

## ...RL Town Hall Meeting

(Continued from front page)

The other reason, she explained, was a conversation between Grantham and the City Attorney in which he told her that although council voted in policy, there was no obligation for the mayor to implement council's votes. Following this conversation, Grantham resigned. Roach presented evidence at the meeting Tuesday that was in direct opposition to the city attorney's counsel.

One of the final topics discussed was a meeting scheduled for next week between an attorney and several Robert Lee citizens. The purpose of the meeting is to explore the options for removing the current mayor and one council member. Copies of "Removal of City and County Officials" by Scott Houston, the Texas Municipal League Director of Legal Services, were available to citizens attending the meeting.

It was pointed out that only one more council meeting (April 23) is scheduled before the May 4 election with winning candidates eligible to be sworn in as early as May 10. Early voting begins Monday, April 22, and will continue through April 30. There are two 12 hour early voting days set for the City Council election only. These are scheduled for Tuesday, April 23, and Thursday, April 25. All city council and Robert Lee ISD bond early voting and voting on election day will be held at the Coke County Courthouse in Robert Lee.



## Modern Day Railroad

By James M. Decker

Do you ever log on to your home internet service, only to be frustrated by how long it takes to load a website, download a song, or stream a movie/tv show? As you wait on your internet to buffer, you wonder why you're paying for "high speed" DSL that's akin to 1990s dial-up internet. That's assuming you DID get DSL service and you weren't told it was "unavailable" in your service area.

As I think about how to bring back our homecomers and attract new businesses and residents, I continually think about our internet problem. Last week, I told you about a USDA-funded research paper by Dr. Christiane von Reichert from the University of Montana. She recommended that rural communities invest in things that help attract young families and pointed to high-speed internet, among other things. With better internet access, a community can attract self-employed and remote workers, creating more jobs without waiting for a major employer to move to town.

Technology

The rural internet problem is no secret. It's also widespread. Late in 2018, the USDA announced \$600 million in grants and loans to improve high-speed internet infrastructure in rural America. Some compare rural internet today to the 1930s in America, when electric cooperatives and the federal Rural Electrification Administration delivered electricity to countless rural residents who had been in the dark for years while towns and cities lit up across America.

While this comparison is reasonable, it is also flawed. In 2017, I attended a Q&A session with Anne Hazlett, then chief administrator for USDA Rural Development. Ms. Hazlett pointed out that electricity is a static service—once you have electricity, you have it—while internet is ever changing—a federal agency might provide first-rate internet in 2017 that turned obsolete several years later. Instead, some compare the Internet to the modern-day railroad. In a 2015 article in *The Atlantic*, writer Ingrid Burrington pointed to a judge's description of very early railroads from an 1837 court case:

*"...they tend to annihilate distance, bringing in effect places that are distant near to each other: tending in their magic influence to the extension of personal acquaintance, the enlargement of business relations, and cementing more firmly the bond of fellowship and union between the inhabitants of the States."*

Sounds like the Internet, doesn't it? Railroads shortened distances and enlarged personal and business networks, then the Internet did the same, on a scale beyond imagination.

Railroads also picked winners and losers. There is a long list of towns that flourished when the railroad passed through. Famous Kansas cowtowns like Dodge City wouldn't exist in American lore if they weren't the nearest railroad shipping points for Texas cattle. Closer to home, Stamford boomed as a trading center precisely because it was where the railroads crossed. Then there's the grim other side of the story—towns passed over for a railroad. Formerly prosperous frontier communities soon withered on the vine. Many lost their courthouse and county seat to a neighboring town that received the railroad. Some communities quickly died out. Others held on, but only as a shell of their former self, or as a ghost town relic.

So it goes with our rural communities today. Reliable high speed internet provides more versatile economic options than any point in world history. Our rural communities, formerly dependent on industries that are struggling or less reliant on physical labor, can chart a new economic path. Geography is no longer an obstacle. Clients can be served worldwide with phone and email, opening up small businesses far beyond their local client base.



**Town Hall Meeting!** A large group of Robert Lee residents gathered at the Robert Lee Park Pavilion on Tuesday evening, April 16, to discuss the issues surrounding the City of Robert Lee and City Hall.

employees can also be dispersed across the world. Instead of living near the job, dealing with commutes and a high cost of living, many workers can live where they choose and connect to the job via high speed internet.

A rural community with a low cost of living, quality schools,

and reliable high-speed internet has a fantastic sales pitch for families tired of the city. But what about the grim other side to the modern-day railroad. What about the rural community without decent, readily available internet access? Will it wither on the vine like those hamlets that

missed the railroad so many years ago?

James Decker is a lawyer, farmer, and mayor in Stamford, Texas, and the creator of the forthcoming "West of 98" podcast and website. He may be contacted through Facebook at [facebook.com/james.decker](https://www.facebook.com/james.decker).

# Water Weekly

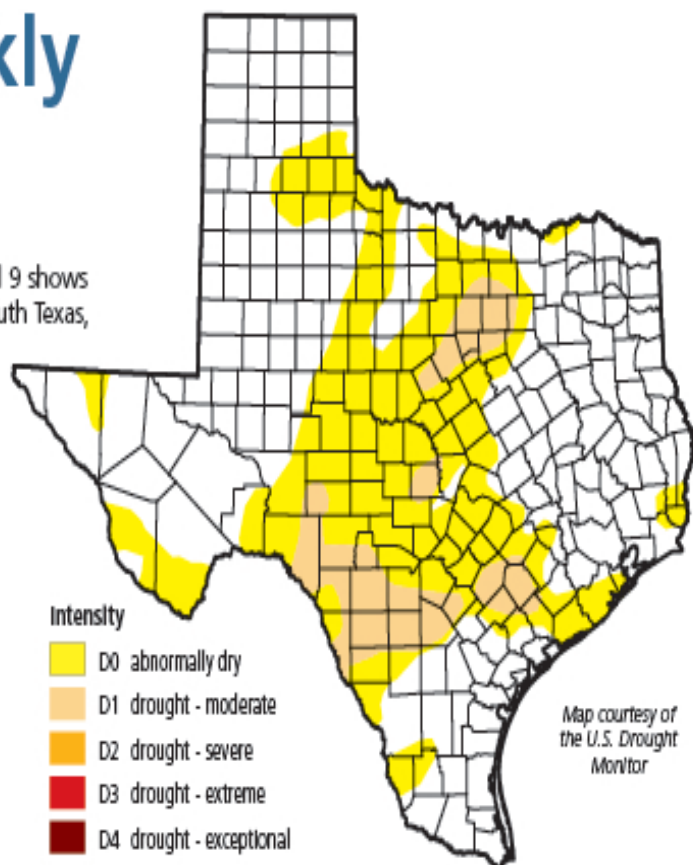
For the week of 04/15/19

## Water conditions

The drought map for conditions as of April 9 shows significant improvement, particularly in South Texas, where some areas improved two drought categories from the previous week. Those improvements shrank the area impacted by drought by 4 percentage points and eliminated severe drought from the state.

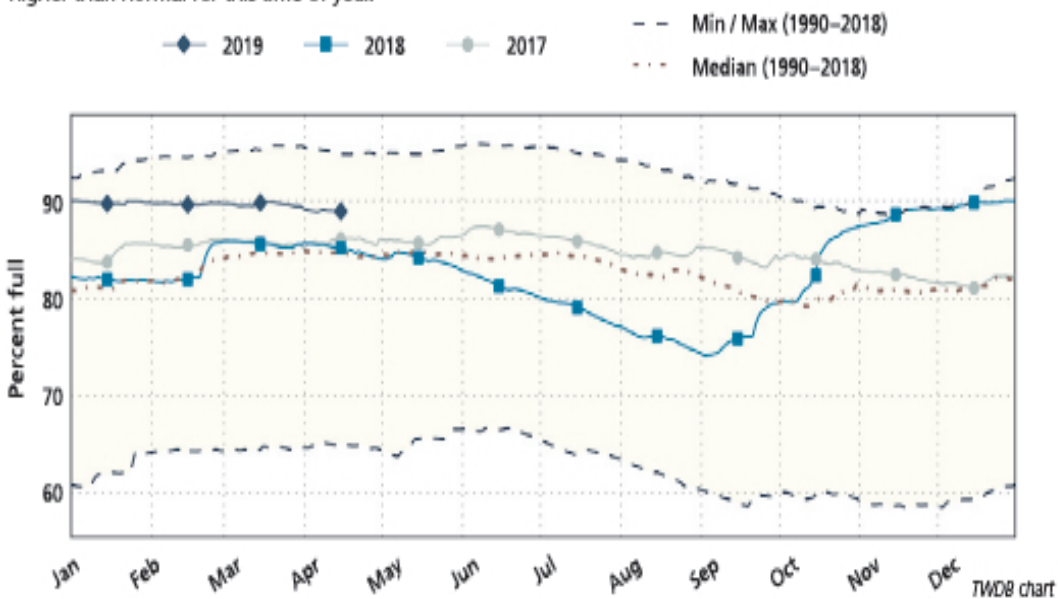
## Drought conditions

- ◆ 8% now
- ◆ 12% a week ago
- ◆ 2% three months ago
- ◆ 49% a year ago



## Statewide reservoir storage

For the first quarter of the year, statewide water supply storage has remained high. As of mid-April, storage is 88.9 percent of capacity, down a percentage point from the beginning of the year but still 6 percentage points higher than normal for this time of year.



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