

**Williamson County
Commissioner
Terry Cook**

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May 2020 Volume 4 Issue 5

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With the reopening of our community, you may think that the pandemic may be over or at least slowing down. That couldn't be further from the truth. In fact, as of May 28, 2020, new COVID-19 cases have risen in Williamson County 84.33% since May 1. That equates to about 10 known new cases every single day.

Below are trusted sources where you can see updated information. *This is by no means an exhaustive list.*

Be safe everyone. Frequently wash your hands, stay at home as much as you can, and when you have to go out, keep yourself at a safe distance from the next person, and by all means, please wear a mask!

Click on the logos to get more information.



**Williamson County &
Cities Health District**



TEXAS
Health and Human Services

For their statewide dashboard click [HERE](#). Information includes, but is not limited to, cases and facilities by county and region, and numbers of hospital beds and ventilators.

DID YOU KNOW that Commissioner Cook has a Facebook page? Other information regarding responses during this pandemic can be found [here](#).



The Message



Well summer is upon us and school is out --- no wait, that was 10 weeks ago. Whew. This new normal does have some high points, like less time in a vehicle but boy, many lows. The future - definitely too cloudy to see in a crystal ball. We soldier on. There is one known fact: the Covid-19 Pandemic is still mighty among us. The re-opening of businesses and recreation areas are the result of social-economic and political decisions, not medical science. We must continue to be vigilant with wearing of masks, gloves in certain conditions (like gassing your vehicle), giving yourself a 6' clearance from others you are not living with, and all that handwashing. So sorry for all those dry, cracked hands out there. But, as we're seeing, that doesn't mean you can't have fun; we're just finding new ways to exercise, entertain ourselves, graduate, and celebrate.

I want to share critical work being done in the county and one shining star of excellence because of the pandemic.

COVID-19 TESTING

Testing is occurring in many ways within Williamson County. One is under the authority of Dr. Palazzo, our medical director/health authority of the Williamson County and Cities Health District. Another is under the authority of Dr. Henry Higgins with Family Emergency Rooms. Then, a myriad of testing in our doctors' offices and hospitals. All test results are sent to the Texas Department of State Health Services daily.

Access to test kits was the limiting factor for all states and their counties. Wilco's Commissioners Court authorized money to purchase test kits to use on first responders. Indeed, our EMS team has been significantly impacted by their exposures to Covid-19 positive people. By April 26, we announced an on-line screening process for those who felt they were exhibiting Covid-19 symptoms. If the screening indicated a need for testing, they were directed to a site for testing. Also offered were regional pop-up sites. However, testing was only available for those with appointments. All tests go to a lab in Denton by courier or mail. The Health District then has to wait several days for results. The data in the U.S. is showing that 25% of the positive Covid-19 results are from asymptomatic people. This is worrisome as they are among us, unaware, AND shedding the virus everywhere they go. That's why masks, distancing, and handwashing are so important. Without a vaccine, we are all we have to limit the spread of this virus.

There has been a clamor by asymptomatic individuals to be tested. Of course, a negative test just says you were virus-free on that particular day when you took the test. After one nasal swab, you probably don't want to be tested a second time! Williamson County partnered with Family Emergency Rooms to offer scheduled testing to those with or without symptoms - of course, symptomatic individuals got priority with test scheduling. Well, this program couldn't meet the overwhelming demand. It began on April 30 and by May 19, 564 tests had been conducted. On May 20, the registration site had to be closed as 350 more were scheduled and 1,000 were waiting to be scheduled. But, here at the end of May, this website <https://forms.wilco.org/forms/covid19testing> is alive again and scheduling of appointments for testing is occurring at one of two Family Emergency Rooms' locations.

There's another group of highly vulnerable people in the county - those housed in long-term senior care facilities. There are 60 such residences in the county including assisted living, memory care, and skilled nursing centers. Indeed, one large hotspot occurred in a Round Rock facility. The county had planned for a facility to

hold those from these facilities who tested positive for the virus, but the size of the Round Rock facility outbreak meant they needed to stay in place and Covid-19 wings were established within the facility. Meanwhile, the alternative site began being a Covid-19 site as well. A Covid-19 Strike Team was created by the Wilco Emergency Management department and consisted of EMS and trained fire department personnel. The responsibilities of the team(s) were to 1) visit each of the 60 sites to assess needs and adherence to recommended practices, and if there is evidence of virus, establish protocols to contain it. Everyone was looking for personal protection equipment (including us) such as gloves, hand sanitizers, masks, and gowns. The Strike Teams worked to temporarily supply them and help them establish supply chains as their normal providers could not; and 2) test staff and residents when necessary. They are available, day or night, to return to sites should symptoms raise their heads; and 3) They are now part of a planned, continuous assessment process for all these residences for as long as needed. Thank goodness for the Wilco Mask Brigade and all those thousands of hand-crafted masks!

CONTACT TRACING

When someone is symptomatic and a test occurs, that person is encouraged to self-quarantine as they wait a few days for the results. If positive results are returned to WCCHD, they have trained and HIPPA-certified tracers to call the individuals and start a contact tracing for this person. These groups of contact tracers are using the Microsoft Teams application for communication and organization, and they are generally Williamson County employees with regular jobs and give time to this effort as well as their regular jobs. The Health District sends out, thru Teams, an alert that a new case has been identified and seeks an available tracer. Someone responds and is then assigned to this case. Following a form, the tracer fills out as much as they can prior to speaking to the affected person, then calls (and may call and call). Information is sought as to health information, such as evidence of diabetes, high blood pressure, etc. Then, the tracing questions of where have they been over last two weeks, who do they live with (who should also self-quarantine), where were they working (that organization must be notified by the Health District) are asked. Once the form is completed, it is submitted via Teams back to the Health District. The Health District takes it from there. You can see that the tracing tree of contacts can get quite large and is a challenge around this world to identify.



WILCO FORWARD

This is the shining star among the pandemic. A program to help local, small businesses with less than 101 employees using federal CARES Act funding was announced in early May. The Commissioners Court voted to set aside \$25M to provide cash grants to those qualified businesses to offset the negative impact of business closures because of the pandemic. As of Wed, May 27, 1,521 checks for about \$17.5M had been mailed out – a press release May 29 reported that on May 28, that distribution became over 1,600 checks for \$18.5M. The county has received over 3,000 applications and are still receiving about 30/day. The program is scheduled to end by June 30 or when the money is fully distributed. Scott Hesselmeyer, our County Treasurer, has run lead on this program and is going to address the Commissioners Court on Tuesday (we're meeting live, in-person Tuesday, June 2 at 9:30AM) with further recommendations for this program. I know I have received phone calls from small businesses so excited that their check arrived and were so appreciative – rent and bills were due and now doable. Checks were mailed from the Treasurer's office to get them into those business owners' hands at maximum speed. This has been a collaboration between the Wilco Auditors' office and our Treasurer's team, and it has truly worked! Now, what can we do for those facing rent or mortgage challenges? Stay tuned.





First the good news: As of May 24, 2020, a total of 63.8% of Williamson County residents have self-responded to the 2020 Census! That is higher than the current statewide average of 54.7%. Out of 254 Texas counties, we are #7 in the percentage of self-responses. The Wilco 2010 total self-response was 69.6%, so we are almost there. Great job, everyone!



Now, the not-so-great-news: 34.2% of Wilco residents have not responded yet. You can go ahead and fill out a 2020 Census form [HERE](#) without the number on the census mailer that you may have received. It's very quick and easy online (fastest) or on the phone, your answers are safe and confidential, and if you complete your census form, a Census Worker will not have to come to your house to ask you these questions in person. Please answer the census now. It's important!



You can see a sample questionnaire [HERE](#) to have your answers ready, in case you do this by phone.



Now more than ever, we should all respond to the 2020 Census by Internet, by phone, or by mail. Responses are kept confidential, and it's easy to respond in English or one of 12 other languages. The Census count directs federal funding for the next 10 years for our community. Census data is used to provide billions of dollars in funding for hospitals, school lunch programs, Medicaid and other resources that are needed every year, especially in uncertain times like now. Make sure our school districts, cities, and county receives the funds we need to sustain our programs and ensure our community receives the representation and resources we need by sending in your responses.

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Cedar Park	68%	Florence	34.4%
Georgetown	67.9%	Granger	24.3%
Hutto	65.8%	Jarrell	43.8%
Leander	59.5%	Liberty Hill	49.7%
Round Rock	62.8%	Taylor	57.3%

As of Wednesday, May 27, the Census responses across Wilco are as varied as our people:

Our Wilco Census2020 office opened this last week of May and will be starting "Operation Leave": delivering packets to homes that have difficulties receiving mail at their address. In Wilco, that is 25,600 households. Once those residents have the packets, they can respond by on-line, telephone or thru the US mail service.

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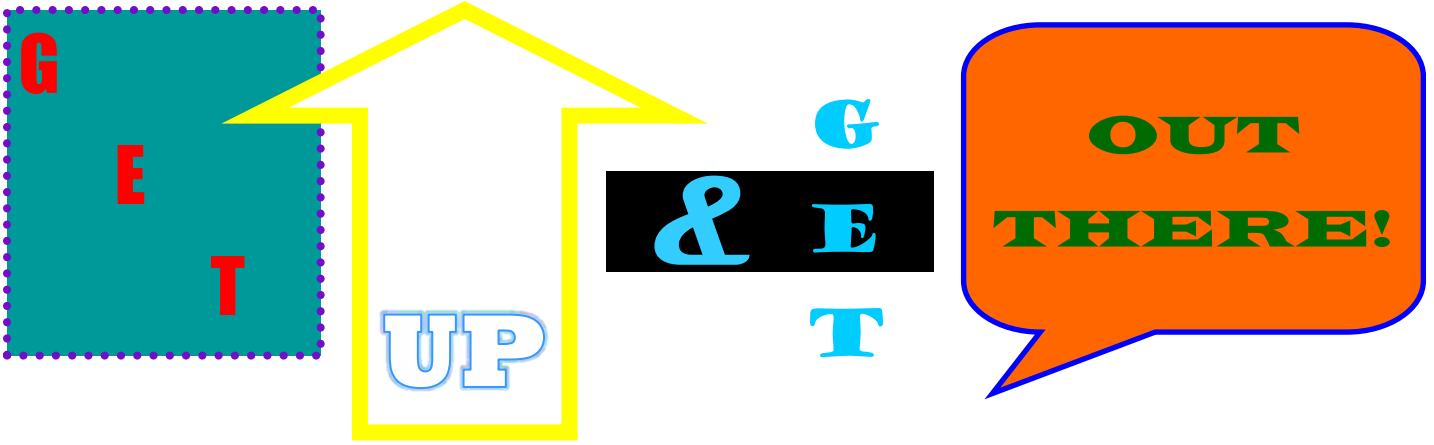


The rails are starting to be installed! The public opening of this section of trail will open soon. Please know that this section is only 0.9 miles long and runs from an area near 620 and Chisholm Trail Rd. and dead-ends at a private property...for now. When taking this trail, you'll have to come back from the end, thereby making a 1.8 mile trek.



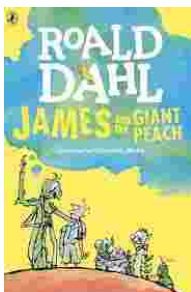
These railings were chosen to look like the sides of the bridge that was installed over Brushy Creek. You may be thinking, "Gosh! It's already rusting! What the heck?" Not to worry! That is supposed to happen. This steel is designed to develop a protective coating of rust. It doesn't deteriorate the rails.

Be on the lookout soon for, what we think, will be a virtual grand opening!

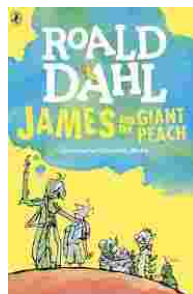


Commissioner Cook was tasked with keeping up the spirits of the Williamson County staff. She has put together a weekly flier that contains a number of links to things that make you laugh, music, art, virtual tours of all kinds, activities for kids, workouts, and moments of zen.

On this page and the next one are some of those links. Click on the logos, pictures, or where it says "HERE." Hope you enjoy! If you would like to receive these weekly fliers, please email Garry Brown at garry.brown@wilco.org, and he will send you a couple.



Episode 1



Episode 2





Short Moments of Zen [HERE](#) and [HERE](#)



Looooooooong moment of Zen [HERE](#)



In Commissioners Court



Aaaaand here they are STILL, but not for much longer!

This is the last month for virtual Commissioner Court proceedings. As Williamson County government is opening back up, Court will go back to live meetings in person on Tuesday, June 2 at 9:30am.

As usual, you can watch them live [HERE](#).

Cook: Digital age keeps justice afloat in Williamson County

<https://www.statesman.com/opinion/20200518/cook-digital-age-keeps-justice-afloat-in-williamson-county>

Sheltering in place from COVID-19 has meant adaptations, postponements and planning for our four Williamson County justices of the peace.

When the first order to social distance by six feet went into effect, our JPs performed weddings with only the couples in their chambers; after the stay-at-home order, weddings went virtual.

For Judge KT Musselman of Precinct 1, who offices at the Wilco Jester Annex in Round Rock, working remotely resulted with him sitting on a couple's coffee table via a cell phone one day to wed a sheltered-in-place couple seated on their sofa.

For another wedding ceremony, Musselman and guests from throughout the state and country watched from 15 computers via Zoom. These ceremonies have given him the idea of offering virtual weddings after they return to their office.

Musselman also has added new meaning to the traditional vows every time he says, "Keep each other in sickness — coronavirus or not — and in health."

He's also exploring how to go paperless, while his staff has rifled through 100 boxes of files to scan and preserve.

Judge Evelyn McLean, whose Precinct 3 office is in Georgetown, gave a whole new meaning to social distancing. She wed a couple at the Children's Advocacy Center gazebo on the Inner Loop in Georgetown from her car via cell phone, as family members watched on Zoom.

McLean's staff quickly adapted to Softphone software to answer phones remotely. She also began offering more online services and forms to the public, including online dispute resolution for certain small claims cases.

Expecting an even bigger backlog than before COVID-19, McLean's staff is drafting processes for online court settings. However, she did say that this time has given her clerks the opportunity to catch up on projects and explore future innovative ideas for court.

Judge Edna Staudt of Precinct 2 works in Cedar Park and had participated in the Continuity of Government training, so she was well-prepared for continuing services when her office had to vacate the facility.

With assistance from Wilco's IT Department, Staudt and her staff were working successfully by remote within a week. Her staff continues to receipt filings of lawsuits, criminal complaints, payment of fines and to process mail.

They're answering phones to provide information and meet statutory requirements for deposits. The case manager continues monitoring orders for juveniles on probation.

However, cases cannot proceed to trial until the state reinstates live proceedings and service of citation (legal notice to the other party that your case is filed and you notified the court about this).

Unless classified as "essential" by the state, live proceedings have been discontinued by law. Live courtroom hearings and service of citation require assistance from the Constable's office for security and serving notices.

In the JP Precinct 4 office in Taylor, Judge Stacy Hackenberg was unable to offer virtual court and began setting hearings for June, when she hopes they'll resume in-person court.

She explained that the remote system can work well if every party has broadband access and the proficiency to conduct business remotely. For customers lacking that access and/or are uncomfortable with technology, virtual court doesn't work as well.

Much of Precinct 4 is rural with limited broadband access, and she suggests that broadband should be available to every resident in the county to offer a more open, accessible and fair judicial system for everyone involved.

Hackenberg foresees an increased emphasis on offering customers self-service options that go beyond online payments, such as offering opportunities in small claims for negotiations between the parties to reduce the need for the court's involvement.

To be safe, Wilco's JPs also were forced to stop conducting in-person inquests in the case of a death, and instead began taking information over the phone from officers on the scene to determine whether an autopsy was warranted.

Virtual inquests have proven one of Staudt's biggest laments. At these inquests, she would always hug the bereaved family members of the deceased and offer prayers. Instead, she began mailing them cards with encouraging and spiritual messages.

Our justices and their staff — just like the rest of us — have been forced to adapt to new ways of doing business. I marvel at their innovative methods and willingness to serve in difficult times and unprecedented circumstances.



DID YOU KNOW that you can see the events that were attended by Commissioner Cook on her official Williamson County office's website? You'll also be able to read her poems, too. Although she's not attending anything right now, you can see all past events [here](#).

Where is Commissioner Cook?



Since Williamson County closed most of its buildings to the public in mid-March, county government has continued to function and be highly responsive to its citizenry, traits that you expect us to uphold. The Commissioner 1 Office has been no exception.

We have been answering emails and returning calls in a timely manner and virtually holding meetings. The important work on behalf of our constituents does not stop. The only difference is that my staff and I have been doing it from our respective homes.

As you may know, Williamson County has come up with a plan to slowly reopen all of our buildings to the public. If you have watched recent Commissioners Court proceedings, you know that I am very hesitant on this point, because Williamson County, much less the State of Texas, has not flattened the curve of new COVID-19 cases. In Wilco, the increase of new cases has risen 65.5% since May 1.

I have one staff member who is in a high-risk group for contracting the virus and another who lives in a multigenerational home with an 11-year-old and an 85+ year old. Taken together with the steady increase in new COVID-19 cases, I have chosen to keep my office working remotely.

You can still expect that we will continue answering your emails and phone calls in a timely fashion. We can still meet, too. Just virtually. Thank goodness for Zoom, WebEx, and all of the other virtual meeting platforms!

We will announce when we reopen.

I hope you understand why I have made this choice. Please be safe and keep our Williamson County neighbors safe by going out only when you need to with a face mask.

ROAD UPDATES

620 at Railroad/Chisholm Trail– A storm sewer pipe west of railroad tracks along north side of the roadway has been installed. A 12” water line pipe was also excavated and installed along the north side of the roadway, west of the Sonic. The 12” water line pipe was connected to the existing pipe near the Wash Tub Car Wash. A TxDOT contractor began clearing right of way in various locations along the north side of the roadway. A storm sewer pipe across RM 620 near Round Rock High School was installed during the evening hours, and crews installed water line and manholes on the north side of the right of way in various locations during the day. Estimated completion date is Summer 2022.

Great Oaks Bridge at Brushy Creek Rd.– The Texas Commission on Environmental Quality (TCEQ) has given its final approval for the plans for the bridge. Utility companies are working on their relocation designs. AT&T is scheduled to finish their construction in June 2020, Charter and Grande in August 2020, and Oncor in October 2020. Hopefully, they can stay on target. Material has been placed under the bridge over Brushy Creek to keep the bats from roosting there. Roadway designs are being finalized. The old bridge will remain in use during construction. The construction is fully funded through the 2013 bond and is anticipated to begin Fall 2020 and take 18-24 months to complete and set to finish in Spring 2022. Learn more [HERE](#).

Great Oaks Water Line Relocations– There have a a couple of challenges with this project that include a sagging bore hole, a cracked encasement pipe, and boring equipment breaking down, which has delayed the completion. For safety in and around the construction area, the Trail will be closed at the boardwalk at Shirley McDonald Park to just east of the Great Oaks Drive and Hairy Man Road intersection. **Fern Bluff water line**: Trenching is complete, 12” pipe has been laid, and area has been backfilled. **Brushy Creek water line**: Installation of three water line pipes are supposed to be completed in the next two weeks. After pipes are installed, the contractor will perform chlorination and pressure testing. Substantial completion is hopeful by late June 2020.

Hairy Man Rd./Brushy Creek Rd. Safety Improvements– Everything you want to know about this project is at this [website](#). We’re still considering a few options in road alignment to maintain as much of the canopy over the road as possible. Design will be revised, then project will be ready for bids. Construction start is not slated to begin until fall 2020.

N. Mays St. Extension from Paloma Dr. to Oakmont Dr.– A bridge rail for the southbound side of the bridge has been formed and poured. The southern approach slab and wingwalls for the northern approach slab for the bridge were also formed and poured. Electrical conduits are continuing to be installed throughout the project. The outfall for the existing detention pond was removed and excavation began for drainage lines at the north end of the project. Utilities relocations are ongoing and nearly complete. Hallelujah! Spectrum still has cable work left at the north end, but we are hoping they will be done by mid-June. This is a joint project of the City of Round Rock and Williamson County that runs parallel to I-35 and will take traffic off of I-35 by supplanting Oakmont Dr. with N. Mays St. across University Ave., to Westinghouse Rd. Substantial completion slated for late summer/early fall 2020.

University Blvd. widening from IH-35 to Sunrise Rd.– Design and right of way acquisition are complete, and utility relocation efforts are ongoing. Road construction to start Summer 2020. This is a City of Round Rock project for which the county has contributed \$5M. Project slated to finish in early 2022.

Pond Springs Road Area Drainage Improvements– GOOD NEWS! TxDOT will allow the use of the area’s drainage pond pending approval of an agreement between TxDOT, the County, and the City of Austin. Drainage design on the preferred option is advancing, and utility relocations are unknown at this time. Construction start is anticipated spring 2021.

Forest North Drainage Improvements Phase III– All easement agreements are done. Waterline designs are with the City of Austin, because they own the lines and thus, are responsible for their design. Commissioners Court awarded the contract to DeNucci Contractors, who was responsible for Phase II work. It will be the 1st 2019 Bond Project to start construction, which is anticipated June 2020.

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

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