

James Dover
Interview 009a
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Vivian Holt, Interviewer
Dorothy Farley, Transcriber
Retyped by Elaine Lawrence

Abstract: In an interview with Vivian Holt, Diboll City Manager James Dover explains his job responsibilities and the relationship between the mayor, city council, and city manager. He briefly touches on some of Diboll's problems and his hopes for the city's future.

Vivian Holt (hereafter VH): I'm highly honored to have this opportunity of interviewing you as one of the city officials of Diboll. Mr. Dover, did you ever serve as an alderman or councilman?

James Dover (hereafter JD): No, Mrs. Holt, I never served in that capacity. I did serve on our school board, which is a similar duty, but, not as an alderman or a city councilman.

VH: How many years, and did that privilege ever cause you to desire to serve someday as mayor or city manager?

JD: I served for three years on that board. My association with the school and the city gave me the desire to run for city manager or become the city manager, I would say. I do feel like that had something to do with it.

VH: Were you born and brought up in Diboll?

JD: No, I was born and reared in Alto, Cherokee County, neighboring to Angelina, but I'm not a native of Diboll.

VH: Do I understand correctly that the mayor and aldermen make all decisions and policies for the town and that you are hired to carry out their plans?

JD: To a certain degree. A city manager form of government, as we have here in Diboll, the city manager makes certain recommendations to the city commission about policies and plans and in conjunction with my recommendations and their concurrence, well then we...they're carried out in that manner.

VH: Are you ever asked to give advice on their policies?

JD: Yes, I am quite often. Personnel or some other pending policy of the city comes to my attention.

VH: Have some of your suggestions caused them to change some of their plans?

JD: I would think that I could say, yes, there are some that has changed some of the plans. Maybe the different ways we've gone about putting some plans ahead of the others that are more pressing in that order.

VH: Mr. Dover, how would a person attain the position of city manager?

JD: First, he would need schooling in this field. Secondly, after he is qualified to serve as city manager, then he would have to be interviewed by various city commissions, in this...with different cities. A college graduate from the city management field would be a very good field for him.

VH: Who hires him?

JD: In most cases, the mayor hires the city manager on acceptance by the city commission. It's approved by the city commission.

VH: Do you consider that he receives a fair salary?

JD: Well, that kind of varies from town to town. In this day and time I would say that there are not any overpaid city managers. I feel like most of 'em are on a fair salary.

VH: Is it true that you serve in a supervisory capacity over all departments?

JD: Yes, I do.

VH: Doesn't such a responsibility cost you sleepless nights now and then and a few headaches?

JD: Well, I think I can answer that, yes it does, because there are many, many problems and various aspects. From one area you might say, if we don't pick the garbage up or if it's not taken care of...there's not too many restful days thereafter, so...there are some sleepless nights to go along with it.

VH: Is there any one department that demands more of your time than the other?

JD: They're all about the same. I guess maybe the biggest area would be in ...sanitation. Seems like this is one of the most troubled fields. This is not all to do with 'uh maybe from the city standpoint but in serving the citizenry and the requirements of the EPA and the Texas Water Quality people.

VH: Do some departments have bigger problems than others, if so, what, which of them?

JD: The one that has the greatest problems would probably be the police department and this is not from an internal standpoint, but just their day to day duties. They never know what they're gonna be up against, so I feel like that this would probably be the largest area.

VH: Are the finances to carry out the plans of the mayor and aldermen always approved in advance by the people? If not, are there ever complaints that too much money is being spent on certain projects and not enough on others?

JD: Well, we try to do that in this way. We have a public hearing on our budget prior to it being installed for the coming fiscal year and time is set aside whereby the citizens from the town can come in and review this budget, ask questions and 'uh before it is finally adopted. So, I feel like in this way that most of these problems are corrected before they become finalized. Our budget this year, for instance, was in excess of \$1 million and we had a very good representative from the citizens. They asked several questions and I think this is good. Most places you find the people rarely voice themselves like this but they do criticize the way their town is run, but they never take time to go down to city hall and voice these opinions. Usually, it's to their neighbor or someone like this and that's not the place for the answer to their problem to be resolved. Go down to city hall. Ask what's going on, look at their books and most assuredly, if a thing can be corrected, then it will be.

VH: How does Diboll compare budget wise and per capita with towns of equal population?

JD: Diboll is above average when it comes to comparing with the average population with another town our size. Temple Industries is a large contributor to the difference in this factor. Financially, the City of Diboll is very sound, very sound. The only areas that I can see that improvement could be and that would be a downtown section, maybe a little more housing. There are plenty of jobs here, but we don't have the adequate people to facilitate the job availability. But financially the city is in very good shape.

VH: Mr. Dover, do you enjoy serving as City Manager?

JD: Very much so, very much so.

VH: There is the old saying, "that we live and learn." Do you feel that you have learned some valuable lessons in human relationships as City Manager?

JD: Yes, there's not hardly a day goes by that there's not some contribution that I have learned, from talking to someone or just doing the daily job. I don't think you'll ever find a city manager that has all the answers to all the problems. So by talking to people in various communities or throughout the country there's an answer for every problem that exists, in most cases.

VH: Do you advise...would you advise a young man to seek to serve in that office?

JD: If he likes people, and he likes a job that is challenging, well then, yes, this would be a good field because it has a combination of both I'd say.

VH: Would you care to serve for several more years? If so, why?

JD: Yes, I would. There are several things here in Diboll that I feel like that are not complete and I would like to feel that I had a small portion of seeing these come about and this would be the addition of services that are needed for the city here in areas of better lighting, better housing, to name a few. I'd like to see these things come about and I think that we will soon see them. The City of Diboll will be somewhere in the neighborhood of a population of ten to twelve thousand population.

VH: Have you a vision of Diboll as you would like to see it tomorrow or ten years from now?

JD: Well, I think some of the foregoing items there. Yes, I would like to see it, oh, ten or fifteen thousand population. To me, this is an ideal size. It's large enough that people can have and enjoy a community without having to go out of town and this is one of the problems of Diboll today. Fortunately in some ways, Lufkin is nearby. But I'd like to see our community take care of our own needs and this would probably come about if we were in this size population.

VH: What suggestions would you make to the people of Diboll?

JD: About the only suggestion that I could make would be that citizens should become more involved in their city government, know what is going on, to come in and to have some input as to what you like, what you dislike. In this way the city commission and myself can better design the city to facilitate these requirements and I think this would be one of the best areas.

VH: Mr. Dover, it was very kind of you to spend time answering my questions. I appreciate you very much and I trust that you may have the desire of your heart granted while you're serving Diboll in the future. Thank you, Sir.

JD: Thank you, Mrs. Holt, the pleasure was all mine.

VH: Thank you.

(The dialogue ends here)

END OF INTERVIEW