

**Public Comment re Permanent Burnet County Commissioners Court
and County Judge Courtroom**

I oppose the June 24, 2025, agenda item proposing a “permanent Commissioners Court meeting place and County Judge courtroom” at 127 Jackson. On June 10, Judge Wilson discussed a *public workshop* to discuss the \$15,750 study’s “best uses” for this office space, saying, **“This is just to do the evaluation and architecture to see what will work.”** Commissioner Dockery also mentioned a *workshop*. Commissioner Collier asked **“Are they going to give us some alternatives?”** Yet, the June 24 agenda omits the workshop, rushing a specific conversion without input. This *discretionary* overstep bypasses transparency and exceeds Wilson’s *ministerial duty* to preside fairly.

Wilson’s judicial role is negligible and consists of uncontested probate only, as he can’t hear guardianships without additional training, and mental health cases are outsourced. Wilson claimed, **“My court, as constitutional county judge, is going to need to operate,”** but his caseload doesn’t justify a courtroom. Former Judge Oakley needed no courtroom for ten years.

Where’s the Office of Court Administration data on days-on-docket to prove need, and to prove that 3 courtrooms are too few for 4 full time judges. There is no mention on the agenda item about sharing the courtroom with the 4 full time judges. The Commissioners Court meets ~30–40 hours annually in a small courtroom and non-courtroom facility—moving a table or two isn’t too much work, is it?

Wilson called 127 Jackson “almost a million dollar building,” but it cost \$500,000 in ARPA funds—\$400,000 purchase, \$100,000 improvements. Why convert office space without a long-term facilities plan or County Justice Center discussion and plan? Is this a “quid pro quo” tied to March 11, 2025?

Hold a workshop and provide:

- OCA data proving need,
- Requests from the four full-time judges,

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- A verified total cost estimate,
- The promised workshop, and
- A public long-term facilities plan.

Wilson's discretion must serve taxpayers, not speculative projects that overstep his role. Hold the workshop, keep your word, deliberate transparently in this courtroom, and govern yourselves accordingly. Thank you.

Biased Survey – Was this agreed upon by all commissioners?

The original survey on the proposed Burnet County courtroom at 127 Jackson was not Noticed thru the Commissioners Court, and was heavily biased, designed to steer respondents toward supporting the conversion without providing critical context. Its **leading questions**, such as assuming population growth necessitates expanded court facilities and highlighting only three courtrooms for four judges, **implied an urgent problem without evidence**, like Office of Court Administration data on case backlogs. The survey omitted key considerations, including costs (beyond the \$15,750 study), alternatives like a County Justice Center, or the fact that Wilson's judicial role is limited to uncontested probate cases, with no need for a dedicated courtroom as shown by former Judge Oakley's precedent. **By framing the issue to favor approval and excluding financial or strategic trade-offs, the survey manipulated public perception**, undermining transparency and informed decision-making.

Bias in Burnet County “Courtroom Survey”

Overview

The original survey on the proposed conversion of office space at 127 Jackson into a “permanent Commissioners Court meeting place and County Judge courtroom” was biased; designed to steer respondents toward supporting the project without providing critical context. This report examines the survey’s biases, their subconscious impact on takers, and implications for transparency, given County Judge Bryan Wilson’s limited judicial role (uncontested probate only, no guardianships without training, mental health commitments outsourced), minimal case transfers from the County Court-at-Law (CCL), no precedent under former Judge James Oakley, and the absence of a long-term facilities plan or cost estimates beyond the \$15,750 design study approved on June 10, 2025.

Identified Biases

1. **Leading Questions:** The survey’s questions, such as “To what extent do you agree that Burnet County’s recent population growth has created a need for expanded county services, including court facilities?” and “How concerned are you about Burnet County currently having only three courtrooms for four full-time judges?” *assume problems* (growth-driven need, courtroom shortages) **without evidence**. *This framing primes respondents to accept the premise, skewing results toward approval.*
2. **Lack of Neutral Context:** *The survey omits critical data*, such as Office of Court Administration (OCA) statistics on case filings or days-on-docket, which could refute claims of judicial need. It fails to mention Wilson’s negligible caseload, Oakley’s precedent of operating without a courtroom, or the adequacy of current meeting venues (~30–40 hours annually in a small courtroom/non-courtroom facility).
3. **Omission of Costs and Alternatives:** *The survey excludes questions about the project’s cost* (potentially \$100,000–\$500,000 beyond the \$15,750 study) or funding (e.g., tax increases), *preventing respondents from weighing financial trade-offs*. It also ignores alternatives like a County Justice Center, which could address broader needs, limiting informed decision-making.
4. **Positive Response Bias:** Response options (e.g., “A great deal” to “None at all,” “Extremely important” to “Not at all important”) emphasize agreement or concern, with fewer neutral or negative choices, *nudging respondents toward supporting the conversion.*

Subconscious Impact on Survey Takers

These biases subtly manipulate respondents’ perceptions. Leading questions create a **priming effect**, *planting the idea that population growth and courtroom shortages are urgent issues, even without data*. The lack of context exploits **information asymmetry**, leaving takers unaware of Wilson’s limited judicial role or existing venue adequacy, fostering uncritical acceptance. Omitting costs and alternatives triggers **anchoring bias**, as respondents focus only on the presented need, not financial burdens or strategic options like a Justice Center. The positive response scales leverage **social desirability bias**, encouraging takers to align with perceived county priorities. Collectively, these biases steer respondents toward

approval, undermining objective feedback and obscuring potential “quid pro quo” motives (e.g., a docket for a retired judge like Gil Jones).

Implications

The survey’s biases compromise transparency, violating Texas Open Meetings Act principles (Government Code Chapter 551). By skewing public perception, it supports Wilson’s discretionary push for the conversion, despite no OCA data, judicial requests, or long-term facilities plan. This risks taxpayer funds and erodes trust, especially given governance concerns (e.g., March 11, 2025, appointment issues). A bias-free survey, with neutral questions, cost disclosure, and OCA data, is needed to ensure informed public input.

Questions for Burnet County About Wilson's 127 Jackson Proposal

1. Why did County Judge Bryan Wilson overstep his discretionary authority by omitting the public workshop mentioned in the June 10 meeting and instead rushing a specific “permanent Commissioners Court meeting place and County Judge courtroom” on June 24 without input?
2. How does Wilson's discretionary push to convert 127 Jackson's office space, without a long-term facilities plan or County Justice Center discussion, justify spending taxpayer money?
3. Given Wilson's limited judicial role (uncontested probate only, no guardianships without training, mental health cases outsourced) and former Judge Oakley's lack of need for a courtroom, what cases justify the June 24 courtroom proposal?
4. Have the four full-time judges requested additional courtroom space, and if not, why is Wilson advancing the June 24 agenda without their input? How will taxpayers be protected from redundant costs such as the ~\$2,000/month for JP2 office space (while having a dedicated commissioners court and county judge courtroom) given no long-term facilities plan?
5. Why did Wilson claim 127 Jackson is a “million dollar building” – we see \$500,000 in ARPA funds (\$400,000 purchase, \$100,000 improvements) were spent, and what is the total conversion cost beyond the \$15,750 study?
6. With few, if any, cases transferred from the County Court-at-Law, what Office of Court Administration data supports Wilson's June 10 claim of judicial need, and how does his discretionary proposal align with ministerial transparency duties?
7. Does the \$15,750 study or June 24 proposal aim to create a courtroom for visiting judges (e.g., retired judge Gil Jones), and if so, what cases would they hear, given Wilson's negligible docket?
8. Could Wilson's discretionary overstep—omitting the workshop and rushing the June 24 proposal—be driven by political motives or outside influences?
9. Would holding Commissioners Court meetings at 4 PM or later facilitate a more efficient use of county buildings?

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