

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

(Second session, Tape 1, Side B, May 21, 1999 )

Interviewer: We're talking now about sidewalks. I guess this was the '50s when people were repairing their own sidewalks?

Freeman Funk: By the way, this was a difficult thing to administer. We'd have to send out an inspector, and he'd have to mark which pieces had to be repaired and we'd write letters to somebody saying those pieces have to be repaired within a certain period of time. If you don't do it, the city'll do it and charge you. Some people would say go ahead. Eventually, the city got enough money together in a surplus one year to take over that duty to repair and build some sidewalks, and the calls came in-- people who'd neglected to do it themselves and they'd call and say okay it's yours, now do it.

Interviewer: And got after you?

Freeman Funk: Yes.

Interviewer: What year was that, do you recall? It must have been in the '50s.

Freeman Funk: I think it was the '60s

Interviewer: [Looking again at the list of suggested topics] You have a note here... gas meter in the bedroom and the water meter with the dime versus the nickels.

Freeman Funk: Okay we were in the gas business. We're covered that. But one of the stories that has intrigued me is that we had this rather short man who was the meter reader for gas. The meters in the old days were indoors because it was a wet gas and it would freeze outdoors so they were in all sorts of places. They had to have a little bit of heat. Not a whole lot. Water meters don't freeze because they are in the ground, buried. This man told us about one meter-they'd have to go up on back porches and all of that. This man told us there's even one in a bedroom. Now I don't know how it got there. He said it's way up toward the ceiling. I said, "How do you even read it?" And he

said, "Oh, that's easy, I just get up on the bed and bounce. (Laughing) And he was serious, that's what he did. With respect to the water meter, we had a man who came to us from public works ... he was a nice fellow, but he was a little hard to teach... and he had no skills. I decided to put him in the meter reading department and I worked with him for two weeks. He learned to read a meter. He became a good meter reader and he liked the job, reliable. He complained a little bit because we didn't supply him with a car, but he got along all right. He told us a story: "People think I don't read the meters. Some of them have little tricky things that they do. The other day I came across a meter and I opened the box and looked down. And the lid that you have to flip to read had a dime laying on it. I took it off, read the meter, and left two nickels." (Both Interviewer and Freeman Funk are laughing) Someone left it there and assumed that the meter reader would be the only person to see it. He wouldn't take the dime but he left two nickels.

Interviewer: Pretty smart.

Freeman Funk: Yes, he was pretty smart.

Interviewer: Let's change our areas here and talk a little bit here about action line versus direct line. What was that all about?

Freeman Funk: Okay, press relations were very important to local government.

Interviewer: How do you assess your press relations over the years?

Freeman Funk: It varied. We worked hard at it and they worked hard at it. But it depended on the reporter a whole lot. Editors get their material from their reporters. If they write their editorials based on poor reporting, they get a poor editorial. That's obvious. But about this specific thing, the local paper decided it was going to start this thing like papers were doing in that day, and put a column called "Action Line."

Interviewer: It was consumer oriented?

Freeman Funk: Yes, they had a number. People would call these things in and if it were interesting enough the newspaper would publish it with an answer. If it involved the city... I wanted to get the question from the citizen not filter it through the newspaper editors who might throw away the ones they don't like. So I refused to answer. You'll get

no answer from anybody in the city government about these things. You can refer people to us if you want, but we'll deal with the citizens directly because they are our people. Well, the editor didn't like this too much.

Interviewer: I can see where that would be a conflict...

Freeman Funk: New telephone books were coming and I said, "I'm going to put in direct line."

Interviewer: Direct line? Is it still here?

Freeman Funk: I don't think so. I used it for many many years. The listing in the telephone book said under city of Fredericksburg City Manager 9 to 10 Daily. I'd sit there with that phone. Nobody in between. When that phone rang a citizen could get me and talk about anything they wanted to talk about. It just kind of knocked "Action Line" in the head.

Interviewer: How many calls did you get?

Freeman Funk: Pretty good number. A lot I would refer to somebody else. Or have somebody else call them. I would have direct contact and let people know they can contact the city manager any time they wanted to.

Interviewer: How long did you do it?

Freeman Funk: 10 or 15 years... Now I would sometimes have to have somebody do it for me.

Interviewer: Were the majority of calls complaints?

Freeman Funk: Everything. You never knew what was coming up. Let me give you an example of "Action Line." A man called me and said there's a serious thing up here in my neighborhood. I think there's wastewater sewage flowing into the canal and he said I know the city gets its water from the canal. I said, "Oh my goodness, give me your name and location." He said, "I started to write to Action Line, but I thought it better I just call you."

Interviewer: I think it's better he called.

Freeman Funk: Well this was something that required immediate action. Three days later if the editor decided to publish it or deal with it and not cast it aside, then I'd get my hands into this. That was much too late.

Interviewer: Was this legitimate?

Freeman Funk: Oh absolutely. He was right. I told you that there are separate storm water and wastewater systems? Well they are separate except for four manholes where if one overflows there are two outlets; in other words-if it stops up here it will rise up and go out the other which is what happened there. It was simple stoppage. And we could clear it. But what are you doing to do? It happened it was downstream from the water intake a little bit but that water in the canal doesn't flow much and bacteria could work its way upstream. So I called the state public health director in Richmond and told him what we'd done. What we'd discovered. We'd shut down the filter plant and were ready to double chlorinate. All sorts of things. Do you have other suggestions? Well he was very very complimentary for the action we'd taken and the responsibility we'd assumed-as opposed to just saying well, it's probably going to be all right.

Interviewer: But this could have been a public health emergency.

Freeman Funk: Well we got over that one, but it just illustrated how "inaction" you could get on Action Line as opposed to direct line, whereas if you call someone who has the manpower, knowledge and intelligence to do the right thing. You're all right.

Interviewer: And you quickly recognized the problem there.

Freeman Funk: Yes, I often had said that councilmen would like to take direct calls -they seem to get flattered if a citizen calls them, but they don't have a work force. So whenever a councilman gets a call that he thinks needs attention he's got to call the city manager. He could also ask the citizen to call the city manager, which is better. But you can't tell a councilman what to do and how to conduct his life... Of course I've had the other experience now having been on City Council.

Interviewer: You've made a note about "City Council and the Strong Committee System." That would relate to this problem wouldn't it?

Freeman Funk: It relates in a way. It could encourage people to deal with council rather than the administration.

Interviewer: You've seen both sides of it, which do you think worked better.

Freeman Funk: Well the strong committee system worked well before the Freedom of Information Act [was passed] by the General Assembly. I can tell you the details if you'd like to know.

Interviewer: Yes, I'd like to know.

Freeman Funk: In the committee system there were 12 councilmen and a mayor.

Interviewer: And you?

Freeman Funk: Yes, and the mayor was a figurehead and he knew it. He had no vote, no voice. He had veto power - I don't think he ever used it.

Interviewer: Was he elected at large?

Freeman Funk: At large, as mayor. Okay with 12 council members and a committee system it's easy to see how many committees you are going to have. You are going to have 12.

Interviewer: (Laughing) You better.

Freeman Funk: If I could digress, Mac Cowan-who later became mayor - said as a freshman council member he was given one of the least important jobs. It was the claims committee. And in those days there weren't many claims because people weren't litigious as they are today.

Interviewer: People with a claim against the city?

Freeman Funk: Yes, any little thing that came up-you know a tree limb fell on a car or any little thing-would be referred to his committee. Automatically. If it came to council, it would be referred to a committee. Council would never act on new business.

Interviewer: The committee would meet and report back?

Freeman Funk: Yes. The committee would report back. In 1942 when Mac Cowan was a freshman council member a big flood came and council thought there'd be a lot of big claims so they appointed a

special committee to bypass Mayor Cowan. Entirely. This illustrated how unimportant committees are at times and how important certain committees are. These 12 committees could meet and did meet at the call of the chairmen. Each committee would have three council members. I had to attend each committee meeting and they had them at strange times - sometimes at breakfast time, sometimes at supper time-to suit the members. Nobody ever bought my lunch... . I tried to encourage them if they could act on something and knew what the answer was going to be couldn't they just go ahead, but they didn't want to bypass the committees. The strong committee system implies that if a council committee studies something and makes a recommendation then council will follow that recommendation. Otherwise it upsets the system. If council votes against your recommendation, then you'll vote against some other committee's recommendation and it's a mess. These committees met without press present. They could call in anyone they wanted to. City engineer, staff members. As I've said the city manager was always present.

Interviewer: They were pretty much secret?

Freeman Funk: Yes, but they never made a decision, in all the memory I have, they never made a decision. They made recommendations. Until it got to the full council and gets on the council minutes it didn't happen. You could study something in depth. Study it not at all. It was probably possible for the chairman to make a recommendation without meeting with the committee if he wanted to. It was possible to speak freely and really analyze a subject upside down and inside out. When that change came about it took a lot of adjusting.

Interviewer: You are talking about the FOIA (Freedom of Information Act)?

Freeman Funk: Yes, when that came about it took a lot of adjusting. The committees became weak. The committee system was boring to the committee members and the city manager. We had to hear everything twice. The committee felt obligated to tell council everything it knew or thought was pertinent before they voted.

Interviewer: It was like a play... they wrote it and they went in and acted it out?

Freeman Funk: That's right. But it worked. It was a good system. The open system was okay too. You just couldn't exchange as much

information with each other as you might want to. It prevails now and standing committees no longer exist in City Council in Fredericksburg.

Interviewer: So staff does the work?

Freeman Funk: Yes and makes the recommendations. That was true before, too. Even under the strong committee system. We had access to the information, to the background and we had the time to study and make reports and there was a lot of report writing. And to catch it historically so the council doesn't make up its mind one way this year and another way next year.

Interviewer: To follow it along consistently?

Freeman Funk: Yes.

Interviewer: I don't see how an elected official who has a job and another life can absorb all this material that they must do.

Freeman Funk: It varied a lot with personality. We had people with too much time. Like when I was a member of council I had too much time. So I could go into too much detail. I had to guard that very carefully. I'd preached the difference for 26 years. There were other members who didn't have enough time. There was a member I admired a great deal who'd call up and say, "What do we have on the calendar?" I'd say, "Nothing, Doug (Quarles)" and he'd say, "Let's call that meeting off" Some of them wouldn't do that. They'd meet there to socialize. But it took my time. I had to be there and sit there. No minutes to take, no reports to write. I thought there were better uses of my time. But I never let them know that. I'm working for them. I'll do whatever it takes to satisfy them.

Interviewer: Now would it be a committee (of the council) for example that worked on the Germanna College location?

Freeman Funk: That would not be a standing committee unless remotely the education committee did it. The education committee -- I assume that standing committees existed at the time -- would handle the appointment of a citizen to the board of Germanna College.

Interviewer: That's not much of a relationship.

Freeman Funk: No not much. If you got to pick a committee since no one ever dreamed of a subject that fitted some committee. You just

have to force it into a committee if you have the strong committee system.

Interviewer: You prefer the strong committee system, I think. Don't you?

Freeman Funk: Yes.

Interviewer: Let's talk for a while about buildings. You had some thoughts about the location of Germanna.

Interviewer: Yes, I guess we could say here that it was probably in the 60s.

Freeman Funk: The State said to the localities, "We think that Planning District 16 ought to be expanded some and we'll put in Culpeper and Orange Counties and that will be the community college district. It's up to the local officials to find a place to put it." They said it must have a four-lane highway, public water, public sewer, electricity. They set these out. And we said okay let's get busy and tell them where we think it ought to be.

Interviewer: And you all were fully in support of the idea of community college?

Freeman Funk: Mac Cowan was mayor and he said to me how can we pick a location that we can support? We know that Rt.3 is four lane and it ought to be on that somewhere and probably in Spotsylvania. We know that Culpeper and Orange are on one in Stafford up here. I'll use a little method here that maybe you'd like to see the results on. So I used a method called "centroids" in which you take a criterion and take the center of gravity so to speak. The criterion in this case would be demographics and the census tracts gave us the number of college students age in each of the localities ... that is weighted. The greatest number should have the college closest to them. You also have to weight how many in Stafford and how many in Culpeper have to drive how many miles. Miles and numbers give you a factor and you actually plot them and they'll come together on a map right there. And I said that's where it should be... It meets everything... This side of Lake of Woods by quite a bit. At Chancellor... Elys Ford Road on the south side of Rt. 3. Well, we didn't get it there. That was our submittal. We didn't get it. Politics entered into it. The big wheel from this area so far as state government and community colleges go lived in Culpeper, so he drew it all out there. And he said this is where we're going to put it.

Interviewer: And that's where it is today?

Freeman Funk: (Assenting.) Except even in today's paper it says that Spotsylvania is going to have another building of the community college. They already have one. So you see its getting relocated right back to the center of gravity where we thought it ought to be in the first place.

Interviewer: Well, it does always work out in the end.

Freeman Funk The hard way.

Interviewer: Sometimes.

(Both are laughing)

Interviewer: Let's talk about the library and the Lafayette School.

Freeman Funk: This is just a little thing.

Interviewer: Perhaps it's very pertinent considering the new developments.

Freeman Funk As buildings become vacant you start to think what can they be used for and I had needs for a study. I had needs for a study because I had no finance director, no planner, not much staff and I had to set aside a month each year to work on the budget. More thought process than anything else. Along with some estimates and inquiries. The Wallace Library in the building where the school board is now located had been relocated to Lafayette School and here was a vacant building. It was springtime. I didn't need heat or air conditioning. I just set up a little desk and worked there. No telephone. The staff knew where I was and they could just run down there and get me. No problem. So that was an intermediate use. Later it was taken over by the school board. I used Lafayette School when it was vacant and this was early days of TV (for early educational television.)