



VIEQUES SUSTAINABILITY TASK FORCE MEETING
NOVEMBER 14, 2014
VIEQUES, PUERTO RICO

Report on the current conditions and needs of Vieques.

The turn of the 20th century marked a new beginning for the history of Vieques as of April 30, 2001 when the US Navy signed the Quit Claim deed that returned former Naval Ammunition Facilities (NAF) land to the Municipal Government of Vieques and other federal, state and local agencies. On May 1, 2003 the US Navy ceased all military operations on the island and; likewise, transferred all other lands. One year later, on December 27, 2004, Estudios Técnico, Inc. completed its Master Plan for the Sustainable Economic Development of Vieques.

These events created great interest, enthusiasm and euphoria the world around as the “Crown Jewel of the Caribbean” would finally have a chance to truly shine. Yet, not much has happened in Vieques since then.

Thirteen years later, we still face the same problems on a daily basis. Among them are the following:

- Poverty, unemployment, underemployment. In 2000, 72.2% of the Vieques population lived below the federal Poverty Standards. (we still had some direct and indirect jobs from naval operations then)
- Increased dependency on government funds (welfare)
- Higher cost of living
- Maritime transportation deterioration
- Health related issues (increased geriatric needs)
- Weak commercial activity (fleeing dollars)
- etc.

Thirteen years later, our economy has not improved significantly and although outside investments have increased, they have not occurred in a planned manner. Our Municipal Government has not seen any significant increase in its tax based income and is unable to invest in any works of infrastructure, service, security and/or maintenances of the new lands acquired by the Quit Claim Deed of 2001. The Municipal budget for 2014-2015 as of October 30, 2014 includes expenditures of \$13,006,911.40 and income of only \$9,963,563.54. We are operating with a current deficit of \$3,043,347.86. Under these circumstances, the Municipal Government is unable to invest in much needed equipment. It is for this reason that our Mayor, Hon. Víctor M. Emeric Catarineau, requests your assistance in identifying

funds to purchase equipment and/or identify state or federal agencies with surplus equipment that can be transferred to Vieques to address the key areas of services to our people.

1. Equipment for garbage collection and land fill operations to meet EQB requirements.
2. Equipment for maintenance of green areas in state and municipal roads.
 - a. Two (2) compactor trucks
 - b. One (1) dump truck
 - c. One (1) digger
 - d. Two (2) machete tractors
 - e. Pruning tractor
 - f. Pickup trucks
3. Tank truck for diesel and gasoline
 - a. The two local total gasoline stations cannot always supply fuel needed for municipal vehicles & equipment. With this tank truck the municipality will be able to maintain a fuel reservoir and buy fuel directly from other companies in Puerto Rico.
4. Septic tank truck
 - a. Due to a lack of sewage infrastructure on the island, many residences and businesses rely on septic tanks for their operations. The municipality does not have the appropriate equipment for emptying septic tanks of low income residents and/or schools and other government facilities.
5. Potable water tank truck
 - a. Several communities in Vieques still do not have potable water and depend on the municipality for this service. At least one additional truck is needed to adequately serve these communities.
6. Equipment for the Municipal Emergency Management Office
 - a. The Municipal Emergency Management Office offers the only means of response to emergency situations on the island requiring ambulance services. It has only one fully operational ambulance.
 - b. A second one is undergoing repairs after an accident and has no air conditioning
 - c. According to regulations of the public service commission, these vehicles' useful life (4 years) is about to expire.
 - d. The municipality needs to acquire at least one new ambulance in addition to one compact unit for rescue operations in areas of difficult access.

In addition to the equipment mentioned above, the Municipal Government of Vieques is greatly in need of assistance for the maintenance & repair of state and local roads, grounds & bridges. While the Department of Transportation and Public works has 5 state roads on the Island (PR 200, 201, 995, 996, 997) it has only one employee in Vieques: hence, the Municipal Government had to assume the responsibility for all these roads. The allocation of funds by DTOP for this operation was the following:

2013-2014 = \$58,000.00

2014-2015 = \$53,000.00

These funds which are insufficient to cover the needs have made it necessary for the Municipal Government to assume state responsibilities and have caused an additional financial burden on the municipality.

We suggest that DTOP increase the amount of funds allotted Vieques so that it may be able to formally assume this task.

The equipment previously mentioned in this report address immediate, specific needs of the island for its day to day operations – needs that will always exist to greater or lesser degrees. Yet our greatest need which was suggested in the Master Plan for the Sustainable Economic Development of Vieques, a strategic economic development plan has not yet been discussed. This is our greatest concern and is the main goal of our recently created Office of External Resources and Economic Development.

We request that the Vieques Task Force assist the Municipal Government in this effort and facilitate in its implementation as we seek to establish our vision of Vieques 2030 and develop strategies which will address the following issues (among others):

1. Transportation
 - a. Classification of Vieques airport and maritime ports as international rather than regional to:
 - i. Facilitate greater access to goods & service reduce the dependence on the Maritime Transport Authority, as sole service provider.
 - ii. Allow cruise ships to dock in Vieques.
 - iii. Establish & maintain commercial, cultural & industrial ties to other Caribbean Island.
 - b. Establish the short maritime route Vieques-Ceiba-Vieques.
2. Tourism
 - a. Identify types of tourism desired agrotourism, ecotourism, mega hotels, Inns, Bed & Breakfast, etc.
3. Health facilities
4. Education
 - a. Post secondary
 - b. Hospitality services
 - c. Third language classes
 - d. Virtual universities
 - e. Technology/telecommunications
5. Security/Safety
 - a. Maritime Police
 - b. Specialized units
6. Manufacturing
 - a. Incentives for investors

- b. Jewelry and other value added products
- 7. Telecommunications/Technology
 - a. Call center
- 8. Commerce
 - a. Strengthening local economy
 - b. Local monetary exchange
- 9. Infrastructure
 - a. Improving local roads
 - b. Connecting isolated communities
 - c. Planning the Island's Growth
- 10. Agriculture
 - a. Exporting what we already have (mangos, spices, etc.)
 - b. Incentives to local farmers
 - c. Farm equipment & machinery
 - d. Farmers market
- 11. Conservation/Environment
 - a. Recycling
 - b. Waste disposal alternatives
- 12. Land titles
- 13. Permits process

Upon examining our history, we will discover that Vieques was a truly autonomous Island under the term of Military Governor, Teófilo Leguillou (1832-1843). As a free port, Vieques established direct commercial contacts with other Islands & countries.

We hope to accomplish the same.