

Freeman Funk: Third City Manager of Fredericksburg (Part I) --
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Interviewed by Nancy Bruns

Fredericksburg City Manager 1955-78
Fredericksburg City Councilman 1999-98

Interviewed by Nancy Bruns. Transcription by Tomi Reneau and Nancy Bruns. May 14, 21, 28, and September 9, 1999.

Freeman Funk was born in Vinton, Virginia, December 20, 1921. He is a graduate of Virginia Tech where he received a bachelor of science degree in civil engineering. He also holds a master's degree from North Carolina State University. Mr. Funk is a certified professional engineer in both North Carolina and Virginia. He was Fredericksburg city manager for 23 years - from 1955 until 1978 - and later served five years on City Council, retiring in 1998. After leaving public service in 1978, Mr. Funk was a consulting engineer. His first wife, Frances Gill Funk, is deceased. Mr. Funk and his wife, Mary Frances Blackburn Moore Funk, live on Franklin Street in a house that Mr. Funk built in its entirety. Mrs. Funk is the widow of Robert C. "Hotsy" Moore.

Interviewer: This is Nancy Bruns and today is May 14, 1999. I am here today with Mr. Freeman Funk to do an oral history interview. Mr. Funk was Fredericksburg city manager for 23 years, and we'll be reviewing those years. Mr. Funk, let's begin by talking about how you became city manager. You had been city engineer for a couple of years before you became city manager, isn't that correct?

Freeman Funk: Yes, I was. I might start with how does anyone get to be a city manager.

Interviewer: Well, please. How does one get to be a city manager?

Freeman Funk: Mr. Houston (L. J. Houston, Jr., Fredericksburg city manager from about 1917 until 1954) got to be a city manager because he was an engineer. And in the early days Fredericksburg was the second city in the United States to have this form of government; Staunton, Virginia, was the first.

Interviewer: In the United States?

Freeman Funk: Yes, it started with small cities. They could not afford a staff engineer and a manager, so they made a combination job. They employed engineers and said, "Okay, you'll be our city manager and do all of these things." So it spread out through the country after that. I became interested when I was in high school, believe it or not. A civics teacher suggested to me that maybe I ought to be a city manager. Oh, that's looking pretty far into the future.

Interviewer: That would have been in the '30s?

Freeman Funk: Yes that was '38 or '39. Round about there. I'm not sure I dwelt upon that extensively but I still remember hearing...

Interviewer: The idea was placed?

Freeman Funk: (Agreeing) ... and my father (George Funk) was involved in local politics. He was deputy treasurer of Roanoke County, as a side job [my Mother actually did the work], and so I knew the workings of local government from the inside, I guess you might say- and from the political standpoint. I went to college and studied chemistry and the war came along and I got out of college.

Interviewer: And went in the service?

Freeman Funk: Yes, in the army for about four years. I eventually earned a commission in field artillery. And while I was in the army, the army developed a program of taking youths with some college education into a program called Army Specialized Training Program. And I couldn't get chemistry and I asked a professor that I knew, "What should I take from this list on the blackboard?" He said, "Civil engineering would be good, because sanitary engineering is related and a lot of them won't get into it because of the chemistry. You've already got the chemistry." So that's what I signed up for. They sent me to Penn State and I stayed in there for the full term of the program. I think it was about 18 months. Right in the middle of the war. It was unbelievable. Well, afterwards of course it's back to the troops. By that time I was sort of on my way to being an engineer. After the war I went to back to Virginia Tech and got my degree.

Interviewer: In civil engineering?

Freeman Funk: Civil. From that point on I had a teaching contract at North Carolina State College in "Civil" with the privilege of taking one

course tuition-free per semester and in three years I got a master's degree in that... .

Interviewer: Does that bring us to about 1950?

Freeman Funk: I got the degree in '50, yes.

Interviewer: Now, go ahead.

Freeman Funk: The specific Fredericksburg thing - In '47, when I graduated from tech, I applied to Fredericksburg for an engineer job or whatever they might have. I did that because Mr. Houston's reputation for training people, bringing them up from engineering into management was pretty well established. And he had some successful people who did just that. So following a professor's suggestion, I applied. I got a nice letter from Mr. Houston saying, "Sorry, we don't have any openings." So I took the contract to teach at North Carolina State. By sheer coincidence a fellow faculty member at the same department was a speaker at the North Carolina City Manager's Association. He knew of my interest in city management, but I hadn't made any move to do anything about it. He met Mr. Houston at that meeting and Mr. Houston that day had received a telegram from his city engineer saying, "I'm going to resign on a certain date." And so here's an opening that occurred. And when I got the word I wrote to Mr. Houston and he said come on up for an interview. So this is my second shot at Fredericksburg and this time it was successful.

Interviewer: It succeeded. You're coming to Fredericksburg for your second interview?

Freeman Funk: Well, the first one didn't result in an interview... . It was just a mail application. But for the interview, it was successful and he offered me a job. And I said that I would have to complete my teaching contract. He said that's all right. So I came here in June right after the contract was over.

Interviewer: June of 1952?

Freeman Funk: (Agreeing) '52. And I served in that capacity for about a year and then I was promoted to assistant city manager, the first assistant city manager the city of Fredericksburg had ever had. They had people performing duties, but they couldn't call them that because it wasn't acceptable to the public.



Freeman Funk with L.J. Houston Jr.
Pictured above Mr. Houston is Stuart Royer,
city manager 1912-1918.

Freeman Funk: So actually when I was first here I started being assistant to Mr. Houston. This time I truly had the title, too; and two years later Mr. Houston retired after he developed a retirement system funded by the city. And I became city manager and stayed in that job ... for 23 years.

Interviewer: Now the mayor was Mac Cowan at that time?

Freeman Funk: Yes, he was.

Interviewer: And we were going to talk about.... Well, let's go ahead and say what you think the special skills are that a manager needs.

Freeman Funk: Well, in a small city, you better be an engineer. It's common, Actually, when this system started there was no special degree offered anywhere that I know of in the country in public administration. And now many colleges offer that and most of the managers, whether they come into small towns or large, have public administration backgrounds. And that's one way to get there. The skills are like any management job. It's personnel stuff.

Interviewer: People skills.

Freeman Funk: (Agreeing) People you deal with, as employees. You see, all the city employees work for the city manager. And we have all of the citizens who have a claim to your life...

Interviewer: They call you on the phone?

Freeman Funk: Yes. Any time of the day or night.

Interviewer: And do, I'm sure.

Freeman Funk: And those skills are important. I've tried to fill in for any weakness I've found in the organizational structure, you see. I never did try to be chief of the police or fire department or anything of that sort, but I would have administrative assistants to come in. They'd be recent graduates in public administration, looking for some experience, and I would find out what their interest were, and put them to work in that field and I'd devote my energies in another direction. Right now Marvin Bolinger, the current city manager, has Beverly Cameron as an assistant. And Beverly's strength is in financial management. So that's what he does. He does the budget. And that allows the city manager...

Interviewer: ... to do the other things?

Freeman Funk: So it's a team work situation. You deal with what you have and do the best you can.

Interviewer: And adjust yourself accordingly?

Freeman Funk: Yes.

Interviewer: Now, the population when you became city manager was just around 12,000?

Freeman Funk: Something like that. In the order of 12,000.

Interviewer: So you saw a tremendous amount of growth in twenty years.

Freeman Funk: Yes. A lot of it happening in the last ten.

Interviewer: In the 60's. Now I was looking at how you were chosen. Were you actually chosen by council? Duly elected?

Freeman Funk: Oh, yes.

Interviewer: And you have a contract?

Freeman Funk: No contract.

Interviewer: No contract?

Freeman Funk: Serve at will and pleasure of the council.

Interviewer: Did you think that was going to be difficult?

Freeman Funk: No. I had that as a subject of debate at a city manager's conference and that's the side that I took: No contract.

Interviewer: No contract?

Freeman Funk: And the reason for that is that it does away with some of the fear of the Council-Manager system ... that citizens have. Someone will say, "Oh, you've got someone in there and you can't get rid of them. He's got a contract so he's going to do what he wants to do and so forth." Without the contract, that argument is shot. Because....

Interviewer: You can be fired.

Freeman Funk: Any time the council doesn't want you to be city manager, they just say so. And I was quite resolved to work in that system as I believed in it and I was quite ready to be "done away with" whenever it became...

Interviewer: Whenever it happened?

Freeman Funk: And, of course, that eventually happened.

Interviewer: Now, was council five members when you took over? As you became city manager?

Freeman Funk: No it had thirteen.

Interviewer: Oh.

Freeman Funk: If we ... and a mayor.

Interviewer: And a mayor.

Freeman Funk: Wonder if I've overdone this. Maybe there were twelve and the mayor. But we had plenty.

Interviewer: Plenty of councilmen?

Freeman Funk: Yes.

Interviewer: And was it a ward system? It's still a ward system.

Freeman Funk: No. No ward system.

Interviewer: No ward system. At large?

Freeman Funk: That's right. And that is the classic thing in Council-Manager [form of government]

Interviewer: That's suppose to be the best?

Freeman Funk: Well, we thought so. And I still think so. At large. But the Justice Department of the United States changed all of that. They said you can't do that. There must be wards, and you're going to like it. So we're back to wards.

Interviewer: Yes, and we also now have fewer council members.

Freeman Funk: Yes, yes indeed.

Interviewer: Well, I had made a note about the tax rate. Two dollars per hundred evaluation and there was twenty-three million of total assessed value.

Freeman Funk: Yes.

Interviewer: That would give you an income base of under five hundred thousand, wouldn't it? Would that be about right?

Freeman Funk: Yes. Well, it is interesting that you would come up with that figure.

Interviewer: We're talking about the city's population of twelve thousand and what that actually gave you to run the city on and that would come out to be around

Freeman Funk: Four hundred and sixty thousand dollars was about the dollar value, but the rate was less than two dollars. Actually it was eighty cents. Because there was the custom of assessing for less than fair market value, which I detested because I thought it was unfair to the public to say, "Your house might have been a \$20,000 value, but your house is going to be assessed at \$8,000." And say, "Oh well, I'm not going to complain about that." Actually that might have been too high. It was placating. And I don't believe in deception, and so I was very happy when the law was really written to require all assessments in the state of Virginia ... real estate ... to be 100% of fair market value.

Interviewer: That's right. Some of the utilities were assessed at a higher rate...

Freeman Funk: Well, our utility assessments didn't amount to anything, I mean the values of those isn't taxed. Wasn't taxed. When you give a problem with two variables -- you know, tax rate and a percentage of fair market value--and multiply both of those together a lot can get lost in the transaction.

Interviewer: Are you saying it obfuscated what was really being done to some citizens?

Freeman Funk: Yes. But it was done throughout Virginia.

Interviewer: Yes.

Freeman Funk: And I can give you some horrible examples of what localities did and it seemed to be within the law because it had been to the courts and the court said

Interviewer: ... you can do it.

Freeman Funk: The language is so clear in the constitution of Virginia. It says; "shall be assessed at fair market value." The court's interpretation was that that means any per cent of fair market value that you want to use. And Prince William County, in those days, had the Possum Point Plant of Virginia Electric and Power Company (VEPCO) and that gave them a big value on the books. And that ratio of fair market value to true, was set by the State Corporation Commission not by the locality and was set at 40%. So the county didn't know what to do with all of that money at that time so they put the assessments of all others down at about 12%...

Interviewer: So that the utility paid the larger share...

Freeman Funk: So that all the other taxpayers who bought electricity from VEPCO ... were subsidizing Prince William's taxpayers. And there's nothing fair about that.

Interviewer: No, I agree with you. Freeman Funk: So that's all over with.

Interviewer: It was changed about '69, when the Constitution was changed?...

Freeman Funk: I don't know.

Interviewer: But what I'm asking really was, this wasn't much money to run a city on.

Freeman Funk: No.

Interviewer: And you had a school system, an independent school system...

Freeman Funk: Yes.

Interviewer: And you undertook, really about the first or second year you were city manager, this Salem Dam Project.

Freeman Funk: Yes.

Interviewer: Tell me about that...

Freeman Funk: Well,... all right. Should I tell you once more, a little bit more about the budget?

Interviewer: Yes, please.

Freeman Funk: I produced the first one million dollar a year expenditure budget for the city. And in spite of all predictions, the sky did not fall! But anyway we made it over that hump and currently the budget, as you know, is about thirty-three million. Unbelievable in our day.

Interviewer: What was your million dollar budget? About what year?

Freeman Funk: I think it was the first year I was manager or maybe the second. Probably '52 or '53. ['55/56]

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Virginia
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Interviewer: I think that sounds right to me. You had an ambitious agenda here. (Interviewer is looking over The City Manager's Report. See summary to the right.)

FOR THE
FISCAL YEAR ENDING JUNE 30,
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Freeman Funk: Yes, you always have to look into the future a bit and prepare councils for their tasks. Now I got you off of a subject that you had...

CITY MANAGER'S SUMMARY

Interviewer: ... of water. You had said that water was the most critical problem facing the city.

Below are summaries obtained from the reports of the various departments; also included are facts, figures, and conclusions drawn from other sources. I wish to point out certain recent changes in operations and administration which I believe will prove beneficial to the city:

Freeman Funk: Oh, yes. Well, it was. The first week I was in the city as city engineer I faced a water shortage. We faced a water shortage. And I remember so well seeing the reservoir on College Hill, on campus, just about dry and nobody doing anything about it.

1. Began use -of mechanical joint cast iron pipe for water mains.

Interviewer: Where did that water come from on that reservoir?

2. Adopted state highway department specifications for materials and methods in construction and paving of city streets.

Freeman Funk: From the Rappahannock River through the filter plant [and pumped up there] and stored. then as finished water. Stored there. And it was re-pumped from there into the elevated tanks in College Heights to

3. Began use of mechanical street sweeper.

4. Initiated master plan work.

5. Extended the practice of competitive bidding for purchasing

serve that portion of the city.

materials and contracting for services.

Interviewer: How about these little water companies? The Courtland and the Dillard water companies. Now were they still going in '52?

6. Introduced the use of power equipment for tree work.

Freeman Funk: Yes. Yes, they were. The quality of their product brought about an annexation that occurred, when was that... '55? Or thereabouts. A group of people living in the vicinity outside the city, in Spotsylvania, under those private companies, had such terrible conditions of water that they had to seek relief somewhere and they decided to get it from the city. So they petitioned the court to be annexed into the city.

7. Started a city nursery for shade trees and ornamental shrubbery.

Interviewer: Isn't that unusual?

8. Adopted new standards for arrangement of space between curb and property line on new streets to allow for more space for tree planting.

Freeman Funk: Even more than unusual is the fact that the city didn't want them, and the county did want them, so the city and county were co-defendants in an annexation suit.

9. Developed off-street parking lot in downtown area.

10. Abandoned the self-insured plan and adopted insurance company plan for (a) Workmen's Compensation Insurance and (b) Public Liability Insurance.

Interviewer: I never heard of such a thing.

11. Modernized personnel methods.

Freeman Funk: Well, it's almost impossible.

12. Began classification of various positions and established a pay range for each.

Interviewer: But it happened.

13. Began requiring a physical examination for applicants for employment before final acceptance on permanent payroll.

Freeman Funk: It did happen. And we lost.

14. Adopted standard specifications for trucks.

Interviewer: And then you had to provide water for them.

15. Began national newspaper advertising of historic assets.

Freeman Funk: That's right. That was part of the court order. It said, "You provide water by a certain date."

16. Adopted policy of charging for water and sewer tap fees.

Interviewer: So then what did you do?

17. Changed method of charging for sewer service from flat rate to charge based upon water charge.

Freeman Funk: We provided that water by a certain date.

18. Started on program of universal metering of water service.

Interviewer: Where did you get it?

Freeman Funk: We had, by that time ... I made a recommendation to council and I drew them a little graph to show what might happen ... the plant capacity was six million gallons (6 mgd) a day.

Interviewer: This pumping station? [Filter plant]

Freeman Funk: Yes, and we still have that same capacity, by the way, almost fifty years later. And we were on a

course going upward this way where we would have to have more water than we had capacity for.

Interviewer: What did you do?

Freeman Funk: So I told the council that we were in a ridiculous situation where people were misusing the water. There were no meters in the city and people just turned their hose on and let it run and go on vacation and let the water run down the street.

Interviewer: Well, who paid if there were no meters? You paid a flat fee, whether you used a gallon or 20?

Freeman Funk: That's right. Based on the number of fixtures in the house, not on the number of people, the number of fixtures. And one of the strange things about that is, if you had a wash tub you paid on that, but if you had a washing machine... you don't pay on that... The council agreed and I said, "Now, if you'll do that here's what will happen. The water consumption will go down, down, down, down, and then it will level off and you'll have a reserve capacity of four million gallons in a six million gallon plant." And it happened.

Interviewer: How could you project that?

Freeman Funk: Well, it's simple engineering projection.

Interviewer: Okay.

Freeman Funk: I knew what the average daily consumption would be based on the experience of other cities.

Interviewer: I see.

Freeman Funk: And I knew what the population was. Multiply that out and there it is.

Interviewer: There it is. So you picked up four million gallons.

Freeman Funk: Yes. I was shocked to learn when I came to Fredericksburg that our filter plant was larger than the filter plant of the city of Roanoke at that time.

Interviewer: That's amazing.

Freeman Funk: It truly is. Well, it's nice. If water is abundant, people enjoy it. And the quality of life goes up with the use of water and it's great. But as long as you keep the rate nominal it's still great and people are not going to be wasteful like they were... Interviewer: ... earlier.

Freeman Funk: So, this is the reason that we were able to exist there without enlarging that plant at all,

Interviewer: And that's taking in those Spotsylvania people who demanded to be taken in.

Freeman Funk: Oh, yes. That's right. And also [currently] we have been helping Spotsylvania along. Actually Spotsylvania owns one million gallons capacity in that plant. That was sold

Interviewer: ... In that plant?

Freeman Funk: Yes. That was sold by the city a few years ago.

Interviewer: To Spotsylvania?

Freeman Funk: Yes. I couldn't believe it when I learned about that. But that's the truth.

Interviewer: Now go to Salem Church dam.

Freeman Funk: Yes.

Interviewer: That, you saw, was the ... could be an ultimate source.

Freeman Funk: Oh, yes. Yes. It would have been marvelous. But I learned a whole lot from doing that work...

Interviewer: Tell me about it.

Freeman Funk: Well, the Salem Church reservoir project was a federal project developed by the Army Corps of Engineers as they do here and there, all over the country, and they determined that this was the best undeveloped water dam [sites] in the eastern United States; and that it should be developed to reserve this water and use it rather than let it flow down...

Interviewer: ... right on down into the bay.

Freeman Funk: So they began to study it and Congress appropriated some money and we would go to Washington and meet with our congressmen and say we needed some more money. We'd be intermediary between the Corps of Engineers and Congress, believe it or not, although they were working for each other. One for the other. They'd tell us: We'd need this. Can you do it? And then Congress would say: Well, I don't know whether we can or can't, but we'll try.

Interviewer: It was a political problem? Freeman Funk: Oh, it was. We'd get appropriations for studies. Then they'd need to study some more. We'd get another appropriation for a study and then go up and say: "Now, how about some construction money?" "Well, I don't know. I think we'd better have another study." So the thing was studied to death and it fell apart.

Interviewer: Died of being studied?

Freeman Funk: But in the meantime, maybe this is not off the subject, I learned that local participation was going to ... was being required by Congress. As a new item. Right in the middle of all this, if you are going to use and benefit from the water held by that dam in your municipal water supply ... and that was my object, to ...

Interviewer: ... get more water.

Freeman Funk: Get more water and have an assured full supply of water. Big. Big.

Interviewer: You would have had to put up more storage? Well, would you have needed more storage capacity?

Freeman Funk: This would be all raw water.

Interviewer: Oh. Okay.

Freeman Funk: All raw water. But you can always be sure you're going to get six million gallons a day down at your plant. Or seven or eight or whatever you needed. But they said, "Oh, but if you do that, then you should be willing to pay for it."

Interviewer: A financial partner?

Freeman Funk: Yes, and so they asked me one time, "Well, how much would it cost you to build a dam or to get that much water and what is

it worth?" and so forth. And I came up with a figure. I said, "Well, it's about a million dollars." Lot of money you know. All the money we're getting in a whole year.

Interviewer: Well, that's right. It's twice really, what you were taking in.

Freeman Funk: Yes. So, I conceived of a trade-off. You see, dollars in Washington are not always cash. It's "in kind." And I knew that VEPCO owned a lot of land upstream that they had never used. They bought it in anticipation of raising the height of the Embrey Dam, storing more water behind it and generating more electricity by hydroelectric methods. But they never did it and they got off onto coal burning generators and gas and then nuclear later.

Interviewer: Yes.

Freeman Funk: So they had all this land and no use for it. Well, the federal government would have to acquire all that land and a whole lot more for the development of the reservoir of Salem Church. So I approached VEPCO, with council's permission, I'm confident, and said, "How about selling us all your land upstream that you're not using ... ?"

Interviewer: From the Embrey Dam?

Freeman Funk: (Assenting) And the power company manager and I were good friends and he said, "I'll see what comes up. I'll get it brought up before the board." And he came back and said, "Freeman, how much would the city be willing to pay for that land?" And I came up with a ... another week goes by and I came up with a figure and I said "Well, I think four hundred and fifty thousand dollars." Because it was forty-five hundred acres and that comes out to an even hundred dollars an acre. He took it to them and then he came back and said, "Did that include the trees?" I said "Well, to tell you the truth, I hadn't figured it that closely." He said, "Well, we can do it if you'll give us three years to timber."

Freeman Funk: I said, "Well, that sounds good. Let's see what the council says." And the council said okay. 'Cause I was going to use that four hundred and fifty thousand dollars worth of land to pay our one million dollar debt to the federal government. Because surely by the time they got through it would have cost them a million dollars to get it. And here it only cost us four hundred and fifty thousand. Well,

that land has come into use and re-use and ... the value of it has multiplied just recently. Would you like to know about that?

Interviewer: Yes, continue.

Freeman Funk: As Spotsylvania grew, the city grew some but not much. And the city water use began to approach plant capacity again, and Spotsylvania was in dire need of water, as they are right today. But a year or two ago they became aware they had to do something and they eyed a water storage facility that the city had put in and never used.

Interviewer: Where was that?

Freeman Funk: Mott's Run--Mott's Run Reservoir. The city developed that because we couldn't rely on river flow directly, and there's practically no water storage behind the Embrey Dam. So whatever water came there, went past us or we caught it and used it. In the process of regional studies, Spotsylvania said, "We want to buy water rights from the city either in the Mott's Run Reservoir or buy land upstream. But we've got to do something."

Interviewer: Now the Salem Church Dam had just fallen though totally?

Freeman Funk: Oh, yes, that had fallen through long ago, and nobody even gives it a thought any more. The environmentalists just killed it.

Interviewer: It just wouldn't work?

Freeman Funk: They said you are going to cover up too many animals and plants and so forth. So this [Mott's Run] is an alternative. This is much smaller. We built Mott's Run to supplement the city's supply but mainly to give confidence to the major industry of the city [in Spotsylvania.] And that's something not many people understand because it never did come out, but the plant downstream from us, just over the line in the county, manufacturing cellophane had fresh water needs--finished water needs. They [FMC] had a filter plant of their own, but it was in the tidal estuary. And our water is in the fresh part... above the fall line in Falmouth. So to assure them that we would always have water for them from our system, we built that reservoir. That might have prolonged their life here in the city .

Interviewer: The cellophane company?

Freeman Funk: Yes. But eventually they did fold as all industries do. All industries. That shocks people. It used to shock the City Council when I would tell them in our industrial development we've got to be prepared when FMC--or Sylvania whatever you call it--when it closes. And they would say, "What do you mean they'll close? Have you inside information?" And I would say, "No. But it's going to happen because all of them close. It's a hard fact." Interviewer: Eventually.

Freeman Funk: Well, the council went along with that storage anyway and we do own a nice reservoir up there and the idea was to release water from that into the river--supplement the river flow from that.

Interviewer: To give the cellophane company... pure water?

Freeman Funk: To give them fresher water and to give us more water to purify to send to them. Because they had two sources of water, they had highly pure from the city and semi pure from their own plant and certain processes could use one and certain could use the other. That's a rough explanation. About -two or three years ago when I was on the council the water problem in Spotsylvania came up and we had to share information with them, and they were about to tell us that they were going to go to court to make us make a decision on selling some land to build their reservoir because we owned ... the city owned the prime spots.

Interviewer: That was the land you'd acquired from VEPCO?

Freeman Funk: Yes, in part... for Mott's Run we had to acquire right much in addition to what we owned because VEPCO bought land back years and years ago--the supplemental land we bought from them-- by contours. By given levels. [Mr. Funk demonstrates on the map how the VEPCO purchase followed the contours of the land rather than being by the conventional method of purchase by square or linear measure] It was irregularly shaped, but it was scientifically good.

Freeman Funk: Well in negotiating with Spotsylvania, the State Water Control Board put the pressure on the city--not because of Spotsylvania--but because of new technology. And they said you've got to correct something that's been going on here for a long time at this water filter plant. You're taking the mud out of the river water and producing clear water, but then you've got the mud left that you've got to get rid of and you've been flushing it back into the river...

Interviewer: Down here?

Freeman Funk: Yes, a little below here... . And they gave us a deadline to do this. Of course it was a little more than mud. It had some chemical residues in it too. That was going to be a lot of money. That plant's life then was in jeopardy and the then director of public works for the city was convinced that we ought to double the size of the water filtration plant to sell to Spotsylvania. In other words, Spotsylvania's plant would be here in the city.

Interviewer: Could you have done that?

Freeman Funk: Yes, it could be done. I objected to it because it's in a residential area. I said it's hazardous. I had whole list of things. It's the only correspondence I've saved. Chlorine was involved. You know it's a war gas? Things do happen. I had a lot of reasons it shouldn't be there, other than the fact that I live nearby! We were about to do it but I convinced council that that was not the thing to do. My next step was to convince council we ought to get rid of the plant entirely. And that shocked everybody. I said let's have the director of public works study it. He's got the basic figures. We know that Spotsylvania is under design--this was two or three years ago. Let's have him cooperate and work with them and see how much it would cost the city to own five million gallons a day capacity in the new plant that Spotsylvania is going to build. Kind of reversing the situation that we had had and how much would you be willing to pay bonus over what it would cost to build this addition. They said the deadline is past and they're going to put the screws to us. And I said, "Let's try." Almost any official of the state who's at all reasonable will see good faith evidence and will react to it if he knows you're truly going to do something else that's really better and they'll give you more time. This plant has been here all these years and it wasn't killing anybody and it wasn't going to kill anybody in another year.

Interviewer: And it had been an ongoing problem.

Freeman Funk: Yes, that's right. And that study came about and lo and behold we could do it cheaper out there with Spotsylvania than we could on our own down here. Furthermore Spotsylvania was willing to pay us \$4 million for the water that's in that reservoir and some land. Compare that with \$450,000 for all that land purchase! Of course time has gone on and it's different dollars. The plant is under construction. I have asked, and I hope it's effected, that demolition costs be included in the capital costs of our move

Interviewer: Demolition of this plant down here? Freeman Funk: Take it completely down ... haul it away and plant it in grass. That's my goal. We'll see if that happens.

Interviewer: Well we will because we're right here to watch it, aren't we? (Both Mr. Funk and the interviewer live in the neighborhood of the water filtration plant.).

Interviewer: We were going to talk next about police and fire protection coming under the city manager

Freeman Funk: Oh, yes.

Interviewer: Was that a controversial thing?... this would be about 1954. Is that right?

Freeman Funk: Yes, that'd be right. Let me tell you how that came about. When Mr. Houston was city manager he was hired with emphasis on engineering and budgeting and really in today's terms he was director of public works. But he had additional duties of financial and personnel so it was city manager [form]. They never did put the fire department or the police department under him because they were run by committees - committees of council - three members hired and fired, did everything regarding those two departments. Three of this and three of that.

Interviewer: This was an old time tradition here? It had been here since Mr. Houston's days?

Freeman Funk: Yes it was. Nobody wanted to tamper with it. It was really strange situation. Here you have a councilman who is chairman of the fire committee. What's he going to do when budget time comes? Fire, fire, fire. We don't care about the other departments. We want the fire department. Well, I don't know. That's just political. They got tired of it apparently because I certainly didn't say I won't be city manager unless I have these.

Interviewer: Wasn't it getting to be a lot of work?

Freeman Funk: For the committees? Oh yes, sure. They would have to depend a lot on the fire chief and the police chief. They had other things to do. They may not have been skilled in management either. It was a very difficult thing. It worked, but I think they became convinced that it could work better. City council used to and still does

go on conventions where they meet with others in the state and the nation and they find out how ... things are working. They don't have to trust just one opinion-they can get a broad view of things. And I guess that's what they got. And they said we want to put these two departments under the city manager. I said, "It's all right with me." The charter of the city, in describing the city manager's job, said he will do this that and the other and other duties as assigned.

Interviewer: (laughing) And other duties as assigned and that became that.

Freeman Funk: Also director of public welfare as an assigned duty. Did you know that?

Interviewer: No, but you employed a welfare superintendent?

Freeman Funk: We had the most marvelous welfare superintendent you could ever imagine -- Alis Bailey.

Interviewer: I've met her yes...

Freeman Funk: I have great admiration for her.

Interviewer: Was she the first?

Freeman Funk: I believe so and came in in Depression Days. Early on.

Interviewer: I hadn't put it down but we're talking about things that led to development of systems within the city. One thing I noticed in one of those early city manager report is natural gas and bonds were turned down. Bonds for the introduction of natural gas...

Freeman Funk: That's a story in itself..

Interviewer: Well, tell me that story... This would have been about 1955?

Freeman Funk: When I came in '52 the city had been in the gas business for a 100 years...

Interviewer: The city was making its own gas?

Freeman Funk: Yes it was a process of breaking coal down into its components and producing a manufactured gas and distributing it-a 100 years before 1952.

Interviewer: Before the Civil War?

Freeman Funk: Yes.

Interviewer: And it lighted the houses in Fredericksburg?

Freeman Funk: Yes, lighted - cooked, heated whatever anyone thought he could afford. The plant had produced several types of gas, but it all did the same thing. And incidentally it survived the 1942 flood even though it was in the flood plain the operators swam to work and kept that plant going when it was much needed ... everything was wiped out in the city. ... In 1952 when I came here they said well we're still in the gas business, but it's been sold. We're going to get natural gas.

Interviewer: Who had it been sold to? This Columbia Gas?

Freeman Funk: No, to a private individual, Fred Robinson, and he was going to form a company. And he had an exclusive right to do what he could to get first an allocation of gas. You see natural gas is a natural product sort of owned by the nation. It had to be shared and they were going to build a pipeline across the country. And if you could get an allocation out of that pipeline capacity then you can introduce it into your system. Congress very wisely set it up so allocations had to be shared. If they didn't do that the big companies would send it all to New Jersey and it would be used up.

Interviewer: It was being pumped out of Louisiana or Texas or wherever the natural gas is?

Freeman Funk: That's right and it was pumped in and sure enough the line came along and the allocation came along. And Fred Robinson didn't get his company going, and Mr. Houston and I thought that it would still be a good thing for the city for manufacturing purposes and we were tired of the old gas plant and its troubles. With the allocation in hand and council pretty much ready to go, we needed the money to run the pipeline from Lignum. to the city. The bonds were to be revenue bonds... revenue implies that we'll make a profit from the gas company and the profit will be used to retire the bonds--to pay back the people who lent us the money and to pay interest. The Virginia

Constitution strangely says that in a city the city council can vote to sell general revenue bonds anytime it wants to, but if you're going to issue revenue bonds you have to have a referendum of the people. Exactly the converse is true in the county. Why I have no idea. The city had never had a revenue bond (vote) before and here comes an issue before the people they had never dealt with.

I had a brochure all prepared. A nice little folder- it was going to be blue with white lines and it was a map of the city-a blueprint- and it was called a "Blueprint for the future." The council had undergone a change in personnel. I don't remember who went out and who came in, but I know that the mayor was in the oil business and they would not give me the money to publish the brochure even. The council would not support its own bond issue. Publically.

Interviewer: You mean, by appearing and supporting and explaining. It's a fairly complicated issue.

Freeman Funk: That's right. They would not. And the citizens got a little suspicious They said wait a minute here. We don't know if we want to do it. So when the vote came they said, "No we don't want to do it."

Interviewer: It was 629 to 269. But that's not even very much of a turnout.

Freeman Funk: No it isn't.

Interviewer: That's 900 voters.

Freeman Funk: Out of a population of twelve to fourteen thousand.

Interviewer: Well, where did you go next? You still had to have gas.

Freeman Funk: We're still in the business, and we're still having trouble with capacity--a familiar problem. We decided we'd try a new process called reformed propane. And in that process we'd get in tank cars of propane and instead of manufacturing gas we'd simply convert that gas to a lighter gas at the old plant.

Freeman Funk: This might be more than you want to know about it.

Interviewer: No. It's interesting.

Freeman Funk: I operated that plant for awhile myself. That's not unusual-

Interviewer: For a city manager to go down and do hands-on work?

Freeman Funk: Or the water plant. I used to respond to emergency calls all the time. I'm nearby. This reformed propane was to take a heavy gas-propane-and convert it to a light gas and the reason is propane is dangerous--more dangerous than regular cooking gas because it settles in low places and you don't smell it. And you might be up to your waist in propane and not know it.

It comes in a liquified pressured tank. It's liquified by compressing it. And then you expand it, but it's still heavy. Then the reformed gas and all the other gases we ever used were light, and so we had to convert it through a converter process invented by a man in Tennessee.

Interviewer: So the tank car would come with it and you would take it down to the old plant?

Freeman Funk: We had a siding. The car would come right into the plant and we'd unload it right into our storage tanks. We had big storage tanks (in connection with the sweetener effort) that had never been used. They were put in before my time and they were put in to supplement the manufactured gas. But somehow that didn't work out too well.

Interviewer: So the tanks were there?

Freeman Funk: They were there. During the process of having this machinery put in we loaded up the storage tanks. It's a catalytic process. But because of a design feature this turned out to be almost disastrous. There were two tanks ... and the piping connected them together. There was some settlement that occurred in one of the tanks-differential settlement-that twisted the pipes and cracked one of them open. And here is 50,000 gallons of heavy propane spilling out into the neighborhood. We had to evacuate that end of town.

Interviewer: Well when was that?

Freeman Funk: About a year after the bond issue failed. Mr. Houston was still city manager.

Interviewer: So it had to be 1954?

Freeman Funk: Yes, that has to be true. Interviewer: How did you know this was happening? You can't smell it...

Freeman Funk: Well, it caught fire! The man putting in the new equipment was in the plant welding and when this gas flowed down to it, it went right on back and here it was under this 50,000 gallon tank, immediately next to it was another 50,000 gallon tank, was this roaring fire. It was rather frightening. We called in all the help we can get. It happened that the bottled gas company man knew something that the rest of us didn't know. He said if this thing has been installed correctly-other than that it needed a flexible joint--it will have a valve within the pipe that will cut off when it reaches a certain flow. And it will cut off. It was flowing pretty rapidly we thought, but we had to take a chance. He said, "If you say so I'll go up there and hit that pipe with something and try to break it and make it flow faster." If it doesn't have that valve you're going to have a really hot fire!

Interviewer: He was a brave fellow.

Freeman Funk: Yes, he was. And he went up there and hit that thing and sure enough it stopped the flow. It was a frightening moment.

Interviewer: Yes, frightening moments... . But what happened? They said okay we'll approve the bonds?

Freeman Funk: I've gotten a little out of sequence on this ... I know that that man was burned in this fire. (But he recovered.) But nothing we tried worked. This sweetener with the propane didn't work; reformed propane didn't work; the bond issue failed. So we said, "Let's see if we can find a buyer for the allocation and for the distribution system..." And eventually it came about that somebody did come along and buy it and took over.

Interviewer: And relieved the city of running the gas company. And when was that? In the late '50s?

Freeman Funk: Yes.

[End of Tape 1, May 14, 1999]