

Williamson County Commissioner Terry Cook

N E W S L E T T E R

August 2021
Volume 5
Issue 8

In This Issue

This Month's Message

Court Actions

Traffic Lights

School Bus Safety

Notices of Events

Williamson County Employees of the Year

In the News

Great Oaks Bridge

Where is Commissioner Cook?

Disposal of Old Drugs

Road Updates

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

The Message

The Known and the Unknown

The **Known** – Our county is the 4th fastest growing in the county per the 2020 Census – up 40+% since 2010 and our FY22 County Budget is adopted! The new tax rate is $.440846/$100 of appraised value on property. This includes a maintenance and operations, Road & Bridge, and a debt budget rate.

As each taxing entity adopts their tax rates, go to the https://williamsonpropertytaxes.org/tax page to see your resulting property taxes (as soon as it is updated with the adopted rates). Remember that the Commissioners Court raised the over 65 in age exemption on homestead from $30,000 to $90,000; property tax exemption for disabled persons was raised from $20,000 to $75,000 (Note: you can only claim one of those two exemptions so if 65 years of age or older AND disabled, claim the over-65 exemption). Additionally, we added an additional homestead property tax exemption for all homeowners of 1.5% of their assessed value or $5,000, whichever is greater. Qualifying for the homestead exemption requires that you owned and resided in your home as of January 1 of the current tax year and is not restricted to age.

Due to new taxes coming in from development (not on previous tax rolls) we have latitude to work on fixing inequities in salaries for Corrections Officers (jail), Sheriff Deputies, our other county employees and add 29 fulltime new employees in this budget. While our Sheriff's dept is competing with the cities police departments to attract new hires, we, as a county, do not have the deep pockets of cities with their sales tax income to raise salaries annually. It is only by growth, which we have lots of, which yields more property tax income to the county. We have a lot of year-ending roll-over $$s coming into FY 22 including Tahoes that couldn't be delivered – oh that chip shortage, and for EMS, no white Tahoes were available. So, funding for those vehicles ordered, but-no-received, rolls into FY 22 and hopefully so does the Tahoes. (When will this supply chain right itself?). We also added two highly-skilled positions to our District Attorney's office – long wanted, patiently awaited by our DA, Shawn Dick. And, by the way, he now has 8 lawyers in his office certified in criminal law – a tough certification. We are so fortunate to have that team on our side after YEARS of sub-standard leadership with substantial consequences in the District Attorney's Office – can you say "Michael Morton Act" for example?

The county has over 1900 employees and we are holding the line on medical costs, especially with Covid-19 Delta variant. Test kits have been purchased from Texas Dept of Emergency Mgmt. so that we can test ourselves for Covid-19 – if positive, we will first get a 2nd test and referral from our primary physician, then seek an appointment with the plasma infusion lab thru TDEM. The county is self-insured and we're seeking to limit our expenses while bringing our employees back on-line as fast as possible and the plasma infusion (courtesy of those who actually got vaccinated), works miracles for recovery when done within 10 days of a positive test. Our EMS, Corrections, Deputy Constables, and Deputy Sheriffs are especially vulnerable of becoming Covid-19-positive due to their interactions with the public.

The **Unknown** – Impact of Census on who represents each of us.

https://demographics.texas.gov/Data/Decennial/2020/#redistricting-tile will take you to the Texas Demographics website where you may peruse and play with the 2020 Census data if you dare. Line 162, column CI will get you to voter precinct-level numbers. Note that the population numbers of the voting precincts do add to the 609,017 total Wilco population per 2020 Census.

Changes to the voter precinct can't occur until all other boundaries have been set. By law, Election Code Section 42.006, a county election precinct "must contain at least 100 but not more than 5000 registered voters."

In Section 42.005, it also "may not contain territory from more than one of eachof the following types of territorial units":

(1) a commissioner precinct;
(2) a justice precinct;
(3) a congressional district;
(4) a state representative district;
(5) a state senatorial district; or
(6) a State Board of Education district.

Because of that second requirement, the full redrawing of voter precinct boundaries can only happen after BOTH the state legislature and county commissioners court have completed their own respective redistricting processes and the corresponding maps have become set.

– Chris Davis, Williamson County Elections Administrator

Court Actions

Tax Anticipation Notes Sale by Williamson County

On August 3, 2021, Williamson County offered up TANs of $200M with 10 bids for them coming in within 1 minute of 9AM. The winner, J.P. Morgan Securities LLC, offered 0.362776% interest to county for 7- year bonds. A Tan is a short-term debt security issued by a municipal government to finance an immediate project that will be repaid with future tax collections.

On Tuesday, August 10, the Commissioners Court suggested $30M of these notes to be applied to much needed additions and changes to our Juvenile Justice Center. We will work on allocating other funds in September.

CARES and ARPA Funding

Funding reimbursements continue to be made to our non-profit partners paying rents and utilities for those impacted by Covid-19 and behind in those two bills. The non-profits pay the property managers and utility companies, we then repay them upon receipt of a valid invoice. Help seems to reflect much lower demand now than earlier this year.

Additional CARES funding were given to Hope Alliance who is seeing increased need for services thru this pandemic and to Sacred Heart Community Clinic for costs of equipment and process changes to continue providing medical and dental services to the low-income community of the county under the pandemic conditions.

Evaluations are underway for proposed ARPA funding for projects and hopefully will be presented to the court in September.

TRAFFIC LIGHTS!!!

O'Connor

Pedestrian push button landings at Great Oaks and Morgan Hill Trail have been poured. The sidewalk at the southeast corner of Morgan Hill Trail and O'Connor needed some adjusting and that was done. The landscape stone work and mulch at the northwest and southwest corners of Morgan Hill Trail has been completed.

Ever so s l o w l y but surely!

Sam Bass Rd.

D

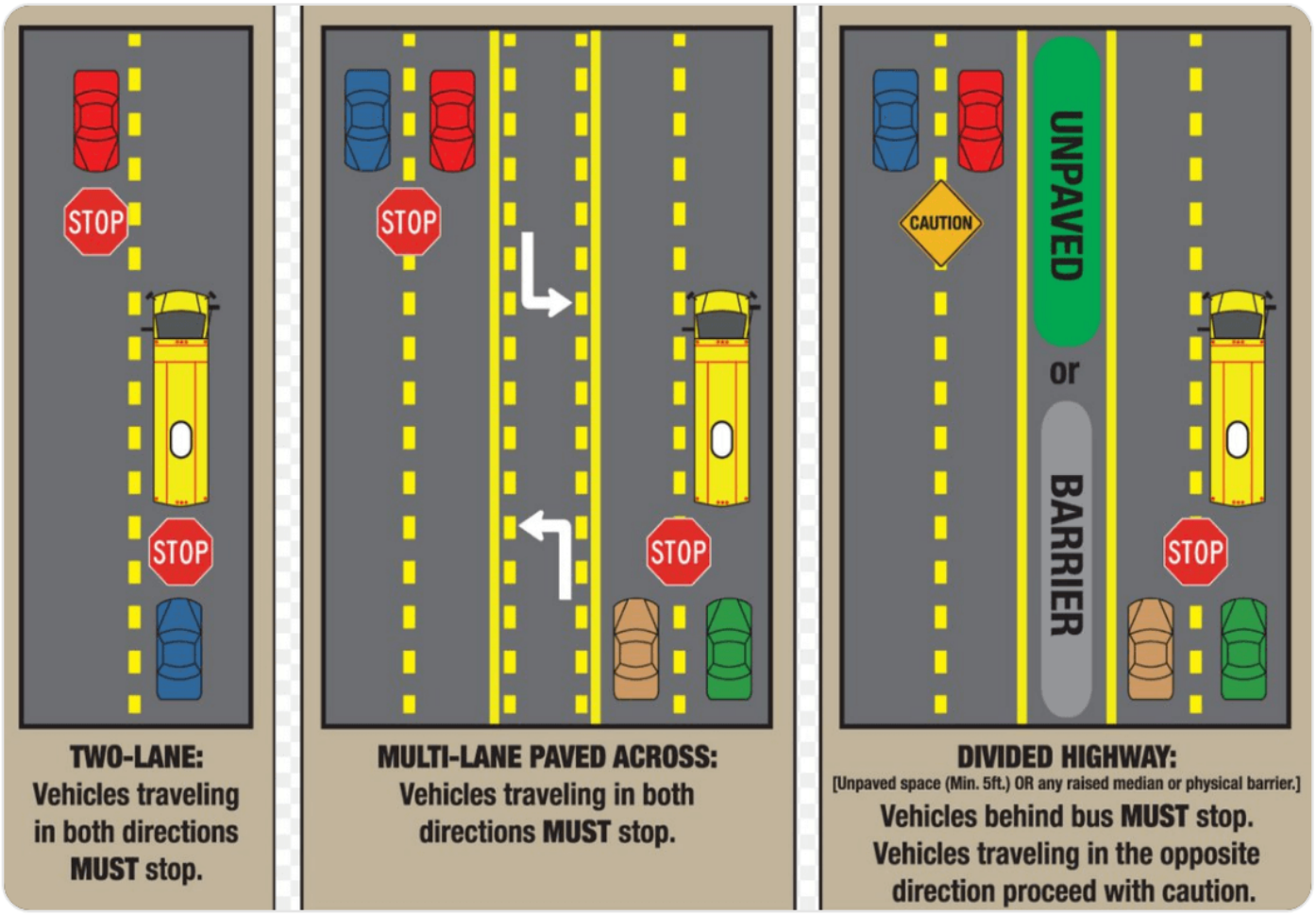
O

N

E



WHAT TO DO WHEN YOU DRIVE UP TO A SCHOOL BUS



Notices of Upcoming Events:

Brushy Creek MUD's Family BBQ Event is cancelled due to Covid-19.

Williamson County's Career Fair

Looking for a new career opportunity complete with medical benefits and retirement? Look no further than your own County! On Monday, **September 13**, from 11-2PM, different departments of Williamson County will have tables set up and personnel ready to help you explore employment opportunities right here in Williamson County.

Where: 100 Wilco Way off Inner Loop in Georgetown in the grey Georgetown Annex Bldg.

Who: Tax Assessor/Collector Office, Emergency Medicine, Parks, Regional Animal Shelter, Facilities, IT, Elections, Juvenile Services, Road & Bridge, Auditing, County Attorney, District Clerk, Justice of the Peace 3 (Georgetown).

When: **Monday, Sept 13, 11-2PM**

Hope Alliance - IT IS TIME FOR OUR 3RD ANNUAL SURVIVE. THRIVE. PREVENT 5K!



JOIN US ON SATURDAY OCTOBER 2, 2021 AT 9:00 AM AT SAN GABRIEL PARK IN GEORGETOWN.

REGISTER OR SPONSOR HERE!

Join me, I'll be the Master of Ceremony for the 3rd year, for this great fundraiser and good time.

Does a Saturday group Bike Ride thru the Eastern part of the County Sound Appealing??

The **Mamma Jamma Ride** may be just your calling. September 18 starting and ending on Taylor's Main Street at Heritage Square Park at 4th and Main.

Mark your calendars for 2021 Texas Mamma Jamma Ride on Saturday, September 18, 2021 in Taylor, TX. Presented by Lone Star Circle of Care, the Texas Mamma Jamma Ride is an annual charity bike event that raises funds to support the life-saving mission of the Big Pink Bus.

The Texas Mamma Jamma Ride is an annual bike event that raises funds to support Lone Star Circle of Care's Big Pink Bus mobile mammogram service for low-income women.

Start Pedaling & Join the Fight! Form your team, sign up and have the fun of a protected route through a myriad of county roads in the Eastern part of the county.

Texas Mamma Jamma Ride c/o Lone Star Circle of Care
205 East University Avenue, Suite 200
Georgetown, TX 78626
(512) 297-7740
marion@mammajammaride.org

All proceeds of the Texas Mamma Jamma Ride support the operation and administration of the Big Pink Bus, a mobile mammography unit. The Big Pink Bus is owned and operated by Lone Star Circle of Care, a 501(c)(3) nonprofit corporation and federally qualified health center providing exceptional and accessible patient centered healthcare for our Texas neighbors.

You can start a team with family, friends, colleagues, or just a group of people who want to get to know each other while supporting a great cause. Teams are a great way to enjoy a little friendly competition, foster community and camaraderie within your company or group, and to share the ride experience with people you care about. Your team can include participants of all different skill levels. With 15, 25, 50, and 70 mile routes to choose from, there's a distance that is right for all!

It's Easy!

Complete your personal registration

Invite friends, family, co-workers to join, Race starts at Heritage Square Park in Taylor at Main & 4th.

Brainstorm with your teammates fun ways to reach fundraising goals. Check out Fundraising Tips and Tools for ideas! Your team needs to raise $300 for the Pink Bus.

Have a blast together during the ride!

Need Help? Here's a useful guide on how to manage your team fundraising page.

Have Fun with Your Team Name

For More information, check out https://fundraisers.mammajammaride.org/event/2021-texas-mamma-jamma-ride/e296066

Like and follow Texas Mamma Jamma Ride on social media
(Facebook, Instagram, Twitter and LinkedIn) for all the latest news and updates.



IN COMMISSIONERS COURT

AWARDS SEASON







Williamson County Employees of the Year
L-R: Jim Daniels, Laura Gorman, Michael Shoe

In an unprecedented year, that included the pandemic and the worst ice storm in memory, Williamson County recognized three Employees of the Year for their leadership. The award recipients were selected by a committee from 35 nominations in three categories:

Pandemic Leadership: Jim Daniels, with Information & Technology Services, was invaluable in helping the county workforce transition to working remotely while ensuring network security in the new reality. He led the roll-out of Microsoft Teams prior to the pandemic, which proved to be instrumental in keeping departments connected while working from home. Jim provided additional training across the county to make sure everyone could use Teams efficiently.

Professional Leadership: Laura Gorman, criminal division chief with the County Attorney's Office, joined the County Attorney's Office in March 2020, one week before the determination for most county employees to work from home. When COVID hit, she established a remote work schedule for 30 employees, while she remained in office to assure that the County Attorney's Office doors never closed. Laura maintained communication with the defense bar, judges, the jail, mental health providers, support services and staff to ensure work was conducted up to the expectations of the citizens and elected officials. She trained new employees, over saw the filing of 3,170 new criminal cases, 382 protective orders, 39 bond forfeiture cases, 308 pre-trial division cases and resolution of 2,511 cases with no jury trials. Most notable is the quality of training and mentoring she provided to her team.

Project Leadership: Michael Shoe, director of Emergency Management, along with other department heads, helped care for Williamson County employees, citizens and even those outside the county as the pandemic began. Michael and his team also took the lead and coordinated testing and vaccination sites. To add another layer of emergency response, Michael and his team coordinated with other department heads to orchestrate services for Winter Storm Uri, the largest winter event Texas has ever seen. This affected the community in many ways, with vital resources unavailable, creating a widespread impact on citizen's health, safety and wellbeing. Without Michael's leadership and his team going above and beyond normal deployment measures, our community, workplace and lives could have been very different during the past year.

In a very dark year, Jim, Laura, and Michael provided some light through their service to Williamson County. As you can imagine, none of these positions are your regular 8am-5pm jobs. We are extremely lucky to have them on staff. Congratulations!

IN THE NEWS

Williamson County Commissioner Cook: Texas' wacky laws and everlasting myths

Williamson County Commissioner Cook: Texas' wacky laws and everlasting myths (statesman.com)

If you believe this last session of the Texas Legislature was full of unbelievably bad bills and resolutions, you may need to study Texas history. This is a state of tall tales, big lies and stellar memoirs.

If you've not read the two-volume set "Texas" by James Michener, might be time to check out those tomes from the library. Weaving fiction, folklore and the truth, Michener sets the stage for modern-day Texas, its people, legislators and attitudes.

Urinating in public is probably prohibited everywhere in the United States, but if you do it on the Alamo, it becomes a state jail felony defined in the Texas Penal Code as criminal mischief of a public monument. There are restrooms there.

In Austin, evidently it is illegal to loiter anywhere in the city limits with the intention of flirting. Those heading out to Sixth Street on a Saturday night might want to take heed.

On that note, don't go leaning on the bar when drinking beer. Apparently there was a law declaring it illegal to take three sips of beer while standing up. Perhaps that's the reason there's so many bar stools.

Marriage ceremonies when one or both people are serving in the military out of the country can occur with properly documented proxies. Virtual is not a new concept here – more like an out-of-body experience.

Regarding marriage, there's more. Texas does allow for "informal" marriages. A couple can agree to live together and refer to each other as spouses without a marriage license. No state law would recognize them as married after a certain period of time. However, there is no common law divorce so should you part, division of property is not approved by the courts. One or both of the parties would need to file suit to establish the existence of a "marriage" for legal support of a divorce.

There's a resolution declaring May 26 as John Wayne Day for a 10-year period beginning in 2015. Now John Wayne wasn't born "John Wayne," never lived in Texas and only two or his 140 movies were filmed in Texas. At the time, Lt. Gov. Dan Patrick declared that the public thinks of John Wayne when they think of Texas – really?

Despite opposing fervor in the Legislature, our senators and representatives do show a bit of Texas humor from time to time. Allegedly, when the bill requiring licensing for concealed handguns passed, a companion mock bill was created requiring licensing for concealed gum. Fortunately for us all, that didn't go anywhere.

Lastly from the law, in the Commissioners Court, frequently the phrasing "take action on an order declaring an emergency and a grave necessity due to unforeseeable circumstances and approve a budget amendment acknowledging additional expenditures" is heard.

It sounds so drastic; why do we use those words? The budget is set once a year for all county functions and should be modified only for exceptional circumstances. We must use those tort terms in the phrase to accept contributions like firewood sales in Berry Springs Park, donations to and profits from purchases for the Regional Animal Shelter, or donations to the sheriff's office.

Occasionally these budget adjustments are due to unforeseen needs or expenses at the time the budget is set but occur later during the fiscal year of Oct. 1 through Sep. 30. The court must amend the budget to then accept or spend "unbudgeted" money, which modifies the established budget. OK, I agree with you — overkill, but that's the way it is.

Now to dispense with a few of the highly suspect or downright invalid myths.

First, Texas is not the only state that was initially its own country. California was the California Republic for about three weeks before becoming a state. Its flag is part of the state of California flag today. Secondly, Hawaii was both a kingdom and a republic before becoming a state. Texas can't beat that. Florida was an independent country named Muskogee. Finally, little Vermont was an independent republic for 14 years before becoming a state.

You can't pick bluebonnets. Wrong! This applies only to bluebonnets that are not on your property (and state property is not technically "your" property). If you have been given explicit permission by the legal owner of a property to pick them, you may.

In closing, at least not even the benevolent HOA overlords can now prohibit your children from selling lemonade.

Construction of the new Great Oaks Bridge over Brushy Creek

With the completion of Hairy Man / Brushy Creek Roads' safety projects, don't get comfortable driving them just yet! We anticipate the Notice to Proceed on replacing the existing bridge over Brushy Creek to be for September 30, 2021. DeNucci Constructors is the awarded contractor (having completed Hairy Man in record time with the road closure – than you to everyone who established a different route during the closure and didn't complain, at least to me!) and did the Brushy Creek Road and parking lot work.

As a reminder, this was the existing bridge that was never aligned with the other roads and was very narrow and low. I believe this is from Hermine in 2010:

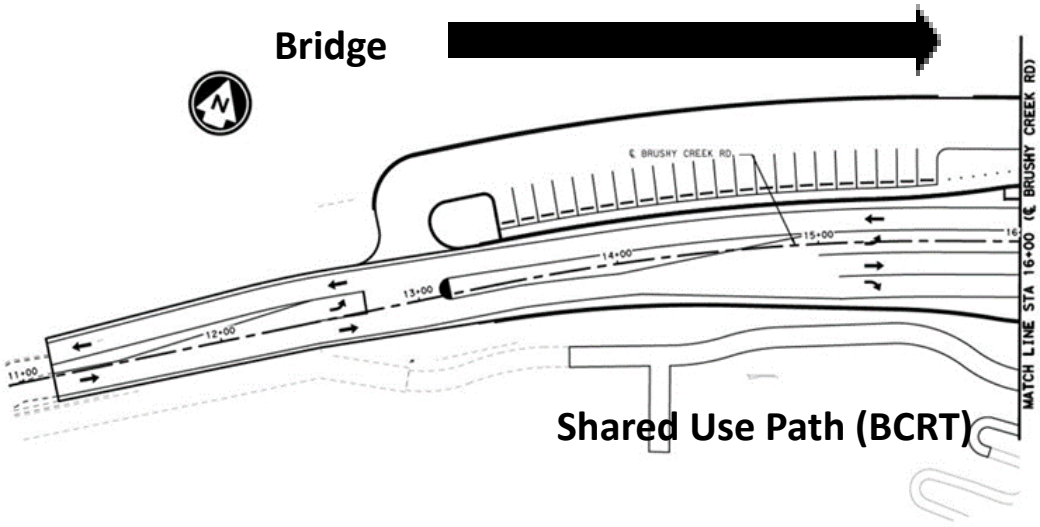


It's replacement will be very different and provide 57 parking places under the bridge. There will be traffic signals atop the bridge as well. Lighting in the covered parking lot will increase safety and evening use. Those on Brushy Creek Regional Trail will not need to cross vehicle traffic when moving east-west. Estimated cost is $10,580,634 and is expected to take 585 calendar days to substantially complete – assuming no severe weather events.

Please see plan drawings on the next page...



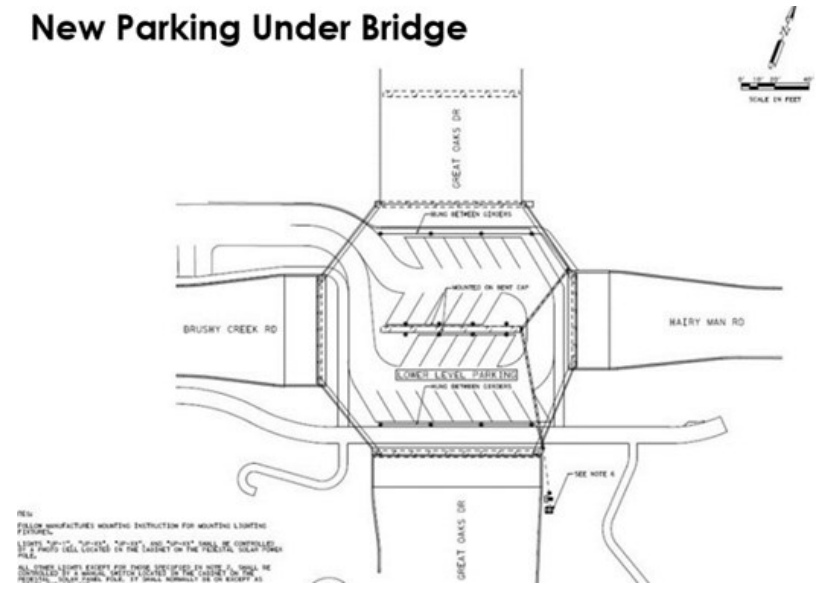
Bridge



Outside parking off Brushy Creek Road as lane goes into covered parking

Shared Use Path (BCRT)

New Parking Under Bridge





Where is Commissioner Cook?

Successful Transition Education Program



Williamson County Juvenile Services, in partnership with the Georgetown Independent School District, and with generous financial support from all 12 Williamson County school districts, has revamped what it means for juvenile justice in our county. The education program at Juvenile Services is now branded as Successful Transition Education Program or S.T.EP.

Students at S.T.E.P. experience the same academic rigor as their home campus, participate in electives and service-learning leadership classes, and have an opportunity to recover credits or earn their general education development (GED), if desired. In short, at-promise youth will be provided quality education and comprehensive trauma– informed support and services as they navigate through challenging life experiences that will carry them past their time at Juvenile Services. Principal Tara Stewart characterized this education program as being trust-based relational intervention (TBRI®).





Commissioner Cook with Matt Smith, Assistant Director of Juvenile Services

Even in the heat of an August day could not dampen the spirits of all who came to the ribbon cutting to celebrate the beginning of this program!

AND speaking of Juvenile Justice, Wednesday evening, August 11, the annual back-to-school-bash for families of youth in the Wilco Juvenile Justice Center was held in the Georgetown Community Center with food, music provided by DJ Chad Jackson, games, door prizes and backpacks full of school supplies. Guests and friends included members of the school resource officers from Hutto, ISDs. Food from a diverse group of supporters including Bluebell Ice Cream, Sonic in Taylor, CenTex Jump and Party Rental, Bites and Brews, Sonic Georgetown, Sweet Lemon Kitchen, Austin Gourmet Popcorn, Schlotzky's, ATX Sliders, Hula Cowgirl and Chicken Express – just makes your mouth water. Further, many partners had tables of resources for the families and games for the kids to play.

For the older crowd, Bliss Nail Salon was providing eyebrow waxing or threading, Moo Gypsy Tribe was doing face painting and MTZ and JC Salon provided haircuts to any youth wanting or needing one. An abundance of door prizes were given out funding by many friends of the Juvenile Justice, HEB and Apex Foundations of Austin.



Anxiously awaiting their number to be called



Numbers on tickets get smaller every year. Note: I did lower my mask to read the winning numbers



Got Drugs…you want to get rid of?

Well, we've got a place for you! Up to now, there's been the lobby of the Sheriff's Office in Georgetown. But soon and much more conveniently, there will be the lobby of the Tax Office at the Jester Annex on East Old Settlers, the Williamson County Annex at 412 Vance St. in Taylor, or at the Jarrell Police Department, 161 Town Center Blvd. Med Return boxes have been ordered to keep you from flushing those drugs down into the wastewater system, out of the hands of those who shouldn't have them, and off the streets. Just bring those no longer needed, out-of-date, or those found in the back of drawers or cabinets. Feel good about disposing them. The Med Return Boxes will be open to the public by the end of September. Excluded are sharps, syringes, inhalers and liquid medications – sorry. It is recommended that you bring those pills in original containers but scratch off your personal information. Or you may pour them into a Ziploc bag prior to putting them into the Med Return Box. For more information, check out www.lifeStepsCouncil.org/rx/

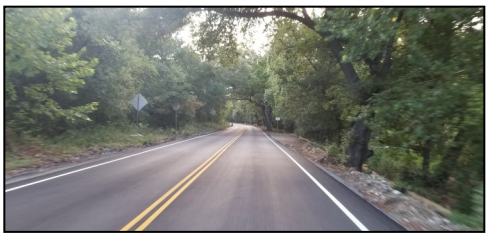
Speaking of LifeSteps – they are supporting TxCOPE, Texans Connecting Overdose Prevention Efforts, a new overdose supporting platform launched by the University of Texas through the Texas Targeted Opioid Response funds. The goal is to improve Texas overdose data efforts to better serve the community. This is the second year that LifeSteps has not been able to sponsor the Overdose Awareness Event at Old Settlers Park which brings together the grieving family members of those lost to drug overdose, allowing them to grieve and perhaps find peace in the presence of those with similar experiences. TxCope has a goal of improving Texas overdose data efforts to better serve the community. Anyone can report overdoses at www.txcope.org . For more information checkout LifeSteps Council's YouTube Channel.

ROAD UPDATES

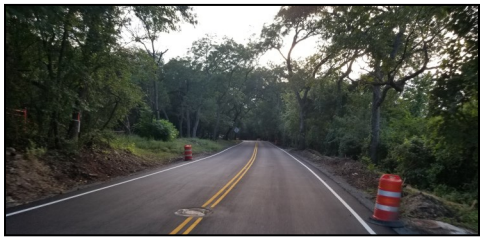
620 at Railroad/Chisholm Trail (TxDOT with primary contractor Bridges and Roads LLC)– If you've driven through this area recently, you can tell so much more of the work being done is now above ground. The area changes frequently, so please be alert as you drive through there.. Go HERE to learn more. Estimated completion date is summer 2022.

Great Oaks Bridge at Brushy Creek Rd. (Contractor: DeNucci Constructors LLC)– All utilities are officially out of the way. Will wonders never cease! Construction is anticipated to begin September 2021. Estimated cost is $11.2M. Learn more HERE.

Brushy Creek Rd. Safety Improvements (Contractor: DeNucci Constructors LLC)– Learn more about this project at this website. Mostly done now, except for striping & cleanup. Yay!



Hairy Man Rd. (Contractor: DeNucci Constructors LLC)– Curb and gutter from Creek Bend Overpass to Sam Bass Rd., excavating and the placing of asphalt on the eastbound side west of Brushy Creek Bridge, and the pedestrian ramp at Sam Bass Rd. have all been completed, and a guardrail has been installed. The closure and detour of Hariy Man Rd. ended on 8/20/21. Still a beautiful drive!



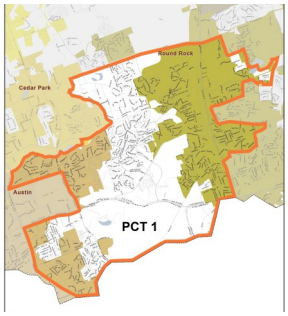
Pond Springs Road Area Drainage Improvements– Agreements have been reached with all entities. Cue the Jeopardy music: This is a regional drainage management project where county wants to share drainage pond with Austin and TxDOT—so much review is necessary. 60% complete design plans for the project are under development and will be submitted to TxDOT next month and to City of Austin for their review process. Construction slated to begin late 2022. County project with estimated cost of $4.17M.

Forest North Drainage Improvements Phase III (Contractor: DeNucci Constructors LLC) – Storm sewer pipes and drain inlets on Newberry Dr. and Shady Oaks Dr. continue to be installed, as is a water line on Shasta Lane. A lot of asphalt is being laid down to the relief of the neighborhoods. All safety end treatments were completed on Shady Oak Dr. This is a county job to create drainage in this very flat area with an estimated cost of $4.8M. Substantial completion is still anticipated in 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!!!* Storm sewer work on westbound University continues. Traffic signal foundations on the west side of University Blvd. and University Oaks have been removed and concrete paving has been poured. At the N. Mays intersection, traffic signal foundations have begun to be drilled. This is a City of Round Rock project for which the county has contributed $5M. Project is slated to finish in early 2022. It can't come soon enough for the traffic on that road.

Wyoming Springs @ Smyers Lane— Additional public outreach is being conducted in response to public comments on safety concerns. Commercial development along Smyers Lane has introduced increasing traffic loads and safety issues. Environmental due diligence has been completed, and the interlocal agreement with the city has been executed.

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!

LOCATION: Williamson County Jester Annex
1801 E. Old Settlers Blvd., Suite 110

MAIN PHONE: 512-244-8610

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! - 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