

Williamson County Commissioner Terry Cook

N E W S L E T T E R

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The Message



Broadband Analysis for Williamson County

On this past June 8, I placed a proposal on the Commissioners Court Agenda to fund a baseline analysis of broadband support (or not) across all of Williamson County. I requested monetary support for hiring a firm to do this study at a cost not to exceed \$250,000 and proposed using CARES Act funding of which we have \$25 million remaining of the 2020 allocation to Williamson County. I believed that the CARES Act would have applied as the pandemic demonstrated how important it is to have on-line access for everyone using a smart phone or computer.

This plan had been vetted by RRISD Senior Director of IT, Mark Gabehart, and industry experts. Months of work were spent studying cities, counties, and even states pursuing improved coverage and strength for broadband in their regions as to their approaches and reporting of findings. It's an easy read with 5 Appendices including acronyms and terms defined. My intent was to make the reports from this study available to cities, ISDs, Chambers and vendors of broadband both currently in Wilco and to any new ones considering offering services in this county. Using the data, they could present sound support for grant requests to federal programs from the Federal Communications Commission, Depts of Agriculture, Education, Housing and Urban Development, and now the American Recovery Program. Additionally, any Texas broadband initiatives hopefully will come into being and offer grants applicable across the State of Texas.

On that day, June 8, in agenda item 32, I proposed authorizing our Purchasing Agent to create a Request for Proposal (I'd been working with her) for consulting services for the broadband analysis. Covey, Gravell, and Long were silent. Russ Boles was not present, and he was the one commissioner I had talked to about this program as the eastern part of the county is perhaps the most desperate for quality service; he was a supporter of the proposal. I didn't know he was not to be on the dais that day. Without a second to an agenda item, there is no discussion. I was frozen out. You can watch these few seconds of inaction at the Wilco website's Residents portal, select Transparency and then Commissioners Court June 8 video, <https://williamsoncountytexas.new.swagit.com/videos/122569#21302084>

You may scroll down on the right-hand side of the screen to item 32 to read the attachments. On the left of the video screen, forward time to 36:35 to take in Bill Kelberlau's comments – I suspect if Bill K. was king, rural America would still need electricity, then the tactics to prevent public discussion of the item.

On May 28, I emailed the packet of the support documents for agenda item 32 to all ISD Superintendents and their IT leads, Chambers of Commerce Presidents, all City Council members, economic development personnel (all I could find), and four city managers, across the county, with a cover letter, asking them to contact the other members of the court with support if they desired the analysis to occur. In talking with 3 of them later, they thought it would be a no-brainer to approve and did not contact the court members.

For those contacting Commissioner Long about this, she is telling them that the funding is not available for a study. Well, the merits of the study could have been discussed and the issue of funding raised – instead, the plan came from me and was met with silence.

I wish to thank the Leander, Taylor, and Cedar Park Chambers for their support, as well as that of many other regional leaders. I have leaders volunteering to offer testimony if I have the opportunity to bring this forward again. I'm not giving up; this is too important for Williamson County.

Redistricting Williamson County

It is that time for the knives to come out across the country for re-drawing boundary lines for all sorts of things, including representation. Texas, and especially Williamson County, have experienced enormous growth over this past decade. Guess is that we've crossed the 600,000 mark in population some time back – my bet is on about 620,000 residents in our county.

Item 29 was on the June 8th court agenda, a proposal to engage the law firm of Potts & Reilly, L.L.P. to represent our county and assist in the redistricting of our 4 Commissioner precincts and possibly change boundaries of voting precincts in this process and the actual movement of voter precincts into another commissioner's precinct, which I definitely expect.

I spoke against this agenda item on two key points:

1. Redistricting should be a transparent process when selecting a law firm to assist in this effort. There is no need to select this type of legal work in a back room – there is no “discovery data” that needs to be shielded from the public or other lawyers because of potential court hearings, as in lawsuits. I proposed that we should be using the Request for Proposal or Request for Quote process to have a myriad of choices to compare experience and have references to contact. Instead, the agenda item presented this firm with no supporting documentation on experience and references. In fact, this law firm does not have a website, the email address on their letterhead is invalid, and it was hard to find any data on them to support this type of work.
2. What information I did find on the firm's members proposed to be assigned to Williamson County was attorney backgrounds supporting their work with the Republican Party. Now Commissioners Long and Covey (our representatives appointed by the County Judge to the Wilco Redistricting Committee) responded that all lawyers have political alignments and donate to candidates accordingly. My response is that it is probably true, but in general that is not touted in their legal work backgrounds and resumes. (Of course, I couldn't find a true resume for either person.) This firm is allegedly from Horseshoe Bay. The proposal assigned Eric Opiela, a former Republican candidate for Texas Agricultural Commissioner and former Executive Director of the Texas Republican Party, and Donna Garcia Davidson to Wilco. If anyone can dig and find reports of redistricting work by them, please forward to me.

My retort was that if fracking and packing of Williamson County voter precincts is their goal, this was probably the firm to do it. I lost that vote too, 3:1.



Independence Day Celebrations Are Back!

Leave the fireworks to the professionals and go to one of these family-fun events. **Some of these may be held on July 3, and some may require tickets to attend.** Remember, your own neighborhood may have its own parade, too! Click on each link to learn more.

[Brushy Creek MUD](#)

[City of Leander](#)

[City of Cedar Park](#)

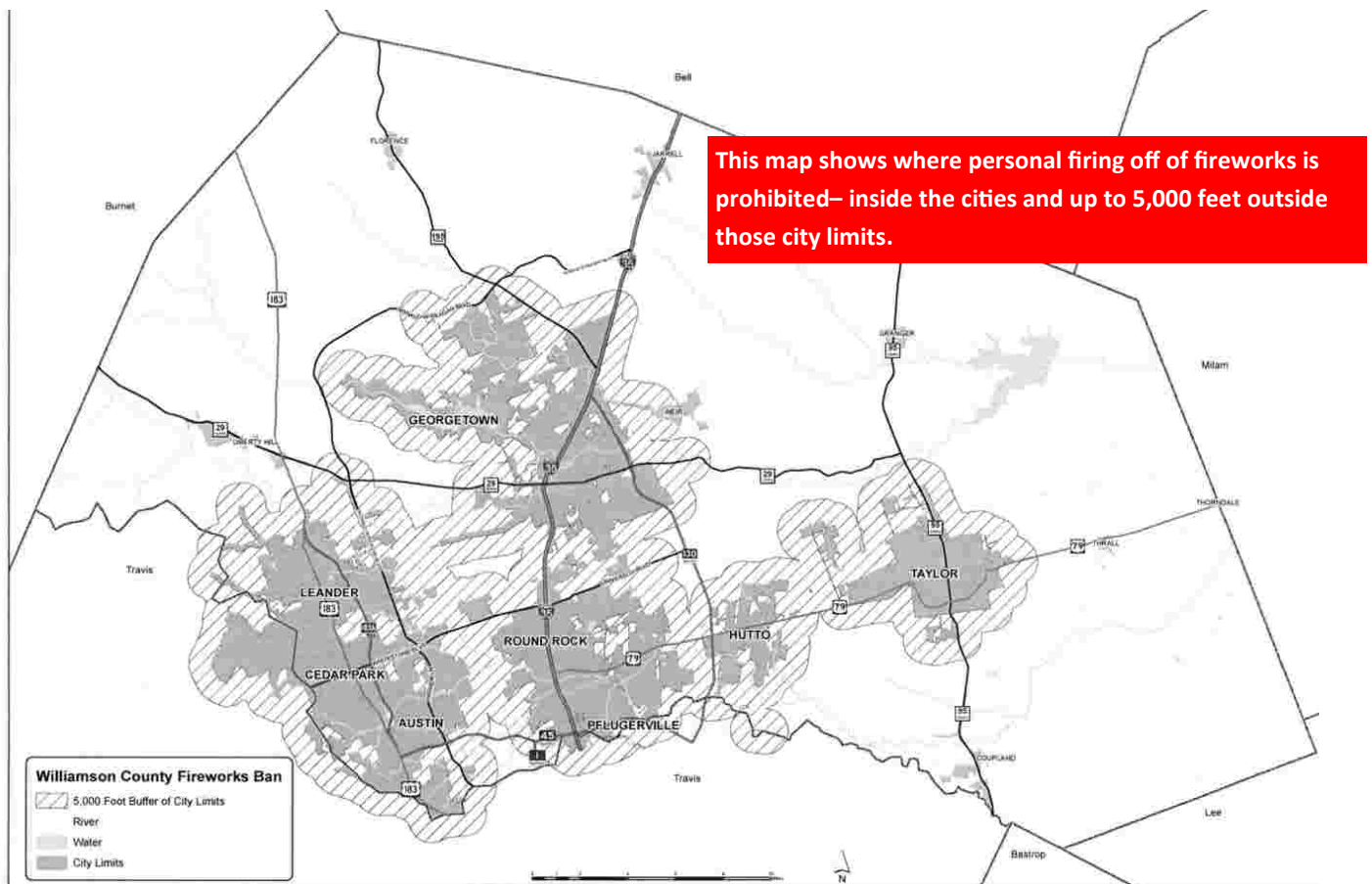
[City of Liberty Hill](#)

[City of Georgetown](#)

[City of Round Rock](#)

[City of Hutto](#)

[City of Taylor](#)



TRAFFIC LIGHTS!!!

O'Connor

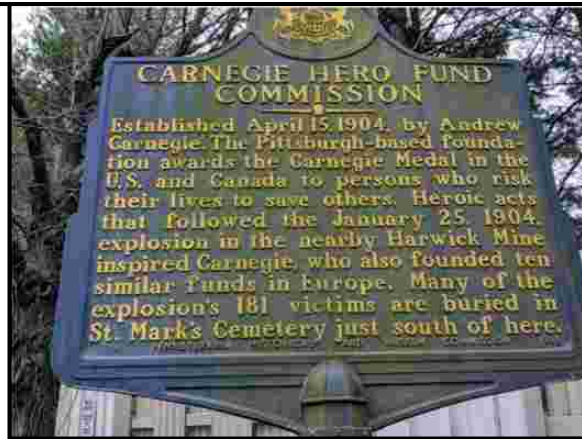
As the dangling signals tease us, we wait. As of June 23, the electrical service at Liberty Walk was not established. Additional ADA ramp work was necessary in several areas. Push buttons for pedestrian crossing seem to have supply chain issues. The saga just goes on and on—Again, we wait.

Cost is ~\$1,000,000. Projected completion is anticipated by the end of *when?* Certainly not hitting the promised end of June.

Sam Bass Rd.

Lights are functioning on Sam Bass Road. Missing are signals for safe left turns from Sam Bass Road to Great Oaks in either direction. This is from a misunderstanding of need. For those of you driving on weekends and rush hours, you know the turning traffic can now just pile up. This is soon to be rectified assuming no supply chain issues.

Believe it or not—we've had at least two occurrences of east-bound vehicles coming thru green light at Great Oaks and leaving the pavement in vicinity of curve at the shaved-ice facility—too fast to hold the curve. The 4-way stop signs had slowed that traffic in the past.



Carnegie Hero Fund

Andrew Carnegie funded a commission to recognize and support those who displayed heroic action when facing very difficult situations. The Carnegie Hero Fund Commission studies nominations each year and selects those heroic actions in which a person puts another before themselves.

It was the Harwick Mine fire disaster, which occurred just outside of Pittsburgh in 1904, that caused Carnegie's Hero Fund in the U.S. to be formalized with a commission. Since then, 8 more hero fund commissions have been established in Europe.

Over 10,000 medals have been awarded out of more than 89,000 nominations and \$40 million in grants have been awarded to date.

On June 9, 2021, Williamson County Deputy Sheriff Jonathan Hudash was awarded the Hero Medal for a 2020 selfless attempt to extract a young man trapped in a burning van in Round Rock. Amidst smoke and flames, he could not undo the young man's seat belt and had to use his pocketknife to cut the belt. Unable to lift the man through the window grasping his arms, he grabbed the man's pants belt and pulled him out of the van window and far enough from the van to avoid the ensuing explosion. The young man died from his injuries the next day; Jonathan's hands were burned and he was treated at a hospital and recovered. His actions are a perfect example of others before self under extreme conditions.

Congressman John Carter presented the award to Officer Hudash at the Deputy A.W. Grimes Training Center in a formal ceremony, as Sheriff Gleason looks on.





IN COMMISSIONERS COURT

ITS Department Award



With the onset of the pandemic last year, Wilcox County departments faced numerous challenges, as you can imagine. What became almost immediately clear was that our ITS department was going to be the backbone of almost every process going forward.

In particular, our Judges and our justice center were going to need some major assistance. The deliverance of justice must be maintained in the face of a pandemic.

To that end, the ITS department worked with our Judges to streamline court processes, made many of them paperless, and put trials online. No small feat for a very traditional business model! For literally transforming the way justice is performed in our county, ITS was awarded the 2021 Tyler Technologies Public Sector Excellence Award.

Thank you ITS for your excellent work!!!

What Every Teen Should Know About Texas Law

The Office of Precinct 3 Justice of the Peace Evelyn McLean is offering a new program to introduce teens to Texas law. "What Every Teen Should Know About Texas Law" is designed for high school juniors and seniors. It is based on the book by Judge Christopher Cypert and is packed full of great information for young people moving into adulthood.

This 10-week program is free and includes topics such as obtaining a driver's license, insurance, traffic tickets, crashes, personal relationships, consumer credit, leases, roommates, moving out early, car repairs, registration and inspection, vacations, social media, getting a job and so much more!

The program will be held on Monday nights from 6 to 7:30 p.m. For information on how to apply, contact Nora Rodriguez at 512-943-1570. Class size is limited to 20 students. First come, first served - so apply today. More information and the application are available on the website at www.wilco.org/JP3. The deadline to apply is July 12, 2021.

IN THE NEWS

Commissioner Cook: Honoring, preserving history in Williamson cemeteries

[Commissioner Cook: Honoring, preserving history in Williamson cemeteries \(statesman.com\)](https://www.statesman.com/story/news/local/2020/05/15/commissioner-cook-honoring-preserving-history-williamson-cemeteries/5141117002/)

While ancestral research can be found online, in family Bibles and from records like death certificates maintained by counties, another good source is tombstones.

But many cemeteries are in the middle of nowhere.

Wayne Ware, chair of the Cemetery Restoration Committee, under the direction of the Williamson County Historical Commission, told me that years ago in Granger, a woman whose husband had died put him in the back of her wagon and started down the road. A stranger saw her and told her to bury him on land nearby.

Also, over 100 county cemeteries are behind locked gates or not yet located. Sometimes a property owner will give permission to relatives or others to get on their land, but many landowners don't live on the property, so gaining access is nearly impossible.

Yet the cemetery committee plods on. It has 16 active volunteers who maintain 20 neglected cemeteries in the county on a rotation basis. The history buried in these cemeteries motivates the volunteers, who call the interred "the pioneers" of Williamson County. The committee has identified 236 cemeteries, 26 of which have received the Historic Texas Cemetery designation by the Texas Historical Commission. Nancy Bell, treasurer for the Historic Commission, said some of these cemeteries date back to the 1840s.

Starting in the spring, the volunteers mow and clean the cemeteries. In the fall, after the weeds and grass die down, they remove dead trees and underbrush.

Last fall, the volunteers spent many hours clearing out the Hargis cemetery, on an acre south of Taylor and north of Coupland. A fund was established by the Hargis family for its upkeep, but the money's whereabouts is unknown. However, the plot had become impenetrable from overgrown brambles, brush, shrubs, and trees, and is known for an abundance of rattlesnakes. Still, the volunteers cleared it.

Eloise Brackenridge, chair of the Historical Commission, tells another story about a Taylor cemetery that began after someone died during a gunfight, and the townspeople needed somewhere to bury the dead.

Round Rock residents Tina Steiner, her aunt Ella Sauls Morrison, Morrison's sister and Steiner's mother, Kathy Effinger, and their cousin, Jessie Carson of Austin, formerly of Round Rock, regularly clean the graves of their ancestors — some who were once slaves — buried in the Hopewell Cemetery across from the Round Rock Cemetery on Sam Bass Road, where white and Hispanic people are buried.

Morrison, now 74, started cleaning Black cemeteries with her parents since she was around 12. Her grandfather bought a family plot in Hopewell when it was called the Black Cemetery. She said that around 1971, her mother spoke to someone in Round Rock city government and asked if city workers would mow the grass on their side of the cemetery, and they began doing so. However, cleanup around each grave is still done by these four women and others through the years. Funds for cleanup and replacement of tombstones are "out-of-pocket," according to Steiner, yet her small group cleans up these cemeteries because "the majority of family, friends and community members we have loved along the way are buried here."

Rocky Hollow Cemetery along the Georgetown to Lampasas road and historically designated, was established on land owned by Thomas P. Chapman in the 1850s, and a Confederate veteran is buried there. By 1870, former slaves who lived nearby began using the cemetery.

To be considered historic, a cemetery must be at least 50 years old and deemed worthy of recognition for its historical associations.

Committee volunteers perform tombstone (or headstone) maintenance throughout the year, and depending on the tombstone, it can require different levels of expertise. Some are easier to work with, but if they are large, their weight and height create problems when moving or leveling them.

If the stones are broken, the volunteers mend the pieces together with epoxy made for the specific type of rock.

Funding for committee volunteers to clean and restore tombstones and cemeteries comes from various sources: the Historic Commission's fundraising, individual contributions, the county, donations designated for repairing tombstones, and community volunteers by providing their time and some of the equipment.

"Several of the cemeteries we have restored have been taken over by local landowners, and even volunteers have taken on their own to clean and restore forgotten cemeteries," Bells said. "It looks like our work has woken up people's eyes to the need."

For more information, visit wilcohistory.org.



Williamson County Receives Distinguished Budget Presentation Award

Williamson County is the recipient of the Distinguished Budget Presentation Award from the Government Finance Officers Association of the United States and Canada (GFOA). This is the eleventh consecutive year Williamson County has received this award which reflects the commitment of the

County and staff to meeting the highest principles of governmental budgeting.

In order to receive the budget award, Williamson County had to satisfy nationally recognized guidelines for effective budget presentation. These guidelines are designed to assess how well an entity's budget serves as:

- ◆ A policy document
- ◆ A financial plan
- ◆ An operations guide
- ◆ A communications device

Budget documents must be rated "proficient" in all four categories, and the fourteen mandatory criteria within those categories, to receive the award.

Thank you to our county budget staff for a continued job well-done! Pictured left to right Sarah Crain (Assistant Budget Officer), Saira Hernandez (Budget Analyst), Ashlie Holladay (Budget Officer)



Where is Commissioner Cook?

About Management and Leadership

Are They the Same?

Doris Sanchez

I had the fortune to hear Terry's speech at the Pavilion Leadership Academy on Friday, June 18, hosted by Executive Director Gordon Butler, training individuals in recovery from mental illness and/or substance use disorder to be peer counselors.

She questioned whether managers and leaders can be the same person; discussed what makes them different; and if they could be successful wearing the same hats.

While a good manager can be trained in a career path, a leader develops skills and intuition typically from innate ability and generally refined through 1-on-1 mentoring.



A person may start a new company wearing both hats; often that individual is pushed into one role or the other by the board of directors as the company or organization matures.

In other instances, people may become instant leaders like elected officials who win elections through popularity contests. Some achieve true leadership while others struggle in this role.

Terry also explored ethical intelligence. She emphasized the importance for all of us to do minimal or no harm to another, avoid knee jerk reactions, make things better, and do it with love if at all possible—think John Lennon.

Out and About

COBRA Graduation

10 officers graduated from Wilco's Corrections Officer Basic Recruit Academy on June 18. We have a critical need for these officers—the accompanying movie reinforced their commitment to their new careers and to each other.

CONGRATULATIONS



The Retirement of Melissa Goins after 38 Years of Service



Carrying tissue for the early minutes of the event on June 17, she delighted everyone with stories of the judges she had worked for over her many years with the county. She is a person of grace, intelligence and enormous organization. As Judge Gravell's executive assistant, she kept his office and our court on task.

We will miss her enormously.



Who hoo—Wyoming Springs is Coming Thru

Wednesday night from 5-7PM, Round Rock hosted an open house on the plans

for the extension of Wyoming Springs Drive from its current terminus at Breakwater to its extension into Behrens Ranch off Old Settlers/Sam Bass Road.



If you missed the open house, please visit the Round Rock site on the project by clicking on the link below.

This is a joint County-Round Rock project with the city managing the project. It is not ready to go out for construction bids yet.

[Wyoming Springs Project](#)

THE RAGGED EDGE

This month we had two opportunities to hear re-caps of the 2021 Legislative Session. Richard Stone has a very relaxed style of questioning his guests on his podcast and eliciting deep insights on topics. In these two podcasts, no pulling was needed to get their insights into the good, the bad, and the ugly of the past 5 months in the Legislature. We had James Talarico appearing at the Texas Beer Company in Taylor on June 10 and James Bucy at Whitestone Brewery in Cedar Park on June 17. With a crowd of Democrats, Republicans, and the I-didn't-know-I-cared crowd, good brew and good food, we were all entertained and left the events much informed.



James Talarico, HD 52, with Richard Stone of the Ragged Edge



MacKenzie Kelly, COA Dist. 6, John Bucy, HD 136, and Terry

ROAD UPDATES

620 at Railroad/Chisholm Trail (TxDOT with primary contractor Bridges and Roads LLC)– Traffic lanes of RM 620 (Round Rock Ave) have shifted north about 14 ft, a subcontractor, Baird Drilling, is drilling shafts for the raised roadway supports. The lanes you need to be in can be a little intimidating—be careful. Go [HERE](#) to learn more. Estimated completion date is summer 2022.

Great Oaks Bridge at Brushy Creek Rd.– Charter and Grande are expected to move their lines by end of July. The Contract is out for bids. Expect construction firm to be selected by end of July. Construction still anticipated to start this summer!!! 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](#). Final pavement on Brushy Creek Rd. from west of Olson Meadows Park back towards Great Oaks Bridge anticipated shortly. Some fencing and drainage work remains. This is a 100% county job with estimated cost of \$4M.

Hairy Man Rd. (Contractor: DeNucci Constructors LLC)– Work began on Hairy Man Rd. and road closure began during the week on June 16 and expects to end on July 23, M-F 6:00AM—5:30PM. Drainage work is underway and all designated trees have been cut down. Substantial completion is anticipated in early 2022. This widening project is part of the Brushy Creek Safety Improvements.

Pond Springs Road Area Drainage Improvements– 60% design of the project is under review. Construction start is still slated to begin late 2021. County project with estimated cost of \$4.17M.

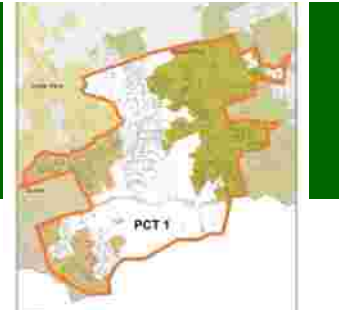
Forest North Drainage Improvements Phase III (Contractor: DeNucci Constructors LLC) – The beat goes on—steady progress despite all that June rain. Good news is the completed drainage does work! This is a county job with an estimated cost of \$4.8M. Substantial completion is still anticipated in early 2022.

University Blvd. widening from IH-35 to just east of Sunrise Rd. (Contractor: DeNucci Constructors LLC)– *Stay off University if you possibly can!!! It is amazing how progress happens amidst so much traffic.* Too many things happening at the same time! This is a City of Round Rock project for which the county has contributed \$5M. Project is slated to finish in early 2022.

Wyoming Springs @ Smyers Lane—A left turning lane will be created in the median for turns into Walgreens. Plans have been finalized and an Interlocal Agreement (ILA) with the City of Round Rock was approved. Environmental due diligence has been completed. Now several of you have posted on social media that it is the left turns from Smyers Lane that cause the accidents. Evidence is strong that the cars that pull out and around the stopped cars waiting to turn into Walgreens have been a major culprit. May prove to be both of the turning traffic but the intersection is too close to 620 to put in a stop light. Driving defensively is the actual (and free) solution to this. Eliminating the blocked thru traffic is the civil engineers' choice solution. It is anticipated that the project will be completed this summer as it is a very small project. Then we wait.



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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1801 E. Old Settlers Blvd., Suite 110

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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