

Statement of Tony Pratt on
The Association of Coastal Towns

May 11, 2018

I have been asked to reflect on the importance of the Association of Coastal Towns (ACT) and the role I may play in helping ACT provide benefits to the coastal towns of Lewes, Henlopen Acres, Rehoboth, Dewey, Bethany, South Bethany and Fenwick, the incorporated towns that are the members of ACT. ACT was originally formed many years ago for the focused purpose of speaking up for the initial beach nourishment work conducted by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and DNREC. This work was carried out between 2004 and 2008 shortly after which regular meetings of ACT ceased to be held. The focus had been on getting initial construction of the beach nourishment projects and once that goal had been met the towns had a collective sigh of relief and could then move onto addressing other demands within their communities. But we shouldn't forget that each of the beach nourishment projects have a 50 year maintenance plan built into them. As many surrounding states are also addressing now we cannot 'build and forget', a term used in New Jersey in reference to a parallel situation there. The level of local concern reduced significantly once initial construction of beach protection was accomplished, but that same level of concern must be present every year.

In January of 2017 Mayor Voveris contacted me with concerns about flooding in South Bethany from the bay side. In preparation for a meeting to discuss this I observed that this problem was not unique to South Bethany and that other towns with a similar problem might benefit by being in on the conversation. When a group of us met to discuss back bay flooding, ACT was recalled as a valuable alliance group that had, in the past, been a key voice in bringing about solutions to coastal flooding and storm damage in and to their communities. The alliance of the coastal towns was and is a powerful voice that General Assembly members, the Administration and the Congressional Delegation listen to and respect.

The towns from Lewes to Fenwick face several common coastal problems; beach erosion and subsequent coastal storm damages, back bay or canal side flooding, lack of boat channel maintenance and marking, and loss of tourism revenues and jobs with an increased problem of any of these three issues. Accompanying these community threats is the unfortunate reality that both federal and state budgets are in critical states of constraint. There is less money available nationwide for communities with these same problems as the population and demand for services ever increases and Delaware state budgets face ever increasing demands on available annual revenue. This collision course of growing coastal resource needs and diminishing federal and state fund availability is unlikely to get any better in future years and is in fact likely to get more challenging. So far Delaware coastal towns have been provided coastal management services at little or no cost to the community. This benefit may be destined to change in the near future.

I have been asked by the coastal town mayors to provide a vision of how I might be able to help the ACT as the towns face these challenges. I have just retired from a 38 year career with DNREC having served the last decade as the Administrator of the Shoreline and Waterway Management Section. My responsibilities included addressing the same challenges listed above for the State. I have worked closely with your community and the others making up the ACT for all of those 38 years. My responsibilities have included working at the local, state and federal level on behalf of your community. I am the President of the American Shore and Beach Preservation Association and have previously chaired that organization's Government Affairs Committee. I was on Lewes City Council for 6 years in the 1990's and well understand the challenges a local elected official must address. I have been fortunate in my career to have been able to work effectively at the local, state and federal levels of government. My close working relationship with the Corps of Engineers has proven to be very advantageous to Delaware's coastal towns in getting so much beach nourishment work accomplished. I am currently working closely with Congress, particularly in the Senate where I have testified several times at the Senate Environment and Public Works Committee (full Committee hearings). I testified just this past Wednesday (5/9) at that Committee's Hearing on the bipartisan America's Water Infrastructure Act of 2018, as an expert witness. My ability to help the ACT face the many challenges ahead is unique, I believe. I love Delaware's coast and each of its towns. I would be honored to be able to use my knowledge, experience and connections to protect these wonderful communities, and preserve and improve the coastal amenities that drew all of us to the coast. Let's work together to achieve the common vision we have for a robust and rewarding coastal life. I am happy to meet in person with you if you would like to discuss the issue I have outlined more thoroughly.