

Williamson County Commissioner Terry Cook

NEWSLETTER

August 2022 Volume 6 Issue 8

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The Message



To EV or not to EV, is there really a question?

Where are the cars? I may be on borrowed time driving my 22-year-old Toyota Sienna van with over 331,000 miles on it. Not dripping oil but...it's developed its quirks. I have struggled with considering internal combustion engines, even hybrids, which could give you double headaches. While it's early in the EV game, if I save the van for road trips, an EV will fit my daily needs. So then, which EV? Hyundai Ioniq popped up in a search as the 2022 World Car of the Year, 2022 World Car Design of the Year, and 2022 Electric Vehicle of the Year.



All that and it is very limited in availability – not even every Hyundai dealer is shipped this car. Well, I plopped down my money in late July to get on a wait list – yep, they have you over a barrel. Now, I wait. Recently, the 2023 Ioniq 6 was announced and 47,000 people ordered the car on the first day. Hard to believe I'm waiting on a vehicle I've not even sat in, but there were copious videos about the car and its features. Lots of reviews. Guarantee for 10 years on the batteries.

Then, as an owner with a garage, we wanted a charging system – Which? Where? We didn't even know the questions to ask. Finally, we got comfortable with features and options for

charging and to Amazon we went after our first exhaustive bid from a local electrical company.

Fortunately, my husband has truly useful household skills, and we tackled the installation of an at-home charging system – thru 4 attics later, we had the very heavy and stiff wiring stretched out from our outside panel across the garage to the one wall with space without competition for holding something else. And that space put the charging hose on the right side of the car. By 11AM last Saturday the charger was mounted and connected – only one glitch...supply chain issues with the circuit breaker needed for 60AMP/220V power for faster charging (but not the fastest available). So, anyone tackling this project needs to start by establishing what model 2-pole, 60Amp circuit breaker you need that fits your circuit panel outside on your house – ours is an Eaton (formerly Cutler Hammer) and you won't find what you need at Home Depot or Lowes. Well, it could be months before the car shows up.

Second issue is that it can't be charged on Tesla chargers as dear Elon decided with proprietary connectors. It's Electrify America for this car, and I get two years of charging with the car – that's the Round Rock Outlet mall my friends – shop away while you charge. I have been to two webinars/discussions on EVs and the nationwide need for chargers – can the grids even support what is going to happen in the next 10 years? This is America – we can do it! My thoughts on Abbott's goal to establish charging stations every 50 miles was to just put them in the rest stops: 24-hour bathrooms, vending machines, picnic tables and areas to walk your dog and long parking spaces to accommodate queuing. Well, rumor has it the oil & gas industry got involved and lobbied to keep private industry out of doing any business in those rest stops... Buc-ee's will have to come thru for us. There is a team of 3 – that is THREE – engineers in TxDOT trying to figure out where to start installing public-private charging stations with the intent of the public withdrawing in 5 years. There seems to be mondo grant money to assist in establishing EV charging stations, but you're going to need more than 3 engineers to take advantage of that as you tackle what-where-how.

Next is to watch what happens in every municipal building code and appendices for wiring up homes, especially new ones, for charging – will they be required? Stay alert. How much are builders going to charge? Our charger was \$749 at Amazon, and our 125LF of 4-wire 220-volt wiring was just over \$330 at Amazon. We didn't install a plug in the wall but wired it directly into the charger itself.

Austin Energy is currently the 3rd largest public electric utility, and they have a Plug it EVerYWhere program where for \$4.17/month you have unlimited charging at any of their over 1,000 stations distributed around Austin. Go to [Austin Energy](#) and search for their map if you're in their area.



I've floated the idea of establishing charging stations around on county parking lots where an EV driver would use plastic to pay and have the opportunity to charge up some while they're waiting at the tax office or have a court hearing, etc. No takers yet – think that will change. Departments such as our IT department do lots of about-the-county runs, and electric vehicles could work for them. I'd especially like to have the small transport truck, flatbed, box, whatever structure works on the back of these vehicles for the parks – silent and non-polluting, no oil changes, mufflers, etc. A manufacturer of such a vehicle is just west of my office on Old Settlers on the south side of the Upper Brushy Creek Water Control and Improvement District's dam: Ayro – look at [Ayro.com](#).

The Budget

The FY23 (Oct 1, 2022-Sep 30, 2023) budget is adopted – a whopping \$505,588,447 total for operations, debt service and Road & Bridge. However, with our growth AND especially businesses moving into the county, the tax rates were reduced from FY22. We will continue to aggressively pay down our debt which does save millions in the long run. This budget finally addresses needs of the Sheriff's office and jail staff. I've read through many of the comments recorded on proposed tax rates from the Tax Office – yep – no new taxes rings loudly – however, how can any entity survive on last years' income when this year's costs are higher, and in some cases really higher. Let's look at Road & Bridge. That organization is responsible for road maintenance, construction of roads not under the Road Bond program, mowing of county rights-of-way and trimming of any tree limbs from trees in the right-of-way. Here we go on what they're facing:

Over the past year, we have seen significant price increases of material costs. These price increases appear to be industry wide, as publicized in TxDOT's Highway Cost Index (HCI). Below is a table that shows the price increases from October 2021 to August 2022 for several construction materials we use for maintenance:

Material	% Increase
Lime	28%
Cement	18%
Flex base	22%
Surface asphalt	73%
Surface aggregate	75%
HMAC	49%
Concrete riprap	40%
Concrete box culverts	4%

Around first week of October, all tax rates for entities in Wilco should be set (ESDs, ISDs, WCIDs, etc) and the site www.williamsonpropertytaxes.org can be used for you to take a look at your property's tax bill for 2022.

While TxDOT's HCI publishes statewide bid averages and trends, our local costs reflect large increases as well. For example, we use asphalt pre-mixed material for patching pot holes, shoring up shoulders, and leveling up roadways as a part of our prep work. Since March 2022, we have seen a cost increase of 30% for our pre-mixed asphalt materials. The table below shows a 3 year commodity price history:

Asphalt Mixes	Bid Price (\$/ton)
Aug 2019	\$ 71.50
Sept 2021	\$ 88.64
April 2022	\$ 89.86
June 2022	\$ 109.68
Summer 2022	Due to lack of product availability, we are also purchasing material from buy-board for \$136.40

Many of our vendors rely on the hauling industry to deliver materials to our job sites and storage yards. Due to the rising and variable costs of diesel fuel, many vendors have requested price increases to cover hauling costs. According to the U.S. Energy Information Administration, for the gulf coast region, diesel has increased 33% since the end of October 2021.

Additionally, our recent bids for construction have come back with higher than expected totals, primarily due to material prices. But diesel high prices hurt on delivery costs.

Project	Description	Bid	% Over Engineers Estimate
Live Oak Ranch Ph 1	Full depth reconstruction, grading, base, HMAC, and drainage.	\$1,846,058	50%
CR 137 Widening and Overlay	Full depth reconstruction, pavement widening, milling, sealing, and overlaying.	\$1,698,586	33%
CR 139 Culvert	Replacement of cross-drainage structure and roadway reconstruction.	\$ 1,751,359	46%

Yep, nothing is the same or at a cheaper price. No new tax income for the county says we can't even stay even on the road services we have been providing. It's tough business living next to the nation's 10th largest city and being one of the fastest growing counties. We have very little say about growth – someone sells their land and something gets built. The county responds with additional services every year. Commercial growth did help cover needs for FY23 and allowed our overall tax rate be reduced by \$.065/\$100 appraised value for property owners. Even the annual \$.04 tax rate for Road & Bridge went down to \$.037492 despite the high prices needed for road materials. Increased exemptions for residential homesteads stay in place.

Note: Apple construction of new office complex in Williamson County continues and has expanded beyond the original investment. The 2022 appraised value is up to \$325,907,594 up from \$51,962,549 in 2020. It all helps.

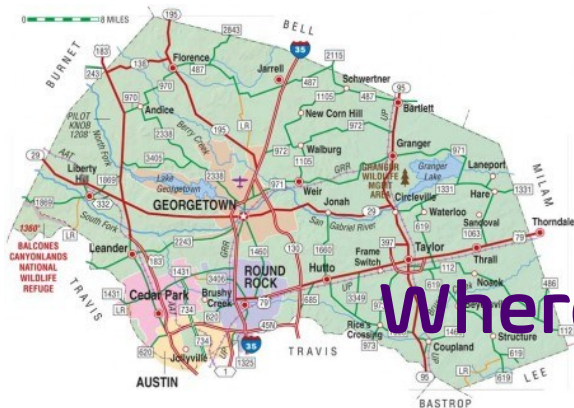


Glen Towery, a resident of Williamson County, is organizing his annual Austin Veteran Art Festival and will include an Auto and Art Show at the Jester Annex, 1801 E Old Settlers Blvd this year

on October 16 from 10-5PM – FREE EVENT

Glenn, a veteran himself suffering from PTSD, recognized what impact the arts of all forms has on healing. Degreed in cinema with a minor in television broadcast production, Glenn created the [Veterans Suicide Prevention VSP channel](https://www.veteransartsandwellnessnetwork.org/watch-live). After its initial 9 months on-line, it had 1 million views. From those humble beginnings came the concept of AVAFEST, bringing the arts to veterans in Central Texas. We are proud to support the AVAFEST efforts this year by sponsoring the car show, veterans' art display, food trucks and vendors this year at the Jester Annex. We hope you will attend. However, no matter where you live, you can tune in to the 2022 festival on the Roku channel and online at <https://www.veteransartsandwellnessnetwork.org/watch-live>

More information on AVAFest is on page 6



Where is Commissioner Cook?

Back to School Helping Hands Bash



August means back-to-school events and I attended two. One was sponsored by the Helping Hands non-profit of Georgetown. It shares space at a former GISD school off Thousand Oaks with the Boys and Girls Club of Georgetown. The Lions Club partnered to offer vision screening. Many non-profits as well as Rock Springs and Georgetown Behavioral and Bluebon-

net Trails joined in offering games, snacks and lunch. We played (I mean everyone) until we were exhausted. Donations of school supplies were accepted and even a group offered free bicycles to families.



A second event was sponsored by the county Juvenile Services Group. Again lots of food, games, photographs and haircuts! This one was at the Georgetown Community Center.



Click on the logo or picture
for more information

October 26-29, 2022



Fall Day of Caring
October 7, 2022



United Way for Greater Austin

Rattan Fest
September 24, 2022



October 16, 2022



IN COMMISSIONERS COURT

2022 Employees of the Year And Project Team of the Year



Williamson County government is full of wonderful, hard-working employees. Here are just a few, our 2022 Employees of the Year: (L-R Johnny Grimaldo, Tanya Kunz, Kimberly Farris, and Julie Kiley)

Johnny Grimaldo, senior purchasing coordinator for the Purchasing Department, received the Wilco Way award for managers. Facing staff shortages and significant workload during the County's immense growth, he also managed to be the lead advisor/trainer on the implementation of a new bidding software. He has been on call during COVID 19 pandemic events as well as storms and natural disasters our county has faced recently. Johnny Grimaldo is a great example of a leader: never complains, no project is too hard, exhibits a great attitude and is well-liked amongst his peers and outside departments.

For the category of Exceptional Customer Service, Tanya Kunz, pre-trial services specialist with Pre-Trial Services, was the recipient. As a pre-trial services specialist, she is usually the most accessible contact to a defendant released on bond. She provides exceptional customer service daily by going above and beyond to ensure everyone she encounters feels heard and their questions answered, or they are provided information that will get them the answers they are looking for. Management has received several compliments from attorneys and court staff on her professionalism and customer service skills.

Kimberly Farris, a paramedic and senior medical officer with EMS, received the Wilco Way award for non-managers. Kim takes on a myriad of additional tasks outside her job description, spending endless hours updating, editing, formatting the protocols and creating a study document to aid paramedics' preparation. She leads the Strategic Planning Team, which sets goals/priorities for the future. Kim is a mentor to the members of this team.

Julie Kiley, first assistant county auditor with the County Auditor's Office, received the award for Professional Leadership. Overseeing a staff of 22 employees, Julie spends countless hours advising and teaching her subordinates, especially important with all of the additional workload due to COVID and various weather-related emergencies. She provides wise counsel to not only the county auditor but to the Williamson County Commissioners Court, elected officials, appointed officials and department heads. The county leadership relies on Julie's expertise daily, Her normal pace is "above and beyond," and she is very deserving of the Professional Leadership Award.

The Project Team of the Year award went to the Parks Department Software Conversion Project Team that included: Minnie Beteille, Inky Chandler-Mertz and Tammy McCulley with Information Technology Services; Kerstin Hancock and Johnny Grimaldo with Purchasing; Melanie Denny and Cortney Husband with Office of County Auditor; and Benita Bonner and Robert Moss with the Parks Department. The project team was instrumental in assisting with the purchase, upgrade and implementation of the Parks Department's reservation/registration/reporting software system. The upgraded platform offers more functionality as well as improved financial reporting and auditing features. The upgraded functionality has increased efficiencies for the Parks Department and county, while enhancing the public's experience through 24-hour on-line access.



IN THE NEWS

Williamson County Commissioner Cook: Annual vacations are time well spent

[Williamson Co. Commissioner Terry Cook: Annual vacations are time well spent \(statesman.com\)](https://www.statesman.com/story/news/2021/05/23/williamson-co-commissioner-terry-cook-annual-vacations-are-time-well-spent/7511112002/)

Fresh back from my annual one-week vacation to a North Carolina beach just in time to be consumed by our annual budget planning and voting.

Roll back the clock. I lounged with feet in the water. The melodic, recurrent, gentle pounding of the surf drowning out all other sounds just clears your head and soothes the spirit. I got a week clear of Atlantic storms with mild breezes, lower temperatures (91° rather than 104°) and no public information requests.

I grew up near the coast and miss the ocean and its mysteries terribly. The rhythm of the wave action as each rushes the shore to deposit its slim edge of foam lulls one into such relaxation unknown to those who vacation elsewhere – especially not staycations where all you seem to do is repeat the home-routines in your life and just look at all the work needed done around your home.

Watching the lone surfer at the end of the day anticipating that last perfect wave to navigate error-free, I smiled soaking up the sinking sun. Each evening pelicans plunged headfirst from their varying altitudes into the ocean, sometimes with a slight twisting adjustment – angle is everything in capturing that fish. While voraciously consuming novels, my sister and I have made this trip for the past nine years. We hike to our selected dining spots from a myriad of restaurant choices each evening – claiming to be burning calories. It is a laid-back lifestyle I could get used to. No porpoises or dolphins (did you know the orcas are the largest dolphins?) this year but also no visible sharks.

There are many county employees building large quantities of banked vacation hours. I suspect this happens in many work environments. Are you one of them? I encourage anyone doing this to rethink that approach and give yourself a break – it's healthy and necessary for a more balanced life. Getting lost in the adventures of a novel is an added plus.

A May 23, 2021, article in Forbes Magazine on the benefits of vacations mirrors the benefits I received getting away. In a poll, they found that 26% of Americans haven't taken a two-week vacation at one time, supporting our reputation for being workaholics. The article also listed results of a World Health Organization's research showing 35% higher risk of stroke with working longer than 55 hours per week and 17% higher risk of dying from heart disease working 35 to 40 hours per week.

With our attentions pulled to emails, social media, calendar alerts and phone calls – we all need to seek solace of isolation and rest. I come back, despite my vacation only being a single week, with a renewed sense of humor, fresh perspective and heightened commitment to the varied issues of public office. The Forbes' article also spoke of the benefits of a relaxed mind. Relaxation on vacation mirrors the benefits of transcendental meditation, perhaps. I came back and even committed to replacing my 22-year-old van with an order for a 100% electric vehicle.

Yep, my road trips may be clipped for a while as I wait for the construction of fast-charging stations throughout the county and across Texas – gone may be my backroads routes. I just can't invest in another internal combustion engine. Even that frugal husband of mine is kind of excited with this newer technology and is investigating installing that fast-charging system in our garage. It will be interesting to see how it serves me in my around-the-region trips. Guess I will then need to always have reading material in the car.

This is the last year my sister and I will have our dear B&B to go to as it is being sold to a Northeast real estate conglomerate on Aug. 16. Sigh. Change, of course, is inevitable. We'll spend the next six months seeking a new destination.

No hurricanes have hit the mid-Atlantic Coast or Texas so far despite expectation of a busy season. Fall could be rather exciting.

If you can't get away, at least invest in yourself with a good book. The new Round Rock library is nearing completion. Take a trip in your head and sleep while dreaming about the story and characters. It's good for the soul, brain and your blood pressure.



Another Month Another Award

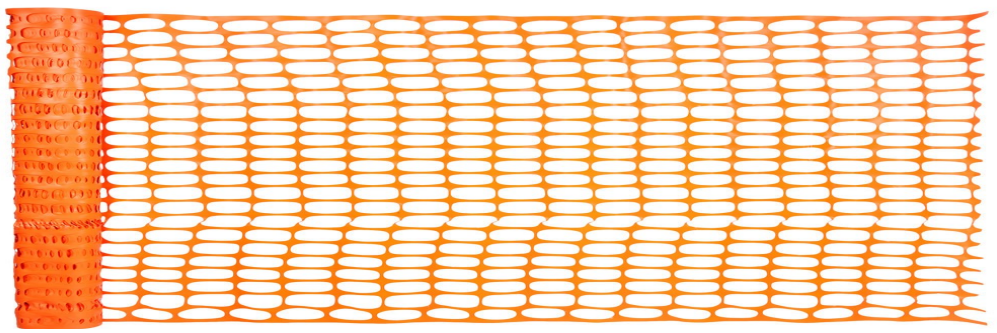
Judge Laura Barker, County Court at Law Two, at center with Round Rock police officers, was the recipient of the Judiciary Service Award from Mothers Against Drunk Driving (MADD) recognizing achievement and outstanding service to prevent drunk driving in Travis and Williamson counties.

Each year, MADD, in cooperation with the Texas Department of Transportation (TxDOT), recognizes achievement and outstanding service as part of the 'Take the Wheel' initiative to end impaired driving. The award is given to a judge who goes above and beyond to support, prevent and eliminate drunk driving. This is the second time Judge Barker received this recognition. The first time was in 2020.

Judge Laura Barker is the presiding judge of the Veterans Treatment Court and misdemeanor DWI/Drug Court program. She has served on the Texas Center for the Judiciary's DWI Curriculum Committee since 2016.

In addition, Anthony Stokes, chief intake attorney in the County Attorney's Office, received the Prosecutor of the Year award for the work he does in helping to end drunk driving working in the DWI/Drug Court.

Congratulations Judge Barker and Anthony Stokes!!!



620 at Railroad/Chisholm Trail (TxDOT with primary contractor Bridges and Roads LLC)– *Lots of switched traffic around this project, so please be aware of the surroundings.* The eastbound traffic moved to the future eastbound frontage road and the westbound traffic was switched to the old eastbound lanes. This will allow for work to commence on the westbound lanes. Curb and gutter has been poured along the eastbound main lanes and on the roundabout under the bridge. The concrete bridge rail and guard fencing is being poured at the ends of the bridge. The new traffic pattern is expected to be in place through December 2022, weather permitting. Road signs and message boards have been placed onsite to alert drivers to the change. Go [HERE](#) to learn more. This is a \$27.5M TxDOT project. Estimated completion date is summer 2023 for now.

Pond Springs Road Area Drainage Improvements– This project is to provide relief to a long-time problem of flooding in the area. Many years ago, the county tried to fix it by digging a deep ditch and by restructuring the road. However, the area still floods and so many of the businesses located here have put up their own dams and other items to try to divert the water away. Utility coordinators are still placing test holes to verify the location of City of Austin water and wastewater lines. A meeting with Austin Water Utility is being scheduled for August-September to discuss the results of the test holes. The cost of the project is \$3.2M. Construction start is anticipated Spring 2023.

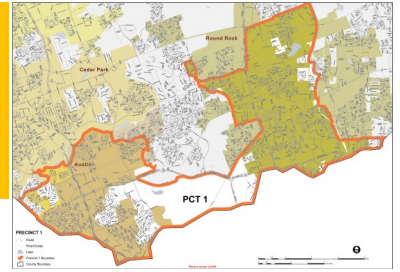
University Blvd. widening from IH-35 to just east of Sunrise Rd. (Contractor: DeNucci Constructors LLC)– Decorative red concrete for the center line medians and islands on University Oaks Blvd. have been poured. Subgrade, the material upon which pavement structure is placed, is being worked on the eastbound lanes between Sunrise Rd. and University Oaks Blvd. and for the approach at the box culvert just east of Baylor, Scott & White. Work on the side streets at Cypress and N. Mays is tying those streets into University Blvd. This project is slated to last forever—no finish in Spring 2023.

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

Because the Great Oaks Bridge project is so important to many of you, we will bring back updates on it, even though it is no longer in Precinct 1— Concrete slab beams from Hairy Man to the Great Oaks bridge have been set. Fill is being placed between the walls along Great Oaks. The old bridge comes down in the end. Hairy Man will open one day. Completion is anticipated in Spring 2023.



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



MISSION

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 US!

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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
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

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

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

Commissioner Cook
keeps meeting with many
MUD Boards and HOAs.
To invite her to your meet-
ing, contact Doris at doris.sanchez@wilco.org or
512-244-8610