

A Community Boating Center for Roosevelt Roads: Attracting Tourism and Investments by Diversifying our Ocean Economy

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By: Arturo Gallardo, Econ. RSF Contract Support

Introduction

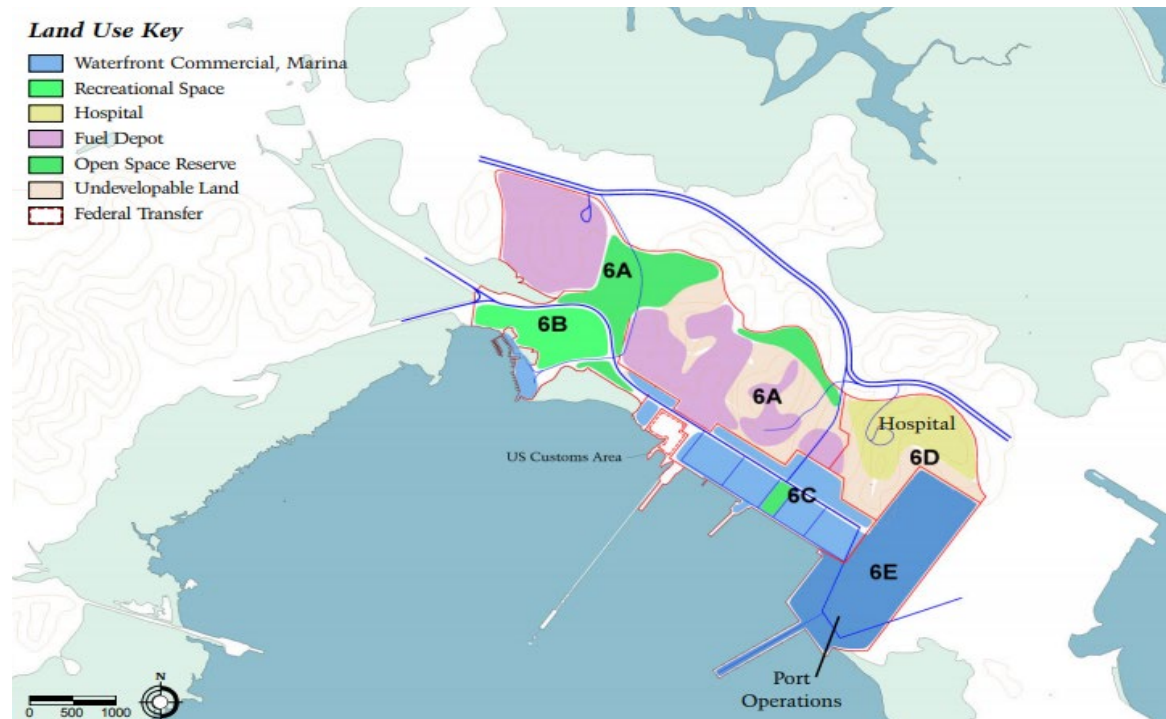
One of the biggest problems facing the redevelopment of former Naval Station Roosevelt Roads (NSRR) is the lack of continuity in government planning. In Puerto Rico, strategic plans and economic development initiatives on average have a four year shelf-life. Once an administration changes, a large portion of the plans developed by the previous administration are erased or abandoned and strategies take a new direction. Plans for the redevelopment of Roosevelt Roads have suffered the same fate.

The base was reverted to Puerto Rico in the Spring of 2004. Unlike other base closures and realignments, the closure was expedited by the federal government and the procedures established by the Base Realignment and Closure (BRAC) process were not followed. (*Puerto Rico Herald*, 17 July 2003) Consequently, the former naval station's redevelopment has been in limbo for the past 16 years.

A Solution

The possible solution that could benefit the local community and enhance their quality of life could be establishment of a community boating center (CBC) at the site of the Roosevelt Roads Marina. This could be a first step in bringing the surrounding communities into the initial redevelopment phase of the base and improve the prospects of an economically hard-hit region. A community boating center could be a catalyst for attracting further redevelopment and investment to the Roosevelt Roads waterfront area. The allure created by the scenic beauty of sailboats and other maritime activities could entice businesses attracted to the nautical scene.

For reference purposes, the marina is in zone 6B of the zone map generated by CB Richard Ellis in their **2004 Naval Station Roosevelt Roads Reuse Plan**, considered the "master plan" for the redevelopment of Roosevelt Roads:



Source: NSRR Reuse Plan, CB Richard Ellis (2004)

The purpose of this report is to propose a possible solution that could bring long lasting benefits to the people of Puerto Rico's northeast region, establish a facility that could attract investment and tourism to one of Puerto Rico's top real estate assets and hopefully put the Island on the map as a top nautical / water sports destination. A community boating center is not a solution to all the problems affecting the development of the former naval base, but as a component of a Blue Economy strategy that includes the restoration of the port control tower next to the passenger and cargo ferry terminal and the Ocean Institute at the former U.S. Coast Guard facilities, it could help get the ball rolling on the redevelopment of Roosevelt Roads.

Economic Impact of the Base Closure

The closing of NSRR represented major economic impact for Puerto Rico and for the local economy of the Island's northeast region.

One year after the closure of the base, the New York Times reported that businesses in the municipality of Ceiba, the town where the base is located, saw their sales drop by 75%. In addition, 40% of the establishments in Ceiba were having a hard time staying in business while the unemployment rate soared to approximately 20%. (*New York Times*, 3 April 2005)

At the height of operations, (1999-2000) the base employed 13,000 military and civilian personnel with a combined payroll of approximately \$107,000,000. As headquarters for the U.S. Naval Forces Southern Command and the U.S. Special Operations Command South, NSRR pumped over \$300,000,000 annually into the local economy. (*Puerto Rico Herald*, 17 July 2003)

The closing of the base on March 31, 2004 devastated Puerto Rico's northeast region. As the Local Area Unemployment Statistics report for January 2020 demonstrates, the region has not fully recovered from this economic blow. (LAUS, January 2020)

Municipality	Workforce	Unemployment Rate
Ceiba	3,457	10.4%
Fajardo	10,201	10.7%
Humacao	16,249	11.5%
Naguabo	7,698	10.3%
Yabucoa	8,383	14.8%

Source: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics; PR Statistics Institute (Jan. 2020)

In response to the closure of the base and to better identify opportunities for the future redevelopment of its assets, the Government of Puerto Rico hired CB Richard Ellis Group (CBRE Group), a world renowned real estate development firm to conduct an analysis and develop a reuse plan for the facilities. On December 2004 CBRE Group delivered the **Naval Station Roosevelt Roads Reuse Plan** to the Puerto Rico Department of Economic Development and Commerce. This plan which has been referred as the "Roosevelt Roads master plan" identified the Roosevelt Roads Marina as one of the assets that should be developed.

The following are some of the key points related to the marina:

- CBRE Group concluded that the marina's location next to other major marinas in the northeast region is a major selling point
- The marina has 72 slips and 25 moorings for small vessels, and it is adjacent to 40.2 acres of accessible land that could be developed if needed
- The Roosevelt Road Marina is in an ideal geographic location due to its proximity to the U.S., British and the Spanish Virgin Islands (Vieques and Culebra)
- Puerto Rico's northeast region is where 70% of all marinas and service ports are located; however, marinas in P.R. mostly serve local boat owners and rarely cater to tourist (this trend is starting to change). The Roosevelt Roads marina could serve this unmet need.
- The marina doesn't compete with the bigger neighboring operations; thus, the study identified it as an ideal location for attracting nautical tourism, and as an ecotourism destination where visitors could explore the mangroves surrounding the Ensenada Honda bay via kayak, paddle boarding and hiking tours. (CBRE, December 2004)

These conclusions remain true and perhaps could provide support for establishing a community boating center in Roosevelt Roads.

Overview satellite photo of the Marina at Roosevelt Roads:



Source: Google Earth

Ensenada Honda Bay, playground of the Roosevelt Roads CBC



Source: Google Earth

Description of the Project: Roosevelt Roads Community Boating Center

While access to the water and beaches in Puerto Rico is mostly unlimited, access to watersports and boating leisure activities is very limited. Unless you own a watercraft, have the resources to access one or know someone who has a boat, chances are you will not be participating in such activities. A recent study conducted by ABT Associates regarding the ocean economies of Puerto Rico and the U. S. Virgin Islands found that Puerto Rico has a limited number of watersports facilities or aquatic rental facilities. (*Clements*, 28 April 2016)

While Puerto Rico has some of the most beautiful shores and beaches in the world, most residents do not take advantages of these natural resources through nautical activities. Ironically, while Puerto Rico is surrounded by water, according to a Sea Grant survey over 60% of Puerto Ricans do not know how to swim. (*El Vocero*, 19 June 2018) Hopefully, the establishment of a Community Boating Center can help reinforce our vision of the ocean as our playground and source for economic growth.

A community boating center (CBC) is a facility that fosters the growth of aquatic activities such as sailing, rowing, kayaking, windsurfing and other type nautical recreational activities for a local community or region. If you go to the websites of most community boating and sailing centers you will notice that the language used to describe their mission statement is very similar: “ a place to foster safe watercraft recreation, education and access to all regardless of financial means”.

Or as Joe Lee Jr., the founder of Boston’s Community Boating, Inc. would say: “**Sailing here for All.**” (*Community Boating, Inc.*, 2020)

Community boating and sailing centers are spread all over the world. The most famous ones are in cities with a nautical heritage such Boston, Newport, San Diego, Charleston, Miami, Barcelona, Lake Garda, and Tel Aviv. While most started as clubs to promote the growth of sailing or as venues for major sailing events, in recent years they have diversify their product offering to provide other boating activities such as rowing, paddle-boarding, windsurfing, kayaking, snorkeling/diving and educational outreach.

In the United States the majority operate as non-profit organizations or community-based organizations. Their 501 (c) 3 federal or state exempt status allows them to extend their outreach to multiple communities and special needs groups that private clubs or a for-profit marina would not necessarily target. Their non-profit status also allows them to reach out for corporate, state, and federal sources of funds. Donations, in-kind gifts, and volunteerism are major components of their day to day operations. Is not uncommon to see in one of these clubs a fleet of sailboats or kayaks originating from the same manufacturer or with sponsorship logos on their sails. These organizations have a number of ways of generating funds while at the same time playing a key role as lead organizations in their respective communities; thus, the launching of a possible

Roosevelt Roads community boating center could have a major impact in the region's quality of life and economic development.

While several community boating centers have had a successful legacy, for purposes of this report I will utilize Boston's Community Boating, Inc as the blueprint for the development of a facility at the Roosevelt Roads Marina.

Boston's Community Boating, Inc.

Boston's Community Boating, Inc. (CBI) is probably the most renowned community boating center in the United States and it has been a model for many around the world. Founded on the banks of the Charles River in 1946, it is a landmark of the city of Boston and it has had a key role in teaching thousands of resident and visitors how to sail and operate different watercrafts. It serves the metro Boston area. Residents from over 40 surrounding communities regularly come to CBI to sail in the Charles River. (*Community Boating, Inc.*, October 2016)

CBI has three primary programs:

1. **Adult Sailing Program**- offering introductory and advanced sailing courses, specific courses such as coastal navigation and celestial navigation, and daily and weekend regattas for those looking to actively participate in sailing races.
See Video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=teviUQ11Hvs>
2. **Youth Sailing Program**- offers introductory and advanced sailing courses, high school sailing races, racing for juniors, STEM education courses, summer intern jobs and summer camps. The Youth Program serves as a talent pool for the volunteers needed to help run the center. CBI has entered into alliances and agreements with EF Educational, MIT, Tufts University, Boys and Girls Clubs of Boston and US Sailing to promote STEM education, marine biology and disseminate sports and education to the City's underprivileged youth. CBI is very active in reaching out to underserved youth. For example, the yearly membership for the youth program is \$300 for a season. Those that cannot afford CBI's regular membership are given a special membership of \$1 for the season.
See video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uzNwREDy1MY>
3. **Universal Access Program**- accessible sailing for the disabled and the blind. This is one of the most popular programs and CBI leads the Nation in sailing programs for the disabled. In addition to the above mentioned sailing courses, they also have regular weekly regattas, including regattas for blind sailors that are run through a system that beeps a sound when the blind sailor is reaching the starting line, finish line and course buoys. This is done through a collaboration with Olin College.
CBI also has a Veterans Program, in 2017 it received a \$65,000 grant from the Veterans Administration to run the VA's Home Based Intensive Clinical Program. During the 2017 season 80 veterans participated in this program.

In addition, CBI has partnered with the Massachusetts Special Olympics to conduct weekly Special Olympic races.

Visitors and walk-in guest are given an orientation and those that can pass an on the water test can rent a sailboat for \$45 per day. Tourist and visitors not able to sail on their own can go on regularly scheduled sailings given throughout the day.

See video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GPpd2z5VHM0>

CBI Financials and Operations

Boston's Community Boating, Inc. offers a good roadmap on how to successfully run a watersport recreational program. It constantly adapts to the market needs (adding the UAP program, kayaks, and standup paddle boards) while remaining loyal to its roots as a sailing center.

For FY 2015 it saw revenues of \$1,772,000 an increase from FY 2014 revenues of \$1,617,000. Focus has been on areas not served by other recreational facilities such as the development of programs specifically targeting Veterans and disable populations. CBI has joined with engineering schools to improve sailing equipment and make the boats more adaptable to different groups and emphasize STEM education. (Community Boating Incorporated, 17 October 2016)

In 2016 their fleet of sailboats and other watercraft increased to meet the demands of the market. Fleet composition is as follows:

- Sailboats & windsurfers: 152
- Kayak & paddleboards: 45

This is probably one of the largest fleets of all community boating entities, and beyond what a similar facility in Roosevelt Roads would need. For example, Sail Newport has 140 sailboats, but only 15 are used for the adult program. Sail Newport is focused on developing younger sailboat racers while still providing access to the adult population.

Member Participation:

For 2016, CBI saw substantial member traffic. The Universal Access Program generated 178 memberships. UAP members had 554 sign-outs (sign-out represents every instance a member took a boat out or took an on-the-water class). Considering that CBI's season starts in mid-April and ends on October 31, equipment utilization is considerable.

While no membership revenue numbers were given for the Adult Program (it is estimated that CBI has over 4,000 memberships annually) 2016 sign-out are as follows (*Community Boating Inc.*, October 2016):

- Sailboats & windsurfers: 6,737
- Kayaks and paddleboards: 5,339

In 2016 the Youth Program membership numbers are as follows:

- 376 youths paid the \$1 membership fee
- 779 youths paid the regular \$300 fee
- 72 youths paid a scaled down fee

Youth participation was divided between summer camps, STEM courses, environmental science courses, regattas, and sign-outs. (*Community Boating Inc.*, October 2016)

Fundraising

The 2016 CBI financial statement reported investing over \$68,000 in fundraising efforts. This included hosting events such as their famous 4th of July “*Sailabration*”, a Gala fundraiser at the Liberty Hotel in downtown Boston, dockside BBQ events, leasing of the facilities for corporate events and special sailing events such as the “Pink Sails” event conducted with EF Education First Company.

The CBI’s 501 (c) 3 status allows CBI to reach out to Boston’s top endowments and patrons. (Klein, 17 October 2016)

The Roosevelt Roads Community Boating Center

The Roosevelt Roads Community Boating Center should consider emulating the steps of boating centers such as those in Boston, Newport, Miami, Charleston, San Diego, Barcelona, and Cadiz. The proposed center should offer the following programs:

- Boating & sailing classes for adults, youth, and special needs community
- After school programs: High school sailing races, STEAM education courses in robotics, environmental studies, marine biology, and multiple sports
- STEAM courses can be conducted in collaboration with the Ocean Institute and local schools
- Afterschool programs – in collaboration with the Ocean Institute
- Collaborate with the PR Sailing Federation and US Sailing in developing the next cadre of future Olympians, an Olympic training center
- High school and local sailing leagues
- Aquatic Summer multi-sports camp
- Access to all levels of ability

Economic and Tourism Aims

One of the primary objectives of this initiative is to turn the proposed Roosevelt Roads Community Boating Center into a top destination for watersports and nautical tourism. The location offers certain advantages:

1. 70 minutes away from cruise ships & thousands of tourists. The community boating center could enter into an agreement with tour operators and the cruise ship lines offering the facility as an ecotourism destination for sailing and kayaking / paddle boarding tours through bay's network of mangroves and reefs
2. One stop destination for multiple tourist activities: sailing, boat tours, kayaking, windsurfing, and hiking tours through Roosevelt Roads network of eco-trails

A Top Destination for Major Boating and Sailing Events

One of the anticipated benefits of developing a CBC is the possibility of turning this facility into a major destination for local and international regattas, and as a winter training center for sailing and rowing teams from colleges in the states and overseas. A well-designed facility could be an attractive choice for these institutions and for national / Olympic teams looking to conduct summer and winter training. The Ensenada Honda Bay is an excellent year-round protected venue for these sports. Not only could this bring additional sources of revenues to the Center, but it could have a spillover effect on the local economy as it could increase the demand for hotel rooms, Airbnb and VRBO vacation rentals, groceries stores, restaurants, shops and local transportation.

This is an untapped market that Puerto Rico used to dominate decades ago when the streets of Condado and the Isla Verde were filled with college athletes training here during the winter break.

While sailing may not seem like a big sport, consider the following:

- UK's Sailing Federation has a \$22,000,000 budget
- By some accounts, China's sports federations budget is estimated in the billions of dollars
- The government of Sint Maarten contributed \$350,000 USD to support the organization of the 2019 Heineken Cup. The event brought over 5,000 visitors and \$25,000,000 to the local economy (www.sintmaartengov.org, 21 January 2019)
- The Rhode Island General Assembly created the "Rhode Island Sailing Events Commission" to attract more sailing and boating events to the state. This was done after the success of the Volvo Ocean Race event in Newport. The event brought over 130,000 spectators of which more than half were overseas and out of state visitors and it pumped approximately \$47,000,000 into the local economy (*Winthrop*, 25 September 2017).
- International youth regattas such as the 2019 World Optimist Championships held in Antigua brought over 255 competitors. A youth event brings the competitors plus parent and siblings.
- Youth sailing events and Special Olympic events are sought after events as they attract large numbers of visitors that turn the events into a family vacation (parents and siblings)

The following are a list of events that the boating center should consider hosting:

- Aquatic Special Olympics
- Annual International regattas
- Olympic Class regattas (OCRs)
- World Sailing Championships
- Winter & Summer training Center for National Teams and Universities
- Rowing and standup paddleboard events
- Youth Sailing Championships
- Sailing or aquatic summer camps

Physical Structure:

To attract revenue generating events and meet the standards that are expected of an international venue, the facilities must be top-notch. The following are some suggestions followed by images of existing venues.

Proposed Facility Requirements:

1. The facility should be a harden building, preferably one with high ceilings, and if possible, with classrooms, offices, and an activity center
2. The facility should be of a design that invites corporate events and social activities. One frequent characteristic of facilities visited is that they are multiuse facilities suitable for revenue generating activities.
3. Building should be large enough to store boats and equipment in case of a hurricane
4. Security layout (fences when possible) to protect the equipment
5. Available adjacent land for storage rental. The land next to the boat landing should be sizable enough for boat owners to store their sailboats or watercrafts
6. Weather monitoring equipment: radio equipment to listen to NOAA's weather radio marine frequency and a TV monitor to follow the local doppler radar
7. Surrounding area should be open around the docks so that equipment is not damage while being moved
8. Abundant fresh-water outlets to clean boats after use
9. Outdoor racks to store equipment

These suggestions are based on the need to develop a facility that can generate revenues and attracts people that want to learn how to sail, row or simply be there. If the objective is to attract nautical tourism and establish a reputation as a world class facility that attracts top boating and sailing events. Appearances do make a difference.

The following images of existing sailing centers offer possible alternatives for a proposed community boating center in Roosevelt Roads.

Newport Sailing Center



Barcelona's Sailing Center example of a harden facility with high ceilings



Source: www.barcelona.cat

Fleet Equipment

A major consideration when building a fleet of boats for a community boating center is to start with a small fleet while keeping in mind the membership size and expertise of those joining the Center. Fleet composition should be a mix of easy and safe to navigate boats and hi-performance sailboats that will help promote growth and membership retention. At first, members joining the club will probably have some sailing experience but once the word gets out you will see more beginners coming in. Beginners will eventually be the core client base. Equipment must give preference to beginners.

Windsurfers, kayaks, and paddleboards are a requirement as most established clubs are seeing a big demand for these types of equipment.

The fleet does not need to be new boats, there is a large market of available used sailboats and watercraft equipment.

Finally, safety is what divides the top-notch clubs from the second-tier clubs. There should be sufficient safety boats (3-6) to oversee and support the operations of the CBC during peak days (weekends and holidays). If the Center plans to host major national and international events, these events require a minimum number of safety boats to support the race management team. A final component of the safety net is a weather monitoring facility. Top clubs have a staff watching the weather on a TV monitor and listening to NOAA's weather radio marine frequency. Advanced warning is always given an hour before a thunderstorm or a squall reaches the venue.

Conclusion

The creation of a community boating center is not meant to bring a solution to the redevelopment of the Roosevelt Roads facilities, it is meant to bring an alliance between the local communities and the public and private sectors to bring economic vitality and improve the quality of life of the communities of Puerto Rico's east and northeast region. The proposed community boating center is just one piece of what could be an ocean focused economic development model that takes advantage of a pristine and strategically placed location to promote economic growth and hopefully transform Roosevelt Roads into a top tourist and nautical sports destination.

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