



*The City of Lewes*



August 31, 2021

The Honorable Senator Thomas Carper

The Honorable Senator Christopher Coons

The Honorable Representative Lisa Blunt Rochester

We write to you today to express the mutual concern of our four Delaware coastal municipalities over the state of the Lewes and Rehoboth Canal (L&R Canal) and to request your support in asking the U.S. Army Corp of Engineers to perform maintenance dredging on the entire length of the Canal from Roosevelt Inlet to Rehoboth Bay.

We are thankful for all the help you have provided for so many years in keeping our towns the attractive, safe, and viable communities they are today for our residents and visitors. We are concerned, however, about the continuing lack of maintenance of the Lewes and Rehoboth Canal by the Army Corps of Engineers that was last dredged by the Corps nearly 20 years ago in 2002.

In its current condition, the Canal barely meets the demands of the boating public, which due to the heavy accumulation of silt, now has a very diminished expectation of using it based on the unreliability of channel depth. We believe that, if brought back to its Corps-designed depth standard of 10 feet MLLW-Roosevelt Inlet to Savannah Rd Bridge and 6 feet MLLW to Rehoboth Bay, then properly maintained and marked, the L&R Canal will flourish as a well-used waterway with both transportation and scenic tourism attractiveness.

We note these words that are included in the U.S. House of Representatives draft appropriations bill on Energy and Water Development:

“America’s ports, inland waterways, locks, and dams serve as economic lifelines for many communities across the nation.”

This fact applies equally to the coastal Delaware area which contributes \$7 billion to the Delaware State economy, the second largest economic sector in the State next to agriculture, and depends on its infrastructure of canals, waterways, inland bays, and beaches to thrive as a tourist destination for millions of Americans.

We do not know the full potential for use of the L&R Canal, but our collective, experienced thinking is that measuring the current use of a waterway when it has not been maintained for decades and basing the need for maintenance funding on the current use data is a far cry from assessing what the use and value will be if properly dredged and marked for boaters.

We have received from the Corps the most recent navigation survey conducted of the Canal from Roosevelt Inlet to its entrance into Rehoboth Bay. We have also polled Canal users in our Towns to determine what they are experiencing today in their use with their boats. The survey and anecdotal information confirm that there are significant areas that are not at design depth and pose navigation safety hazards to boaters.

- In the Lewes end of the Canal, the areas on either side of the railroad swing bridge, which are very highly trafficked, are spots where boats commonly hit bottom at low tide. The Cape Water Taxi reports that there is hard bottom there, and they believe that oysters are now in residence in the too shallow channel at those locations.
- In the vicinity of Henlopen Acres and North Shores, and at the entrance of the L&R Canal into Rehoboth Bay, boaters we have spoken to readily know of the extreme shallowness of the L&R Canal and plan around tides that will result in them hitting the bottom.
- The sedimentation rate in the Henlopen Acres Marina has tripled in the last 10 years with a reduction in depth from two to one feet in the last annual survey, making many slips unusable.

The new canal access dock in Rehoboth Beach is an indication of how highly valued use of the Canal is. The dock cost \$1.25 million to construct following 10 years of planning. The Lewes Canalfront Park also has a marina that has been in operation for over 10 years and is considered a vital attraction in the City. In anticipation of similar usage, the Lewes Canalfront Park Marina has already completed upgrades to accommodate this type of activity. The Roosevelt Inlet boat ramp provides ready access at the North end of the Canal, and as a result, many recreational boaters choose to navigate the Canal from this point.

The broader vision is that the Canal, in its entirety, will be returned to a viable and reliable transportation alternative, that links the towns of Lewes, Henlopen Acres, Rehoboth Beach, and Dewey Beach, that it was designed to be. It requires infrastructure maintenance investment to return it to the specifications it was designed and originally built to.

Imagine the future where the Lewes and Rehoboth Canal serves its full potential. Right now, it certainly cannot. We ask for your help in securing the funding necessary to bring the entire canal channel to design depth and have the boat channel adequately marked so boaters can travel successfully, and without concern for running aground, its entire length from Roosevelt Inlet to Rehoboth Bay.

Sincerely,



Dale Cooke  
Mayor, Town of Dewey Beach



Ted Becker  
Mayor, City of Lewes



Joni Reich  
Mayor, Town of Henlopen Acres



Stan Mills  
Mayor, City of Rehoboth Beach

cc: The Honorable Governor John Carney  
Secretary Shawn Garvin