1).

The Health and Safety Code requires home and community support services agencies to assist their clients as necessary with registering for disaster evacuation assistance through 2-1-1 services provided by the Texas Information and Referral Network.



How To Register

Register online at https://STEAR.tdem.texas.gov

Dial 2-1-1 or use your video phone relay options of choice to contact 211 at 877-541- 7905 (Texas Information Referral Network)

Electronic/Paper Forms

Individual Registration forms can be found at https://tdem.texas.gov/stear/

Completed forms can be faxed or emailed Email: STEAR@TDEM.TEXAS.GOV

Fax: 866-557-1074

Required Information to Register

Name

Address (Do not use a P.O. Box as the physical address)

Phone Number

Primary Language

Contact Us

For more information about the program please visit: <u>https://tdem.texas.gov/stear/</u>

Email us at <u>STEAR@TDEM.TEXAS.GOV</u>

Contact your local Emergency Management Coordinator, Michael Shoe, <u>Michael.shoe@wilco.org</u> only if desperate. He'll be very busy under emergency conditions.

Now – for Emergency "To Go" bags

Reminders:

- All emergency contacts and phone numbers: family, doctors, insurance agents, veterinarians
- All prescription names, #'s, pharmacy phone numbers
- Supplies for any pets
- Get your insurance policies up in the cloud for access
- Chargers for phones and any other critical equipment
- Flashlight and batteries
- Water & food
- Portable medical equipment
- First aid kit
- Password list(s) and account information

For more prepping tips visit http://txready.org/and https://www.ready.gov



State of Texas Emergency Assistance Registry (STEAR)

The State of Texas offers the option to register with the STEAR program, a free registry that provides local emergency management planners and responders with information related to your needs during an emergency.

Who Should Register?

- People with disabilities
- People who are medically fragile
- People with functional needs such as:
 - Limited mobility
 - Communication barriers
 - Require additional medical assistance during an emergency event
 - o Require personal care assistance
- People who require transportation assistance

Register online at Stear.tdem.texas.gov

Call 2-1-1 or use your video phone relay option of choice





Registering in STEAR **DOES NOT** guarantee you will receive a specific service during emergencies.



In The News

Mental illness impacts us all

So, what forms does mental illness take? Many general terms are used to describe mental illness: mental disorder, serious emotional disorder, extreme emotional distress, psychiatric illness, mental illness, nervous exhaustion, mental breakdown, nervous breakdown and burnout. These terms do not really describe what a person is truly experiencing. The most common descriptive mental illnesses are depression and anxiety disorders. Less common are psychosis, substance use disorders and eating disorders.

Our state and federal governments for years have limited or completely closed their funding to expand mental illness treatment centers. No new state-funded treatment facilities have been opened in decades in Texas. Waitlists tend to be years-long; this is especially

troublesome for violent offenders diagnosed with a mental illness. Suicide is now the second-leading cause of teenage deaths, with fentanyl overdoses commanding the lead in those deaths. Substance abuse and mental illness are often closely associated.

Should a nonviolent person with mental illness or suffering from a mental health crisis run afoul of the law, our governments hold them in their jails and juvenile facilities, as there is no other, more appropriate facility generally available, unless a family has rather generous insurance or the means to pay a private facility.

Recognizing that counties are serving as the public mental health facilities today with their jails and juvenile justice centers, Williamson County has led much of the country in training our jail and Juvenile Justice Center personnel in recognizing mental illness and using appropriate approaches to interacting with those people displaying evidence of mental disorders.

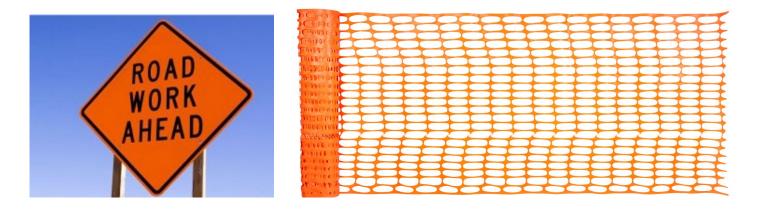
Partnering with Bluebonnet Trails Community Services, our local mental health authority, and with the aid of grants and direct taxpayer investments, a sophisticated web of recovery-oriented systems of care have been established across the county. Programs like crisis response, skilled evaluations and case management have been implemented, and respite centers (for both youths and adults) established. Additional services are still being developed. Fortunately, these programs are also available within our justice system, including our courts, working to restore normalcy and vitality in people, families and communities.

For our youths who've tangled with the law, our Juvenile Justice Center has implemented a trauma-based relational intervention approach that has been extremely successful turning around the lives of kids who didn't get there by accident. Often there is generational trauma at play in their lives or multiple major traumatic events forming their responses in life's journey. Investing in each young life with supportive concern and care leads them to recovery and teaches them appropriate responses to stimuli in their environments rather than responding with violence, illegal drug use, criminal activity or truancy.

Bluebonnet Trails plays a large role in mental health evaluation and counseling in our community and schools. There are respite centers established for both adults (in Georgetown) and youths (at Bluebonnet Trails in Round Rock), and one more being built at the Rock Springs facility (in Georgetown) for youths. Counselors from Bluebonnet Trails respond to mental health crises in-person when called at 844-309-6385.

What can you do? There is a free class offered from time-to-time called Mental Health First Aid. It is about six hours long, is interactive and so informative. The manual is about \$10, if you can afford it, but everyone who attends the class will get one, and it is a very useful reference tool. Contact NAMI of Central Texas at (512) 420-9810 or at <u>namicentraltx.org</u> for information on the class.

Productive and fulfilling lives can be lived even with lifetime mental illness. If it happens to someone you know, be there for them, listen with empathy and give nonjudgmental support. Recovery is not a linear path. Equip yourself with knowledge and don't hesitate to involve professional support for them.



<u>Great Oaks Bridge at Brushy Creek Rd</u>.– The new bridge is complete!!! Retaining walls, completion of Great Oaks Dr. south of the bridge, and final work on traffic lights are the main parts that still need finishing. We are looking forward to celebrating with you at an upcoming ribbon cutting very soon.

<u>Pond Springs Road Area Drainage Improvements</u>– 90% of the design package has been delivered and is being reviewed, and a meeting with Austin Water is being scheduled for April- early May June to discuss results. The cost of the project is now at \$2.65M from a high of \$3.2M. Construction start looks early 2024 and last about 90 days... depending upon weather delays, of course. (the annual summer drought is a perfect time to do this)

<u>University Blvd. widening from IH-35 to just east of Sunrise Rd.</u>- (Contractor: DeNucci Constructors LLC)-DONE!!!

I-35 at US 79- There are weekly updates from TxDOT that you can sign up for HERE.

<u>620 at Railroad/Chisholm Trail (TxDOT with primary contractor Bridges and Roads LLC)– Lots of switched traffic</u> around this project, so please be aware of the surroundings. There's been a traffic switch to the new westbound frontage road from the railroad tracks to the west. Work is continuing on a sidewalk under the Chisholm Trail Overpass and in the center median, east of Deep Wood Dr. Panels and embankment for the retaining walls on the east and west ends of the Lake Creek Drive Overpass are taking place. Go <u>HERE</u> to learn more. This is a \$27.5M TxDOT project and according to them, substantial completion is Fall 2023.

<u>183 North Project (a CTRMA project)</u> - The 183 North Mobility Project will include the construction of two express lanes in each direction and the addition of a general-purpose lane where needed to bring the number of non-tolled lanes to four in each direction along a 9-mile stretch of US 183 between SH 45 North and MoPac. Construction began in early 2022 and the overall design-build project timeline elapsed is 44.8% through February 2023. There will be continued work with high-mast lighting installation/energizing and the removal of existing median lighting, diamond-grinding of the general-purpose lanes, bridge substructure and superstructure work, median drainage and pavement work, overhead sign structure work, utility adjustments, and sidewalk and driveway work. The overall design-build project has expended approximately 28.9% of the budget and is anticipated to be fully open to traffic in 2026.

Learn more: <u>183 North Mobility Project</u> Sign up for updates <u>HERE</u>.

To view previous meeting minutes and presentations for the proposed Road Bond projects and some park projects, go <u>HERE</u> for more information.

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

<u>MISSION</u>

Providing strong, thoughtful, and collaborative leadership on the Williamson County Commissioners Court through a time of great change and growth in our county

VISION

Upholding a local governmental entity that is centered around best-practices throughout the organization and focused on timely and respectful responses to our citizenry

VALUES

The guiding principles of the Williamson County Commissioner Precinct 1 Office continue to be respect, reliability, and dedication to Precinct 1 constituents, while being open to ideas for positioning Williamson County for the future

CONTACT USI

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EMAIL COMMISSIONER COOK: commissioner1@wilco.org

COMMUNICATIONS/SCHEDULING: Doris Sanchez 512-244-8610, doris sanchez@wilco.org

EXECUTIVE ASSISTANT: Garry Brown 512-244-8615, garry.brown@wilco.org

SEE US ONLINE!!!

Williamson County's Website! - <u>www.wilco.org</u>

Our office's web site- Terry Cook, Commissioner Pct 1

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

Sign up for the WIL-COunty Line Enewsletter! Click tore 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 or 512-244-8610

Non-Emergency Phone Numbers

Austin Fire Department 512-974-0130

County Judge 512-943-1550

Cedar Park Fire Department (ESD 11) 512-401-5220

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

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

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