Rincker sighs relief on HB62

By Timothy J. O'Malley
Managing Editor

It was a long road for Mexia resident James Rincker as he waited for the final result of House Bill 62, a proposed statewide ban on texting while driving.

Rincker, along with 20 other families, went to the state capital Feb. 2 to hear Texas Representative Tom Craddick (Midland) make his fourth attempt to create a traffic violation for smartphone use while driving, known as House Bill 62, during the 85th Texas Legislative Session.

Rincker’s reason for this bill to pass is more personal and close to his heart. His sister, Amanda Rincker, died in November 2015 when the car she was driving crashed. Rincker said, “We believe she crashed as a result of her picking up her phone to send a text message. We know of two texts she sent at the time of the wreck. One was to her friend texting, ‘Going to Cisco. I love you’; and one to her friend friend ‘Are you awake?’”

During the Committee Hearing in March, the HB 62 passed 13-yes-19. The bill was sent to Calendars Committee to be scheduled for debate on the floor.

“If at that time that hope turned to concern for Rincker. He said, “Several amendments had been made and there were only two weeks left to session. Time is of the essence in getting this bill passed.”

The Senate committee delayed voting on the statewide ban on texting while driving.

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Mexia Economic Development Corporation Executive Director Susan Gates leads a discussion at a webinar on overcoming obstacles to implementing changes in small towns. The webinar was held May 17 at the Mexia Business Resource Center, which is the building that houses the EDC and Chamber of Commerce.

Photo by Roxanne Thompson/Mexia News

WEBINAR OFFERS NEW IDEAS TO IMPLEMENT CHANGES

By Roxanne Thompson
Staff Writer

Mexia Economic Development Corporation hosted a webinar earlier this month on how to make a town more open to new ideas, and attendees came away appearing to find the material helpful.

The webinar—which is like a seminar, except the speakers broadcast from an online location—was held May 12 at the Mexia Business Resource Center, the building on McKinnie Street that houses the Mexia EDC and the Chamber of Commerce.

The object of the webinar was to address the mindset that people who try to make changes in small towns often confront, such as “We’ve already tried that before,” or “That’s not how we do things here.” Those phrases and that mindset have stopped positive change many times and discouraged those who have ideas they would like to try in their town.

Two members of an organization called Save Your Town, Becky McCray and Deb Brown, alternated speaking live online on the subject, drawing on their own years of experience working in small towns, trying to implement needed changes.

Mexia EDC Director Susan Cates coordinated the Mexia portion of the event, and about nine people participated, including Cates, in Mexia.

Other locations across the United States hosted their own venues for the webinar while McCray and Brown spoke from their respective locations.

The webinar was titled “Ideas Friendly: How to Make Your Town Open to New Ideas,” and the thrust of the message was:

1. Gather a crowd—Find people who are interested in the new idea or change.
2. Build connections—People from different groups, who may not otherwise interact, if brought together, may work together toward common goals.

Photo by Roxanne Thompson/Courtesy of Save Your Town.
It was a long road for Mexia resident James Rinker as he waited for the final results of House Bill 62, a proposed statewide ban on texting while driving. Rinker, along with 20 other families, went to the state capitol Feb. 2 to hear Texas Representative Tom Craddick (Midlothian) make his fourth attempt to create a law for smartphone use while driving, known as House Bill 62, during the 85th Legislature’s session.

Rinker’s reason for this bill to pass is more personal and closer to his heart. His sister, Amanda Rinker, died in November 2015 when the car she was driving crashed. Rinker picked up her phone to send a text message.

We know of two tests she sent at the time of the wreck. One was to her friend texting. ‘Going to Groovebook. I love you’ and one to her best friend ‘Are you awake?’

During the Committee Hearing in March, the HB 62 passed 13-yes-no. The bill was held on the envelope waiting for the Senate to act. It was at that time that hope turned to concern for Rinker. He said, ‘Several amendments were made and there were only two weeks left to session. Time is of the essence in getting this bill passed.’

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The object of the webinar was to address the mindset that people who try to make changes in small towns often confront, such as ‘We’ve already tried that before,’ or ‘That’s not going to work here,’ or ‘They tried something else and it didn’t work’

The members of an organization called Save Your Town, Becky McCray and Deb Brown, alternated speaking live online on the subject, drawing on their own years of experience working in small towns, trying to implement needed changes.

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1. Gather a crowd – Find people who are interested in the new idea or change.
2. Build connections – People from different groups, who may not otherwise interact, if brought together, may work together toward common goals.
3. Take small steps – Moderate changes are easier to achieve and move in the right direction.

McCray and Brown contrasted their way of implementing changes versus more traditional ways that often don’t work as well: 

- Being informal rather than formal
- Allowing chaos rather than trying to be in control
- Involving the crowd, rather than only a few
- Testing ideas rather than making a decision and moving forward with it
- Staying connected with the larger group, rather than staying isolated
- Being open to change and new ideas, rather than being closed
- Taking small steps, rather than aiming for big changes
- Viewing failure as valuable information rather than viewing it as bad

At the end of the webinar, the two speakers completed their presentation, people attending the webinar in the different locations submitted questions asking how to apply the principles the women had explained to the questioners’ individual situations.

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situations, which McCray and Brown answered immediately.

The webinar lasted about an hour, which was the right length, since it was scheduled during the lunch hour so people could attend without interfering with their employment. Brown and McCray’s ideas were not only valuable but could be implemented in Mexia, Cates said.

“The team at saveyour.town, Deb Brown and Becky McCray, always have great information to share from their years of experience in small rural communities that Mexia can apply in our community,” Cates said. “Deb and Becky encouraged small communities to “Take Small Steps,” and that is something we can do. For example, Mexia Rocks is something small that one person, Debbie Nelson, thought she could do in her spare time; and it has become a local phenomenon.”

Cates was referring to a fun initiative Nelson came up with to paint small rocks and leave them around town for people to see, enjoy and even take home — as long as they paint their own rock and leave it where they took the rock they liked. Since Mexia Rocks began, many people have responded, and painted and exchanged rocks.

Although turnout to the webinar was not high, Cates expressed satisfaction with it. “I think the webinar encouraged participants to think outside the box,” she said. “No idea is too big, too small or too weird to be considered. Mexia has some great local talent and creative thinkers. We need to encourage these individuals to share their ideas, gather a crowd to get it done and watch Mexia blossom!”

The webinar is one in a series of events planned by Mexia EDC to involve the Mexia community in the process of economic development in the city.